

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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Christopher Baugh – interview transcript

Interviewer: Lynsey Jeffries

20 November 2003

Professor Christopher Baugh. John Bury; censorship; critics; designers; Stephen Joseph; Everyman Theatre, Liverpool; National Theatre Company; Oh What a Lovely War!; repertory; Royal Shakespeare Company; The Society for Theatre Research; theatre lighting.

LJ: Can you tell me about The Society for Theatre Research and your involvement in it, first of all?

CB: Well, my involvement now is that I am the Deputy Chairman and the Chair of the Research Committee and member of the main committee. I have been reasonably actively involved with it for the last dozen or so years. My first memories of it were when I was an undergraduate at Manchester, round about 1964, when my professor who was Hugh Hunt, the Director, announced that he was going to put my name forward for a scholarship to go to Venice for three weeks to a conference/extended seminar on theatre history and design. I don't know how or why but I got it and I suspect that there weren't all that many competitors. There were only two university drama departments and only Manchester at that time offered single honours. Bristol existed, but it was still offering combined honours at the time and so there were very, very few drama students around. There may well not have been that much competition. That was my first contact with The Society for Theatre Research and it really kind of lay very much in the background. It was a very metropolitan based, it is still very London based in many respects. Although there is the northern group now, but that is fairly recent. Not much then, until I moved to London in the late 1970s.

LJ: Today, do you still have an active role in that society?

CB: Yes. I don't attend as many committee meetings as I probably ought to, but I do run the research committee. We do quite a lot of good. We give out a small amount of money. We only give out about £5000 a year, which in research funding terms is peanuts. We have a name and our name is actually quite valuable so if somebody gets, for example, we had an example about six or seven years ago somebody we gave a grant of £250 to and they were doing project creating a national database of community plays. They got that grant of £250 and, as it were, the good housekeeping seal of approval from the Society Theatre Research and on the strength of that they then got the grant for £98,000 from the National Lottery Fund to create this national database.

We often service a lot of pump priming, we give £250 - £300 to somebody and they go somewhere else and say "look, my research has been approved", or "I got this money from The Society Theatre Research, can I have some serious money from you?" We do a lot of that, a lot of work in those forms. We also sponsor a really important non-professional research. Research is increasingly professionalised with there being so many

universities, so many lecturers, so many professors etc, it is becoming a professional operation, particularly with the research assessment exercise etc. There are, however, particularly in the area of theatre, a lot of non-professionals who have an enormous contribution to make. I got a phone call from a guy we gave £350 for last year, Laurie Webb, lives in Ramsgate and his great grandfather was one of the great toy theatre manufacturers and operators of the 19th century. We gave him some money to research and to analyse and to look at the material that came from his grandfather. He phoned up and he is now going to Princeton and is going to spend hopefully a year there cataloguing and archiving the material. Like so much good theatre stuff, it has been bought up by American universities. We helped to start that trajectory, so the researcher like that would not normally apply to the Arts and Humanities Research Board. It is terrifying even for a professional researcher like myself to do that, the complexity of the form and the language you need to use these days in terms of aims and objectives and outcomes and all the rest of it. No amateur would ever apply through those forms where the big money is.

LJ: Where does the money come from that you distribute?

CB: The money comes from money that has been bequeathed to the Society, typically by people who have died and left sums of money. We only use the interest, about ten or eleven years ago the Society had two or three very significant bequests. Significant in Society terms, in other words, sums up to £100,000 and with careful investment in charities funds and things like that, that is where the money comes from. The subscription pays for our journal theatre notebook and for the running of the organisation, but our good works if you like tend to come from the investments from monies that people have bequeathed to us.

LJ: What are your first memories of first beginning to really enjoy going to the theatre?

CB: It was Sheffield. I was about 15 and it was going to the Playhouse on Townhead Street. It is something I talk with students a lot about, because although I came from a village just outside Sheffield, a place called Elsecar near Hoyland and my family had been coal miners. My father was the pharmacist in the chemist shop in the local co-op and was the first not to have been a coal miner. He and my mum were members of the amateur dramatic societies and some of my earliest memories are being dragged along to see plays and embarrassing, usually my mother, who was acting her guts out on stage, by me standing up in the audience and saying "That's my mummy in the blue dress" and things like that and embarrassing everybody. My first serious trip to the theatre was as a young teenager, about 15-16 and going to the Sheffield Playhouse. The interesting thing about that is I knew no plays and one of the things which I think the repertory system was very important for, and I think there is still an argument for it, is that you went to the theatre because you liked the activity of going to the theatre. You liked to go along and sit and watch people doing things that you couldn't do and taking you on a journey. The play was a kind of a vehicle for that. In other words, I went along to the theatre not to see a play, because I didn't know the authors, I didn't know the titles and I didn't say "Oh" as we might today "I'm going down to the Crucible because I want to see that play" because you have heard reports about it or because you know the author. "I'm going to the Crucible, or something like that, because I really want to see that play, I'd love to see it done." Or "I am going there because it is Shakespeare and I want to see that play." You went along to the theatre simply because it was an enjoyable thing to do. It was then a two weekly repertory theatre and the theatre kind of acknowledged people's motives for going to the theatre. For example, they had a subscription system whereby you would book two seats for every show the 2nd Thursday of the run. After a couple of years, I persuaded my mum and dad to do that and so they went along the 2nd Thursday once a fortnight to see a play, whatever the

play was. In the interval, believe it or not, someone would come along with a tray with cups of tea and biscuits, which you would order, and you would have tea and biscuits etc. The... I think his name was Bill Brown or was it one of the Ellemans, I think it might have been one of the Ellemans. I say one of the Ellemans because Arnold Elleman was a major mover in creating the Crucible and the Ellemans through the daughters are still occupying serious places in arts management. They used to stand at the door of the theatre and say hello to everybody in a green faded dinner jacket and bow tie and a cigarette in his mouth, dribbling down it and saying "Evening, evening. Good to see you again". At the end of the play, after the curtain call, the curtain would stay up and he would come on stage and hold his hands up and say "Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen, you've clearly had a good time tonight, you've clearly enjoyed this. I just want to let you know, please come along to the show next week. Now Keith here who has only had a bit of a small part this week will be taking the lead next week. Now this is a play by Graham Greene and it's 'whatever'. He would do a spiel and introduce, so there was a management in this two weekly rep that people went to the theatre not focused to see plays, but because they enjoyed the act of going to the theatre. It's like you might say I'm going to the pub and of course you would have a drink while in the pub. But going to the pub, being in the environment, being with your friends, talking laughing and having a joke is really what you are after. The drinks are kind of an excuse, or a vehicle.

Successful repertory theatres seemed to find ways of being able to do that and inevitably it is something that has been lost. In part because of the cost of going to the theatre but there isn't that week in week out regular routine of what's on at the rep I will pop on down there in that kind of way. It happened all the way through the old Playhouse until the end of the 1960's when it was three weekly rep. There were some great actors there. Geoffrey Oust, Keith Baron, who is still reasonably well-known, a great actor. His first job was there, he was a Mexborough lad, a local lad. Roger Rowland, Geraldine Gwytha, Anne Sallybrass, I can still remember the names of the people and the important thing is that because the company, Geoffrey Whitehead was there for a year and some for two years, you trusted the actors to give you a good time. You went along because you wonder what Keith Baron was going to be doing that week. You wondered about Anne Sallybrass, what part she was going to be playing that week. You began to identify with a group of people and a building and you suddenly got there and thought "Oh, this is the play I am going to see" and you came out and the play was a kind of added bonus. It's a very different sensation to our contemporary perception of going to the theatre.

LJ: So was there a point when you found yourself being more discriminating about what plays you were going to see and what was it that affected that? Were the critics coming into it, or was it more word of mouth, or a particular actor?

CB: Not really. The local Sheffield Star, I think it was the Star, the evening paper, was very, how shall we say, parochial and adulatory, very descriptive. A bit like the stage reviews of today where they describe the plot, everybody played a good part. There was very little role of criticism involved. There was when a well known play or a play that had caused, I remember going to see at Sheffield Playhouse Chips with Everything, when that was done. Only a couple of years after it had been done at the Royal Court and the publicity that it had at the Royal Court gave you an added bonus to go and see it. John Osborne plays, when they were performed. There was a kind of a regular rhythm. You had a Christmas pantomime, immediately followed by a Shakespeare, and whilst it got a big company on hand you would almost instantly follow it by a big classic, like A Man For All Seasons, like a big Chekhov with a lot of people in it like Three Sisters, or something like that. Then you would have a modern play and then you would have

something else, so there was this regular rhythm throughout the year of kinds of plays. As far as critics were concerned it was usually the reputation or furore or whatever that had happened when they opened in London.

LJ: Right okay. Are there any other particularly memorable productions for you?

CB: In Sheffield not specifically. Not as individual memories. I remember Anthony Collins, who was probably the greatest toad in Toad of Toad Hall I have ever seen in my life, but that's not really a good example. That was Christmas 1959 or 1960 or something like that. I saw some great theatre, but as I keep saying the plays were a kind of blur to theatrical memories. I can still, and this is not nostalgia, the things I remember are the excitement about going into the building and the excitement of having a drink in the bar and the excitement of expectation and the excitement of something new happening on stage. It was quite advanced. Geoffrey Ost, he actually wrote a little book on stage lighting and he had a brilliant lighting designer called Bri Ferguson who in that kind of rep was one of the first to pull the lighting control box from being on the stage where you only got a restrained sideways view, to bringing it our front. He built a little cubby hole at the side of the theatre and he got an old seat in it which he got from a Lancaster bomber, believe it or not, from the Second World War. There was this bomber seat so that they could sit in it and control the show and there always used to be a joke.

I say this because my brother worked as an assistant stage manager at the Playhouse from about 1960 for a couple of years, so I got to know some of the back stage stories to explain it. But just before the intervals you could hear a little whistle and then it would disappear and it was Bri Ferguson's kettle that he had put on a dimmer so that he could have a cup of tea in the interval. It would come up to whistle and then he would turn it down and just keep it bubbling away so that he would have a cup of tea. Anecdotes. It was quite advanced in its lighting. I remember, for example, going along and being quite shocked by going into the theatre and the curtain was up and there was a pre-set, absolutely par for the course in this day, you know when you go into stage and the stage is dimly lit in some kind of atmospheric state, known as a pre-set, and then it changes and the show starts. Actually seeing that happen was quite a surprise, because typically you went in and there was a curtain down and two or three spot lights came on it and warmed, known as curtain warmers, and warmed the curtain up and the house lights go down and the hush of expectation. Curtain goes up and you get a waft of air from the stage, smelling of scene paint, which was a very evocative smell, which of course you don't get these days. They were quite advanced as far as the stage techniques and stage craft, so I remember learning quite a lot about design and converting this space week after week into things that looked totally different, which developed my interest in design.

LJ: So you were far more interested in the individual production themselves and the experience of going, than the plays or the play writes?

CB: Yes, absolutely.

LJ: Okay. Prior to 1968, when The Theatres Act abolished censorship, did you ever feel that a play was deliberately or gratuitously pushing the laws of censorship?

CB: There was one play where I honestly, a play by John Arden called Left-Handed Liberty, which I saw at the National Theatre, No! Armstrong's Last Goodnight, not Left-Handed Liberty, with Albert Finney. It was a National Theatre touring production which I saw at Manchester when I was an undergraduate and I was surprised that I had not heard about any murmurs of censorship and I felt that that would have been a ten times better play. It needed a freedom and I felt it was battering at the edges of something. Obviously battering at the edges of censorship. I don't really think, I'm not sure how

aware the theatre was of censorship as a restriction, really until the fury over Edward Bond's *Saved*.

It affected me personally once at university. We wanted to put on a play about the Moors Murders. They were very recent and this play was written about Myra Hindley and Ian Brady and we were going to stage it in the studio. It was inevitably an amateur production. It was done by university undergraduates in our studio, which just like yours in Sheffield was a converted chapel. Most decent studios are converted chapels or churches. But because it would have a public audience, the script had to be sent away to the Lord Chancellor's office at least three weeks before performance and it was banned. They would not allow us to perform it. On other occasions we had play scripts that the student drama society were putting on or the drama department itself were putting on and we would come back and I remember one, because it was a line I had to say, the word 'arse' was deleted but I had to replace it with 'bum'. I could say 'bum' but I couldn't say 'arse'. They were trifling, silly things, but the Myra Hindley play that was an actual imposition of censorship.

LJ: Is there a particular theatre company that you associate with consistently good productions?

CB: Of the period?

LJ: Of the period and perhaps continuing into now.

CB: Immediately thereafter the period, the Everyman Theatre in Liverpool, really beginning round about 1970 and continuing for most of the 1970's. That had the same quality. By that time I was in Manchester and my wife was the theatre photographer for the Everyman and some of my ex- students. In one year from Manchester, Tony Cher, Bernard Hill, the designer Joe Van Eck went across to the Everyman and I used to drive the car and assist my wife loading films and stuff like that and it was always a wonderful surprise arriving in Liverpool and going through the door and thinking "Oh my God I'm going to see whatever by Max Fish. I've never seen that before. Excellent!"

The going to the theatre, the actual atmosphere of the theatre, the fact that in the bar downstairs you could get Bertorelli ice-creams and Newcastle Brown. Now in the late 60's early 1970's, you could not get Newcastle Brown south of Newcastle and Bertorelli ice-cream was like Ben and Jerry's, it was a very esoteric, rare imported ice-cream. So the fact that this scruffy theatre had this wonderful bar where you could get a bowl of chilli con carne, Newcastle Brown and Bertorelli ice-cream, that was going to the theatre. The bar was also the home of the Liverpool poets and there was the most wonderful graffiti all over the place and I remember the manager of that theatre who used to, not in a dress suit, he used to stand at the front of the theatre as the audience came in. As you entered the front doors, there were stairs going up ahead of you and they were old wooden stairs, because it was a converted (on Hoke Street) congregational chapel so it had a big gallery up top. There were these wooden banisters coming down and at the bottom there were two newel posts with knobs on them and I remember going in one day and the manager was standing there with the knob in his hand, it had come off, and he said "You know, I've stuck that on once a week for the last month. I don't think our audience likes it" and he just chucked it away. It was this really run down theatre, as you sat in the stalls, the scenery for the next weeks show, un-painted or half built, was standing around the walls because there wasn't the storage space. There was still gas lighting in the corridors and the toilets and things like that, but it had an atmosphere of enormous creativity and excitement and daring, and again, you trusted the actors. As an audience you developed a relationship with a group of people that you liked. Bill Nighy was there and Jonathan Pryce and you wondered what they were going to do that week. You trusted them to take you on a journey, whatever the play was. They had a

bigger commitment to new material, so you saw more of Alan Bleasdale plays that were premiered there, so you couldn't really be going to watch plays. Although you began to develop a relationship with the author "Oh, it's another Alan Bleasdale, I wonder what that's going to be". That's where job for the boys, where Bernard Hill, you know where that kind of started in Liverpool political theatre. They had a very active community programme, both in terms of schools and in terms of working men's clubs and factories and things like that. They really dug their feet in. They were to my perception a kind of a model of how a theatre company might work. Round about 1976/77 they were quite well known. Aaron Dosser, the artistic director at that time, left. I think he went to Nottingham Playhouse. What do you do?

That theatre would have been started by excited, committed people who had left the drama department in Bristol. Terry Hands and somebody else, Peter James. They'd left Bristol as new graduates, taken a couple of shows to Edinburgh, found this deserted chapel, found a bit of money and started this company. Now, getting on for almost ten years later, the company was quite well known, so they advertised for an artistic director. Of course people who were quite famous applied, because "Hey, Liverpool Everyman, I want to go there, I want to go there". Actors consciously turned down other jobs to go there. It's a kind of a standard, they begin to get funding from the Arts Council, they decide that they are going to rebuild the theatre, they were going to build from scratch then they decide to rip the place apart and convert it and it was never the same again. It has lost that, it's almost as though theatre companies have got a life cycle, rather almost biologically they are born out of the energy and commitment of young people, typically who find their energy as undergraduates or as trainees. Doing something for free because they love it, they leave, their energy finds the ways of doing it, typically takes place in Edinburgh, they get a bit of funding and they get somewhere together and they start a company and that energy pushes them forward. They then achieve and are recognised by the critics, they are recognised by the press and then what do they do? There are some who say "We need a van, we need an administrator, we need offices, we need some premises, we need a rehearsal room" and before you know where you are you've got to find £100,000 a year before you put on any shows. You've got to then think about what shows you put on, because you know you've got to pay the salaries of your administrators, you've got to pay for your computers increasingly, you've got to pay for your vans, your buildings, your rent and all the rest of it and there are others who are saying, who are noticing that their creativity and their energy are being absorbed into management rather than creating new theatre. Most companies split apart. One or two people will leave because they are plucked to stardom, if you like, as a writer or as an actor, some will stay on and the company will slowly die down again.

A lot of interesting research was done in the 1980's early 90's on dance companies, which all paradigmatically, almost typically start in that way, even more so than theatre companies. The Everyman never really survived its new premises. This fabulous new building, which was totally re-built never really survived that. It's lost its way. It's a shame.

LJ: What you've said so far regarding your early experiences of theatre seem to me very reminiscent of Joan Littlewood's original conception of theatre workshops. Did you ever have any direct experiences working -

CB: No, only in seeing. I saw, what's it called? World War One. Oh, What a Lovely War!, it totally escaped me, that's age. I saw it when it just came on tour. It left London and came to Manchester, the Palace Theatre Manchester, I saw it on a matinee and it was stunning. There were about 150/200 people in the audience, which was in a 2500 seat theatre and it was embarrassingly empty. It was a fantastic performance. I saw that

and went with my tutor, who knew her quite well. My tutor at Manchester was a guy called Steven Joseph, who started professional theatre in The Round in this country. As well as being a fellow in drama at Manchester University, he was the Artistic Director of the theatre in Stoke-on-Trent and every summer he ran a season at the Library Theatre, what was then the Library Theatre in Scarborough. He took students there and I went along one summer as a stage manager and he took us along and we got to see this Joan Littlewood, so that was my only contact with it. I recognised its values from my tutorship if you like with Steven Joseph. It was a great show, very difficult, the cast getting 150/200 people, because 200 people in a studio is packing it out, but imagine 200 people in a theatre like the Lyceum. It was quite embarrassing.

LJ: I know that you are interested in staging in the theatre, was there ever a point where you noticed a definite beginning of a Russian influence in British theatre?

CB: Yes. I think it came from two sources. I think it came from the work of, when the National Theatre Company was founded, but it lived at the Old Vic in 1961/62, I can't remember exactly. Their production values were radically different from almost anything that had gone before. At the same time, the work particularly of a designer called John Berry at the Royal Shakespeare Company and it's interesting because John Berry started with Joan Littlewood. As a gopher, as a kind of a designer, come builder, come fixer, come carpenter, whatever, whatever. He engaged with Peter Hawe and I think between them, as you probably know, it was Peter Hawe's conscious ambition when he converted the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre into the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1959/60, was that he wanted to create an ensemble, something that consciously imitated if you like the Berliner Ensemble but with Shakespeare as Brecht, as the leading writer. That was a conscious attempt to create an ensemble and he got about in people with those values. Very rapidly, I remember 1965/66 there was a little demonstration by the scenic artists and designers at the Royal Shakespeare Company, which I heard about but didn't actually witness. They burnt their paint brushes in mimicry of women burning their bras as a sign of liberation. The scenic artists burnt their paint brushes, in other words getting away from paint, getting away from painted scenery, using real materials.

That was one of my major things when I was a trainee designer with Steven Joseph and Alan Barlow at Manchester. I decided I wanted to be a designer at the end of my first year as an undergraduate and spent the next two years and then went onto Bristol. By 1966, my ambition was to design a setting that did not use any paint but only used real materials. I remember hearing that John Bury had designed the Wars of the Roses, which had large metal-covered walls, covered with real metal which had dimly outlined shields on them. It looked as though the walls of the set could have come from the Krupps Armament factories of the 1870s. Big rivets and metal plates over lapping each other, as though it could have been the side of the Titanic or something like that. He had achieved all the changes of colour by going over this thin sheet metal with a blow torch and just burning the metal so that it went brown or stained in colour. I remember that I went to Stratford to see that.

The thing that was probably the first major long-lasting Brecht-like influence, graphically, was Stratford's adoption of reclaimed timber floorboards as a raked stage. Going into Stratford and seeing a raked stage, slightly sloping stage, that came out as far as it could into the stalls and sloping backwards. To all intents and purposes it looked like natural wood and with an almost total reliance on lighting. A massive amount of side and back lighting, there were major revolutions in the technology that made this possible. There was a company called Fredrick Holt who took photographs of the Royal Shakespeare Company and you can still see them, slides, 35mm transparencies. They started taking slides in 1957/8, just about in fact when Peter Hall first went there as a guest at the old Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. If you look through the photographs you will notice a

radical difference round about 1965/6 and you could say that by 1964/5/6, Ralph Koltai, who is still alive, wonderful designer, John Bury who sadly died a year ago, a couple of years ago, their influence was sculptural. It was plastic. It was dominated by light. It was anti-pictorial. It was not trying to make pictures. It was treating the space of the stage and suddenly realising that your object as a designer was not to create a three dimensional picture, but to create a three dimensional space which had meaning when the actors were in it. The marriage of light and space and the moving body. That's really Ralph Koltai and John Bury's, I think, unsung contribution. I feel very sad. Koltai has lived on and there is a book up there devoted to Koltai designs. John Berry, I think, is an unsung hero. He designed the Wars of the Roses. He was Peter Hawe's major designer all the way through the 1960's, all the way into the 1970's. His contribution has not been recognised. He was more recognised, as indeed are many English designers, who tend to be and I'm not being paranoid, the English tend to view the occupation of stage design with tremendous suspicion. England admires the writer. It thinks of itself, and quite naturally so, as the worlds epicentre of dramatic literature because of Shakespeare. We like to feel that our major contribution over the last century if you like, was the creation of the Royal Court, which was dedicated to writing and new writing in the theatre and the feeling that that was where the future lay. It must come from the writer. Designers were treated with suspicion and considered to be decadent and extravagant. They would produce something that was all spectacle, which was visually exciting but which was somehow intellectually shallow. The European continent doesn't have that, has never had, or tended not to have that vision, which is why some of the major developments in the 20th century have come from continental sources. In some reasons there were others. Why people like Edward Gordon Craig, although English, was kind of rejected by the British Theatre establishment. Where did we start on that? That was Brechtian influence. Yes, okay.

LJ: Finally, what changes do you perceive in British theatre since the abolishment of censorship in 1968?

CB: First thing of course was Oh! Calcutta! and Hair and the appearance of nudity. It was a sexual freedom, I think. The major act, the political theatre companies I worked with, and on one or two occasions for a company called Belt and Braces in the 1970's, the companies like 7:84, the political theatre companies which were funded by the Arts Council that all ended with Margaret Thatcher basically. That was one of the major outpourings, if you like, as a movement almost. From 1970 onwards there was this enormous flourishing of small touring theatre companies. 7:84 and Belt and Braces were the most politically committed, the most consistent and probably in a way the most successful. The problem with the political theatre company is that they tended to perform to the converted. They would go along to the university and put on a piece of socialist theatre and the audience would stand up and shout "Yeah, right on!" and the cast would go away saying "Wow, yeah" but it was preaching to the converted. Belt and Braces, 7:84 through the work of John McGrath, and Belt and Braces through, believe it or not, Gavin Richards, and I say Gavin Richards because I mean he was Latin in Eastenders and played Dennis, and playing the Italian Bertorelli in television sitcom about the Second World War. I can't remember its name. They actually found a way of getting into working people's clubs, working with communities, working in communities and achieving something of a genuine rapport between "real people" and progressive theatre. But it was a fairly short-lived phenomenon.

Again, like I said, having a biological company. I remember being involved with Belt and Braces when that classic argument was going on. The Arts Council were bending over backwards to give them money to get an office, to get an administrator, to get new letterheads, to get new graphics, to go through a marketing campaign, to get an office,

to get resources, all of which would cost at least £100,000 a year to maintain, let alone the actual purchase cost. Other people say no, not only do we sell out politically to our funding masters, the Arts Council of Great Britain, but we lose our strength and our ability to perform for people and with people. The companies split on that kind of argument. Some people said "No, what we've got to do is develop the production values. I'd love to go and perform in the West End". Belt and Braces did. They took, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, they did the British premier production of that. It went into the West End and that basically ended the company. Other people resisted going into real theatres, they resisted spending a lot of money on scenery, costumes, props whatever, because they realised once they went down that route it was the end. Whereas other people were saying "No, we've got to fight on the home ground. We've got to go into the buildings that exist and we've got to take them over". The minute they did that the companies split up and disappeared.

LJ: What about theatre today. How do you feel on the whole about what you see now?

CB: It seems even more pluralistic. I remember consciously thinking, believe it or not, I thought this when I was standing in a queue outside a record shop in Bristol, waiting for the *Sergeant Pepper* album to buy for my girlfriend as a present. I remember thinking, looking at the picture of the cover, there is no such thing as contemporary style. You can wear anything. Of course, you only have to go ten years on and look back and say "Oh my God, how mid 60's" etc and I remember thinking that theatre was very pluralistic in the 1960's. I think that is my dominant thought about theatre today. There are so many niche markets, if you like, contemporary performance art. There are so many different forms that the break up of the repertory theatre system has lost a sense of centre. The major companies, such as the National Theatre, inevitably must reflect the niches, so that Robert Lepage will perform in The National Theatre as a visiting company. You will get the National Theatre reflecting the diversity so that you don't have that core centre. Now there are swings and roundabouts. It's removed the idea of dramatic literature being the be all and end all, it's removed the idea that theatre is there to make plays come to life, which was the vision if you like when I started and when I was at university. That was what the business of theatre was to do. To take a play and bring it to life. To make it three-dimensional. To realise it, and to give it core reality.