

ANARCHY 75 TWO SHILLINGS OR THIRTY CENTS

**KATE VANDEGRIFT: TRYING IT ON
IMPROVISED DRAMA**



Trying it on: an experiment in anarchy *Kate Vandegrift* 129

Disillusionment, anarchism and war *Donald Rooum* 157

Cover by *Rufus Segar*

Other issues of "Anarchy":

Please Note: Issues 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 28, 33, 37 and 38 are out of print.

Vol. 1. 1961: 1. Sex-and-Violence; 2. Workers' control; 3. What does anarchism mean today?; 4. Deinstitutionisation; 5. Spain; 6. Cinema; 7. Adventure playground; 8. Anthropology; 9. Prison; 10. Industrial decentralisation.

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The quiet room

KATE VANDEGRIFT AND JUNE JUDSON spent a year running a one-night-a-week improvised drama class in what was ironically called the Quiet Room of a youth club in North London. This issue of ANARCHY is a blow-by-blow account of their experiences. The most that they are able to claim for their experiment is that "over the course of the months, working under conditions more akin to a street corner than a school room, a very mixed bag of sensitivities learned to co-operate (if only sporadically) in the creation of highly personal and original interpretations of their private world".

Quite apart from its human interest, and the author's close observation of, and intense sympathy with the participants, this story is valuable on several levels.

Obviously it is useful for people involved in similar or analogous activity. How best should one attempt to utilise or cope with this situation, or that one, when it arises? What alternatives are there? Which ones should be avoided? In a situation which was what the layman would call anarchic, the kind of approach which *we* would call anarchic was applied. Did it succeed? Well, the reader will conclude from Kate Vandegrift's narrative that one way to *guarantee* failure in such a situation is in the invocation, in one form or another, of external authority.

Anyone to whom "drama" simply means putting on a play will be fascinated by the resourcefulness which the two drama teachers brought to their experiment, and will be excited by the potentialities of this approach in other fields.

Anarchists who, by definition, want to replace authority by voluntary co-operation in every sphere of life, have a particular concern with what we might call the dynamics of disruption. It is a concern with two aspects, for the anarchists are themselves a disruptive element in authoritarian institutions, while at the same time they are concerned by the vulnerability to disruption of libertarian institutions. Why has X an irresistible urge to break up a series of meetings, why must Y use so much effort to wreck a self-governing workshop project, why can Z only co-operate if he is permitted to dominate the scene and to manipulate the others?

This faithful report on what went on in the Quiet Room last year may help us understand the personality factors involved in any co-operative group activity.

Trying it on: an experiment in anarchy

KATE VANDEGRIFT

THIS IS AN ACCOUNT of an experiment in teaching improvised drama to a group of teenagers at a youth club in North London. It is based on observations made over a period of ten months, set down following each weekly two-hour session. Towards the end of the term the Board of Managers at the particular club wondered, as there had been no production forthcoming from the Drama Class, what had the members gained after all? They asked for a written definition of the teachers' aims. Having that, the matter was dropped. The question is reasonable enough, though there is probably no answer except by depth analysis of each participant. Yet over the course of the months, working under conditions more akin to a street corner than a school room, a very mixed bag of sensitivities learned to co-operate (if only sporadically) in the creation of highly personal and original interpretations of their private world. In order to give an idea of the techniques used, the reactions and results, a general description of each session is set down—emphasising the more significant details, and passing over redundant material.

A few preliminaries: June Judson (producer and actress) and myself (playwright and designer) decided to co-operate on the experiment. Domestic and professional commitments limited our free time to one evening per week. We applied for admission to the Drama Teachers' Panel of the Inner London Education Authority at County Hall, were accepted, and eventually found a position conforming to our stated specifications. These were that the class should consist of ten to fifteen boys and girls ranging between 14 and 19 years of age, and should, as far as possible, offer a cross-section of the average teenage community. We further specified that the aim of our venture was *not* to set about rehearsing and producing a nice play from the bookshelves, but rather to stimulate the expressive creativity of individuals by prompting the group to co-operate in improvisations born of their own experience and fantasies.

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and not necessarily those of the ILEA or any of its officers.

Aware that the teenage sector of our society is probably the most inhibited, the most beset by uncertainty, and the least likely to participate in hazy artistic programmes having little definable purpose, we were not anticipating miracles of released creativity. We had each a background of work with teenagers, though admittedly, not in this "average" category. And perhaps it is relevant to mention that we are both American and that our previous work with young people had been conducted in the USA. We had never before worked together, and our decision to do so in this case was fired by kindred ideas about the theatre, and the assumption that two minds and two energies are better than one in such an experiment. The idea was that we would plan each lesson together in advance, altering our course as required by the problems arising in the class. June was to do the major part of the directing, while I was to observe reactions and later record them. Our goals were clear, but we hadn't the vaguest notion of what to expect. This is what happened.

September 29

The youth club is a handsome, one storey structure, set apart in a brief fenced lawn, and dedicated to teenage social life. It is one of two in London designed specifically on an "open plan", the building itself encouraging a free flow of traffic and mingling of groups. It was built three years ago by the GLC, at considerable cost. On entering, the youth leader's office is to the left, while to the right are a television arena, a coffee bar, and a discussion area. Four steps down is the dance floor; at one end of this level are a couple of ping-pong tables, at the far side is the "Quiet Room" and the girls' lounge. The decor is modern, tasteful and of good quality.

The Quiet Room was designated for the drama class, being the only space separate and suitable. Measuring about 25 x 30 feet, the room is windowless but has a strip of skylights along the length of the ceiling. There are no special facilities; two long tables, about a dozen metal frame chairs with foam padding, wall and ceiling lights. Not ideal, but good enough. One major fault soon became apparent, however. In designing this space the architect had not catered for the noise-level preferences of today's youth; pop tunes at full blast on the dance floor seep through the walls like water through sand. The Quiet Room is a very noisy place.

The youth leader, young, sympathetic, trained to his job, welcomed us and offered assistance any time we needed him. We thought this was courtesy; it was dead realism. Then 25 or 30 kids flocked in, chattering, giggling, horsing around. Obviously too many but a gratifying response. We can sort out the wheat from the chaff in time, and for the moment let's show them what we have up our sleeves. It was soon clear that they were not about to be shown anything—they were showing *us*. What a diversion to have two young (American!) women to jibe. Inno-

cent remarks from us were quickly inverted, and roars of discomfiting laughter rang in our ears. Our few attempts at organized action were easily squashed, and so . . . two hours passed. At the end of the period they had learned our Christian names and little more. We departed, feeling wistfully that here was rather more of a challenge than we had counted on.

October 6

We came prepared with a few costume pieces and several brief plot lines typed on separate slips of paper. The latter—random in subject matter and melodramatic in tone. Whatever last week's chaos had indicated, it was clear we would need to spend a few weeks playing around with ideas and wooing interest. In time the non-interested would drop out.

A similar deluge of kids swept past us and into the Quiet Room when we unlocked the door, engaged in the same ear-shattering warfare—boys against the girls, largely, each sex subdivided into gangs. They came in and went out as their fancy took them, slamming the door, or worse, leaving it open to the din of the dance floor. Should we lock the door? But perhaps our best hopes are still out on the dance floor; better to allow free entry and exit until we have a settled group. Okay, let's try this exercise. Those girls not occupied with rib-poking adamantly refused to participate in any suggested first step. Then why do you come to the class? "There's nothing else to do," was the consistent reply. The boys wavered. This was a surprise—we had expected them to be the more troublesome. A collapsible top hat was produced and a particularly exuberant boy was asked to create a character using it. His success touched off a series of solos and duets among a half dozen fellows, all wearing various hats. The characterizations were vulgar and heavy-handed for the most part, but it was an important step.

Within fifteen minutes a sudden exodus left us in an empty room holding an assortment of damaged hats. Why? A shy, spectacled young man materialized at our side and explained, stuttering, that a film was being shown on the dance floor. This was Howard. He showed us to some seats, lit our cigarettes, and retreated respectfully. We watched *The Glob*, a horror film with teenage heroes, and hoped it would inspire satiric treatment the following week.

October 13

Having failed to get participation from the girls, we separated the group by sexes and hoped for less inhibition. The snag is the lack of space.

The girls sat in a circle at one end of the room with June; the boys

at the other end with me. In the middle was the uncontrollable fray from those (of both sexes) who simply will not try anything, nor leave the room, nor stay in the room for more than five minutes at a time. We tried exercises in concentration and observation. One person examined a small object for a specific time, then the next person took it, secreted it, and queried the first about it in detail. A fair amount of interest and order was maintained for a while. Then, as an ominous rumble built up among the fence sitters, we switched to movement exercises. From this point only boys would participate.

The *mirror image* gambit was very successful, both in knitting the class together and in drawing out imaginations. Working in pairs, one boy played the "real person" while the other represented his mirrored reflection. In order to anticipate and accurately echo the "real" action, almost simultaneously, the "image" must use intense concentration. We noticed the quiet Howard outshining all others as the "image". For the "real person" we looked for wit and imagination in devising actions before a mirror. We discovered Barry—loud, rebellious and handsome. Here was at least a beginning for our class.

Then, almost before we realized it, bedlam broke out. One could not say why. The youth leader came in to help and, after a while, left without having helped much.

Into this noisy scene entered a pair of young men, mature, about 19, sure of themselves, known and respected to the toughest ones here. We were apprehensive. "How de doo? I'm The Face. What's on?" asked the wispy bearded one. We told him. "You'll never get anywhere with this mob," he sneered. But our accents bridged a gap. America? He knew all about it—Chicago, Harlem, jazz and drugs. We listened, while behind us the fury reigned. Then apparently in token of his regard for all things American, he turned and bellowed: "SHUT UP". And they did shut up. "The Face" then proceeded to improvise a snake dance, involving his buddy as the Indian pipe player. His miming was clever, but better was his audience-control. The room was crowded and everyone in it spellbound . . . a trick we had not yet managed, as The Face well knew. Fate had it that just then the principal of a complex of youth clubs, the worthy gentleman who had hired us, arrived to see how we were getting on. He gazed benignly at the concentrated interest of the audience, at the gyrations of The Face, and was quite satisfied. So were we.

October 20

Following up last week's performance by The Face, we concentrated on miming, and were especially concerned with the imaginative handling of objects. But, as we explained, we had brought no real objects with us because we had suffered the loss of a number of personal belongings since the start of the term. As these things had little value

to anyone but us, we suggested that they find their way back to us, inconspicuously. In the meantime we would work with imaginary objects.

An imaginary ball was bounced, then passed to the first person seated in a circle, who was told to take it, define it, then change it into something entirely different. The change should be inspired by the shape and movement of "the ball". So the ball became a bird, the bird a flower, the flower a drink, and so on as it made its way from person to person. Fairly successful, but too soon interrupted by a series of bored and curious intruders.

A heap of old newspapers was placed in the centre of the floor; the problem was to find ways to use them—either as newspapers or as entirely different objects. A girl volunteered to sell them and performed a short scene with Howard as the buyer. No one else would try or join in, so the exercise was changed: go to the vendor, buy a newspaper, discover some item in it, react to it, then leave the stage. This sequence of actions was repeated several times with different people showing different emotional reactions. Among some, at least, improvised action was beginning to be less of an embarrassment and more of a challenge. Among the majority, however, these were simply posh nursery games. Someone rolled a newspaper into a sword and called for a duelling partner. Fine, we said, imaginative. But in a very short time a wild battle was in progress. Then snowballs of newsprint. Then confetti. Arms and legs flailing and lungs bellowing. By the time we managed to get rid of the antagonists, the floor was ankle deep in torn paper. Everyone disappeared except Howard and his solemn mate Jim, who helped to clean up. We discovered that, far from having any of our belongings returned, a packet of cigarettes was missing from each of our handbags.

October 27

We prepared an assortment of readings, curious to know if a more schoolish atmosphere with definite requirements would tame the rebels. In a sense, this was a backward step, evading the intention of the class. Yet we felt the overwhelming need for direction and purpose. In fact, the move was successful to this extent: the loudest and toughest were disinterested and stayed apart much of the time; those who remained sat in a circle and clamoured to be next at the book, girls as well as boys. For the most part the readings were abominable, so few listened, but all were eager to perform. After all, they were not burdened with making up their own words, not risking ridicule from friends or enemies.

O'Casey's *End of the Beginning* was the only play among the pieces we brought. Parts were distributed and interest reached a peak. The interest was entirely self-centred; no sooner had anyone had their turn, and they were off to the coffee bar. Howard and Jim stayed throughout, finishing with readings from *Lord of the Flies* and a discussion of the film.

During the second hour, an observer from the ILEA ranks was in attendance. Occasionally he served a good turn by closing the door left open by one of the ubiquitous migrants, or shushing intruders. At closing time he guided us apart with the youth leader. "You really must lock the door against these interruptions," he advised. The youth leader agreed. We did not.

November 3

We continued with script reading, hoping to demonstrate, rather than try to lecture about, certain fundamentals of situation, characterisation and structure. Unfortunately the group assembled was too large to cope with as a single unit. June took the quieter ones to one end of the room and distributed copies of Noel Coward's *Fumed Oak*. I coralled the tough boys at the other end and started on Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. These plays had been carefully chosen to appeal to either the law-abiding or the rebellious types that comprise the class. Each struck the wanted chord.

Beckett's tramps held the interest of 10 or 12 sardonic teenage boys for a solid twenty minutes. This was a marvel. For the first time a negro was present: he read Vladimir and was so entranced with his prominence in the circle (and perhaps by the character) that he refused to give up the part through three readings of the first section. Several others read Estragon. Still others simply listened. All the readings were clumsy, but as the idea of the play began to come through, in however elementary a way, a quite evident sympathy for the characters emerged.

Coward's broad satire of suburban mores was ideal material for the other group. After two or three complete readings with several cast changes, an improvisation of the play was tried. The result was good and the kids knew it. Inhibitions of speech were markedly reduced, boys and girls worked together without embarrassment, and the portrayal of known types was clearly a pleasure to them. A second improvisation of the same plot was embellished with additional characters and incidents to accommodate more of the group into the play. The rumble of disappointment that sounded at the end of the class showed us that we had made our first real break-through.

November 10

I was unable to attend. June began with more readings (*Death of a Salesman* and *Fumed Oak*). The impossibility of achieving any sort of organised action when the group is over-large, and when there is only one teacher, prompted her to do what we had so long resisted doing: she locked the door. All those who would not participate, or at least keep quiet, were put out. As the key turned, the trouble started. Led by the incorrigible Barry, a huddle of boys battered at the door,

and filtered around to batter at the emergency exit door, making such a din that it was necessary to open the doors. In they came like a tornado, furious, shoving, shouting, blinking the lights, and completely destroying all spirit in the room. Eventually, bored, they retired to the dance floor.

In the brief time remaining, six of the most committed worked on short improvised scenes using ideas that arose "spontaneously". In reality, most of these ideas were echoes of suggestions offered in previous weeks. Within that tight little group a flame of genuine interest was burning, and though their characters and situations tended to be too accurately familiar, still there was at work in them a communal creative process that had had little chance to exercise since their earliest years in primary school.

As the class ended, Howard gave wistful voice to the group's frustration, saying that it would be good if these six might be allowed to work alone and without interruption from the others.

November 17

Hoping to give fuller leash to the conflicting energies dividing the class, we asked the youth leader to allow us use of his office as a classroom for the tough boys under my direction, while June supervised the group we privately designated the "good guys" in the Quiet Room. We made it clear that this was not a permanent arrangement, and that later in the evening the two groups would convene and perform for each other in what we hoped would be a benevolent competition.

In the office I met Rick for the first time. Rick was Barry's mate, older, more worldly, more vulgar. In all there were twelve of us in the tiny room, sprawled out on desk tops, filing cabinets, the floor. As I was the only female, I was for some time the focal point of a good bit of crude double talk. Rick took particular pains to make himself obnoxious and, short of exposing himself, did all he could to shock me. I allowed the talk to wear itself out, parrying when I could, until they were ready to listen. The boys were aware that they were receiving special treatment, of course, and were pleased with their achievement.

I had brought copies of the *Threepenny Opera*. After explaining the plot in the broadest terms, I appointed a cast to begin reading. Naturally Rick was Mr. Peachum. The readings were terrible. Then, after a few pages, Rick took over. The play had given him an idea for a little number he was going to produce and star in—no, he didn't want any help. Briskly he laid out a plot involving a robbery, an inadvertent murder, and an escape from justice. He broke the action into scenes and assigned parts. I suggested a rehearsal. "Forget it," he sneered, and they poured out of the office and into the Quiet Room like a storm falling on a still pond. The "good guys" retreated to the sidelines while Rick superintended the scene setting.

What followed was a pretty fine fifteen minutes' show of dramatic artistry of the variety seen on television: the timing was swift and neat, the miming was adroit, speeches were pruned to the essence, the plot was packed with suspense and action. The most astonishing single feature of the display was the co-ordination, the nearly faultless compliance of this unruly group with the orders snapped out by Rick in the office.

Then, quite unexpectedly, a nasty fight broke out as the play was ending. In a planned brawl scene, Barry was accidentally thrown against the wall. His reaction was violent, immediate and thoughtless: he lashed out with clenched fists and soon the floor was a-squirm with snarling animals. Chairs were broken, shouts and screams filled the air. We rushed into the fray and managed to quell it after a time. The tough camp retreated to the coffee bar, while the good guys got back to their familiar domestic scenes, seeming now particularly dreary and uninspired.

Later we went to chat with the boys at the coffee bar; Rick confided proudly that his play was based on experience.

November 24

If not benevolent competition, then perhaps taking turns will work? We invited the toughs to take the floor at the outset of the class, and asked the fence-sitters and the good guys to watch quietly. Dennis—similar to Barry as a type, younger, an excellent comic, loud—led the boys in a "mountain-climbing expedition" over tables and chairs heaped up for the occasion. Very clever and gifted, Dennis provided all the ideas as the sketch developed, and did most of the talking. Predictably, the "mountain" capsized and the spotlight shifted from Dennis to the mass. Immediately his enthusiasm collapsed; he left the room and his mates followed soon after.

So the hard workers collected eagerly, their numbers somewhat increased. They had profited by the previous week's performance; they wanted to drop the play on which they had been working and turn to something more dramatic. After a short discussion a theme was chosen: grammar school versus secondary modern. Feelings were strong here. Scenes were laid out provisionally and characters assigned, with a minimum of suggestions from us. They played it through, then shifted scenes, altered characters and tried it again. The subject, together with the business of creating beginning, middle and ending of a play, so absorbed their interest that, hardly realizing, they spoke improvised lines freely and convincingly. Stuttering Howard, the sole grammar school student among the group, shone as the player most concentrated on his role.

Interrupting this play in a blaze of arrogance came Rick and Barry. They had missed the mountain-climbing and now demanded their turn in the spotlight. We had no choice but to accept a theme. They per-

formed a wordless duet between two men on an underground train, one reading the newspaper over the shoulder of the other, to the latter's intense annoyance. They did a really fine job, so fine that it was impossible to scold them for their rudeness. We felt ourselves quite torn; here is the best talent and we cannot tame it or incorporate it with the other, serious but after all mediocre, group.

December 1

I was unable to attend. June reported that the session had been a fiasco. One more confirmation that two teachers are essential under the prevailing conditions at the club—where alternative activities are limited to dancing (only the girls do it), ping-pong (occupying four people), and television. We had planned to try movement-to-music exercises, hoping to corral some of the excess physical energies of the tougher boys and girls. June asked to borrow the gramophone from the dance floor and met with a nasty rebuff. Hoping to assert some authority, she tried again and realized, too late, that she was making a mistake. Once again we must face the fact that, lacking the goodwill of the kids and the possibility to enforce our own will, we cannot hope to control the class at all.

December 15

The youth leader is leaving. Perhaps this has some bearing on the uneasy atmosphere at the club. We tried a fairly sophisticated exercise, asking one boy to "prevent" another from crossing the room without using physical means. In other words he had to convince him intellectually. The noise was continual and concentration bogged. Rick launched into a flagrant show of vulgarities. We sat down, watched him, and waited—a course we have learned to adopt. He smiled and sneered, and kept it up. Finally we challenged him: "You've got command here, Rick, and nothing can happen unless you allow it". This took him aback. We commented on his comic gifts and their waste. After a short while he departed and we were able to begin and sustain a play on a theme of escaped Borstal boys and the justice of shielding them from the police. Rick slipped in to watch this, unobserved as it was played in semi-darkness. Afterwards he commented to us privately that the scenes played by this alien, committed group were too obvious and boring for him.

December 29

The class was uneventful, and followed a familiar, frustrating pattern: one hour of confusion and chaos, a second hour of furtive work in the shadow of probably added interruption. The real interest of the evening came after the class.

Barry, Rick, Robin and Roger, all central figures in the opposition, invited us to join them at the local pub to toast and bid farewell to the departing youth leader. In this ambience, the lions turn lambs. Far from arrogant, replete with courtesies, buying drinks and holding chairs, they were eager to tell us about their private lives, especially their sexual exploits and drinking habits. Rick was the most unexpected: he spoke openly of an extensive, closely-knit family and his happy relationship with them. What nice young men these were. *Nice*—in fact, their chatter was all too ordinary now. Was it only under conditions of rebellion that their self-expression was sparked with originality? We steered the conversation to the drama class. They reiterated their impatience with the themes and techniques of the Others. Okay, we said, show us something better.

January 5

Sporadic interruptions, like intermittent attacks from a nest of hornets, slowed the progress of the collected group.

They worked on a fairly lame play. In a railway station, a bourgeois family awaits the arrival of a long-gone brother of the father. He greets them with a monkey in tow which proceeds to shock their nice sensitivities. The boy who played the monkey, in spite of proving a fine comic and winning the lion's share of applause and attention, refused to run through the scene a second time as a monkey. Instead he preferred to be a drunken sailor friend of the brother. Moral: it is far better to be uncouth, despised and human, than a beloved sub-human.

Another observer from the ILEA sat in on the latter part of the session. Occasionally he tried to apply his experience in curbing the spirited intrusions of youth: he was met repeatedly with open defiance. Afterwards he asked the old question: Why didn't we lock the door against them? Patiently, we explained the reason why not.

January 12

Preliminary exercises: the group stood in a circle, as relaxed as possible, trying to focus attention on each other's eyes and thinking of nothing at all. When absolute detachment/concentration is achieved, the group should combine wills, and a desire to (say) raise one arm is communicated around the circle. Simultaneously all will raise arms. Obviously, this experiment is very difficult under the most ideal circumstances and we expected no more than we got: a great deal of interest, some giggling, some sneering, and a classroom fairly untied in mood.

From there we proceeded to a lively improvisation of a plane crash. About fifteen kids participated, therefore the noise and confusion was tremendous—especially at the moment of the "crash", what with screams and groans. The theme was exceptionally popular. They went

through the scenes three times, each time embellishing and weighting, and asked to go on with the same thing next week. Incidentally, Rick, Barry and Robin were not there.

January 19

We suggested that the plane crash theme be treated as a film; the preliminary flight scene might be less confused and more dramatic if pairs and trios of passengers and crew were separately examined by "the camera". To help cope with the tangent plots which should develop in such an ambience, we asked Phil to go off in a corner and direct a separate scene with three girls. Phil was a curious enigma. He was clearly very intelligent, he regularly attended, and yet never participated. His sideline comments ranged from the critically incisive to the snide; his frequent intrusions were more a petty annoyance than a destructive force such as that wielded by Rick or Barry. Probably he was bored with the imperfections in performance, for he often stayed on after a class to discuss a point. Although all previous efforts to draw him into action had failed, now, when offered the post of director, he jumped. As he was quite a favourite with the ladies, it was an added surprise to see him take the three girls to one side and work with them quietly and seriously.

In the meantime we asked Howard to take another section of the group and prepare a post-crash scene with them. This was a flop. Howard is eager and willing to try anything, but he is not a leader. So painfully inept is he at making decisions, that he could not co-ordinate the ideas thrown up by his group.

The results thrown up by Phil were wonderful to behold. Self-possessed and confident, he had developed a delightful little vignette in which each of the three girls emerged with clear-cut and varied personalities, each serving to set off the next. The humour was satiric and muted, not slapstick. Phil was, understandably, pleased with himself.

January 26

Lest we be lulled into thinking we had won an unflinching loyalty from anyone apart from Howard, this evening's failure set us straight. Except for Howard, we had virtually no co-operation from anyone. Even Phil was back on his fence, chirping taunts.

We were focussing on movement. One exercise aimed to sense the breadth of man's physical capacities by asking the player to transpose himself into various animals and mimic their actions. Like the occasion when the boy refused to go on playing the monkey role, it was asking too much of these young creatures at a time in their lives when they are at once so proud and so shy of their bodies. Another exercise, con-

cerning movement-in-character, required a player to perform a pre-set sequence of actions: come into a room, sit down, touch the table, and depart—always using the gestures and actions of a privately assigned character. The audience should be able to identify the character type from the player's performance of the set routine. This is an excellent exercise, but the spirit was dead in the Quiet Room.

February 2

Returning to an exercise used earlier in the year involving the imaginative use of props, we produced an ordinary box of soap powder and asked that it be transposed into anything but soap powder. Mac was the star of this show. He is a great show-off, loud, disruptive, one of the younger members of the tough side but not part of a gang of any stature, yet. Mac grabbed the box and performed a nice bit of camp acting, playing a queer, setting up a window display. He showed a fine flair for miming, but his fault was in playing too hard for laughs and appreciating his own jokes too much. After this was pointed out, he tried it again (rare for his sort of erratic energy to submit to such a discipline) and vastly improved his characterisation. Jim, Howard's mate, volunteered an idea and played a surveyor, using the box as his theodolite. Still riding the crest of his triumph, Mac bounced into the skit uninvited (they are not friends) and together the two gave a fine demonstration of co-operative improvisation. Still later, when a group of the faithful core of good guys were working out a comic scene, Mac leapt in again and stole the spotlight. Leaving the class we sighed to ourselves—ah, if *he* could be tamed!

February 9

We were getting some good results now with movement and gestures, but the spoken word was more often than not clumsy and inhibited by comparison. We tried a confining exercise: telephone calls. Improvised conversations between two people whose movements will not contribute to their speech.

It was extremely difficult to get co-operation. Why? The precise reason for success or failure with an exercise or theme is impossible to pin down. We can recognise influences—a youth leader's departure, for instance—but we cannot be sure of the extent of the influence, or why this week one suggestion will set off a whirl of activity and next week will meet stony resistance.

Finally Barry agreed to try a phone call with Mac. Mac was nervous, despite his comic gifts, for Barry is older and a big cheese in the club—his wit is subtler and more sophisticated. Indeed, Barry led all the way. He adapted immediately to the limitations of the telephone, while Mac, who thrives on gesture, found himself inhibited. Barry tried a

second call with his mate, Robin. This boy, a trouble-maker and relatively inarticulate, was delighted to find us asking him *please* to perform. He had never before agreed to do so. Now he fell into the role of stooge to Barry's quips and functioned very neatly—better by far than Mac, because of his close relationship with Barry. Barry has a remarkable ear for his audience; he goes to the brink of vulgarity, but never falls over, never seriously offends. He is, by now, aware of our dependence on him. He can make or break a meeting, and he knows it. Many of the kids will follow his lead—but his lead is neither predictable nor controllable.

February 16

Exercises in producing extremes of emotion—try to cry or laugh convincingly—met embarrassment and ridicule. The old familiar cry to the teachers: "You show us then!" resounded, but as always we refused. The members thinned out at last and were able to concentrate for a blessedly uninterrupted period with a group of seven.

We turned to an exercise in which an object is used in conjunction with a sequence of actions, but does not enter into the dialogue. Thus, two boys playing carpenters measured a wall and recorded the dimensions while carrying on an argument about their automobiles. Jim tossed a ball in the air while refusing to lend Howard his gramophone records. A fine sketch developed with Phil in the lead role, plying a needle and thread, and refusing to accompany his mate to the police station where the mate is being accused of a punch-up for which Phil is responsible. This was run through twice. Phil had never before agreed to perform. Now he was altogether at his ease and freed of inhibition simply because of the physical activity, the focal point for his attention, provided by the sewing in his lap. Howard, who played the mate on the second run through, astonished himself and everyone else by the intensity of emotion he delivered while arguing the justice of the incident.

The most rewarding moment in these see-sawing sessions is perhaps that instant as we turn off the lights and lock the Quiet Room, hearing in the near distance a knot of kids discussing what they have been doing. One says, "That was interesting"; another: "Yes, I enjoyed that". On their faces is a faint flush of triumph for having conquered themselves for a while.

February 29

It happened that the group assembled were all more or less in sympathy, and all boys. A few suggestions made in earlier meetings were incorporated: a will-reading scene, a death-bed scene and the problem of effectively characterizing a person confined to bed and un-

able to gesticulate. A plot was devised with unusual enthusiasm and haste.

Alan, rather shy and intelligent, volunteered to be the dying man who manages to dictate his will at the last moment. Howard, of course, wanted to be his lawyer. Phil posted himself solemnly behind the sick-bed and called himself Death. Dennis, the loud, boisterous clown and odd man out in this relatively conservative group, was the doctor. Three or four others were relatives of the dying man.

The scenes were not laid out beforehand, but developed as the play went on. "Okay," someone—usually Phil—would shout, "next scene in the lawyer's office". The crux of the plot, the dead man's surviving pet parakeet and the outrageous sum of money bequeathed for its upkeep, was treated with delicious dead-pan seriousness—a tone set by Dennis and imitated by the rest. In the court case defending the will, Dennis, having lost his doctor's role with the demise of his patient, cast himself immediately as the contender's solicitor. So it was Dennis versus Howard; a fanciful wit and agile tongue against a methodical stuttering realist. We privately advised Howard to exaggerate himself, make himself even slower, maddeningly methodical, a tedious and classy barrister. It worked, and the two dissimilar types who bore little love for one another produced a highly amusing, smooth and lengthy duel.

Indeed, the play was sustained for a full hour and a half, with no scenes repeated. A remarkable quantity of information, thrown out by one character or another, was absorbed and entwined into the plot. Howard even took accurate notes and made use of them in his court room debates.

Phil, who had taken on the role of Chief Justice with alacrity when Death was no longer needed, asked if we might do a "serious" court scene next week. He expressed regret that there were no girls in the cast this evening. We agreed emphatically and asked how we might entice a few girls to come regularly. He shrugged: "Too much like work for them".

March 2

Too many to cope with, and among them Barry, Rick, Robin and Co. with a break-it-up gleam in their eyes. As they entered, Phil, Howard and their friends retreated, disgruntled, into chairs along one wall. They were obviously unwilling to work in front of the enemy. Barry caught this and began prodding sore spots. "Don't you think that's funny, Phil?" he asked after a crude remark. "No," replied Phil evenly, "I don't think it's funny." Shortly afterwards the situation got sufficiently nasty for us to have to ask Barry and his friends to leave. They would not. We had to summon the new youth leader, whose leadership consists mainly of muscles and shouts. He applied these now and the three boys left—on a very sour note.

We proceeded with the "serious" play as promised. It emerged as a spy thriller involving a group of 12 to 14 boys and girls. (Had Phil nagged the females into attending?) A number of interesting scenes were worked out, and the difficult problem of including and working with the larger group was faced with fair success. Nonetheless, we mourned the fact that our three favourite ruffians had had to be thrown out, and could not be cajoled into working with these earnest but less imaginative kids. This problem of effecting a peaceful exchange between the factions had become one of our greatest preoccupations.

On leaving the club we discovered that the air had been let out of my car tyres. Seeing Robin and Barry strolling by, I asked them to give me a hand. "No," said Barry bitterly, "you don't give us a hand, why should we help you?" One of the girls came by a few minutes later and said the boys had gone on to "get" Phil for his rudeness to Barry. We wondered if we would see much of Phil henceforth, as he was not cut out to be a fighter.

March 9

They were a bit surprised to see us back after the tyre incident; most of them, including the youth leader, had expected we would quit. Significantly, Barry, Rick, and Robin were not present. (Phil was.) Also, to spell out the general mood of the club at this time, someone had broken into the building over the weekend, smashing and stealing a number of things. We felt privately that much of this problem could be attributed to the organization of the club and to poor leadership. The leader had become a policeman; the only activities available to absorb and channel excess energies were drama and ping-pong.

The drama class was crowded to overflowing. We had prepared a variety of telegrams. A player was asked to enter a designated room (home, hotel, office), make himself comfortable, then discover the telegram. He would read it and react to it as honestly as possible. The telegram was to be a surprise, both to the player and to the audience. Aiming to tap the full range of emotions, the telegrams were tragic, comic, astonishing, routine . . . the lot. This exercise sparked off some exceptional results, and prompted several quite new people to perform. Surprisingly, for they had to work solo before a large audience.

Further work on the spy play followed; the most memorable achievement here was a sequence in which at least a dozen players were performing together, all in character, all absorbed, all oblivious of the audience.

March 16

Barry was back. The youth leader foolishly tried to prevent him

entering the drama class. We asked that he be allowed to stay: he did, and co-operated throughout the session.

Two girls were asked to invent a situation in which the one is confiding some bit of shocking news to the other. They played a realistic scene in a living room—a friend is bearing the news that Jean has decided to marry a Jew. The neighbourhood around the club is strongly anti-Semitic so the play produced some loud reactions in the audience. Several asked to join in and a play developed, with cast and scenes changed through several repeats. When Dennis joined the cast as the girl's father, the play became a farce. Too bad, for we would like to have seen this theme probed further in serious vein initiated by the two girls.

Then Barry asked if he might try a scene with a friend of his. He introduced dapper and somewhat older Peter. We repeated the exercise: the revelation of shocking news, and suggested they try a tragic theme. Barry immediately elected to set the scene in a pub where he was getting drunk to drown a grief. We chided him, saying that we had *seen* him get drunk and now thought his talents could afford us a subtler portrayal. In spite of his (carefully smothered) embarrassment at not being able to shield himself behind laugh lines, Barry played a fine straight scene, simply telling his friend the story of his wife's death in a motor accident. It must be emphasised that Peter helped enormously—indeed, it is unlikely that Barry could have done this scene with anyone else in the club, for Peter is a genuine born-actor. He listened to the sad story silently, using only restrained gestures and sympathetic noises, but gradually building up the emotion until he finally rushed from the room weeping. Exaggerated effects, of course, but even the crowd of teenagers watching recognized the exceptional quality of the performances—they burst into spontaneous applause.

This success nudged Peter into the next improvisation. Howard was listening to his girl confess that she was unfaithful; Peter was the Italian waiter in the cafe where they sat. The Italian characterisation was very funny, very convincing. Faced with exceptional talent of this sort, the other players were spurred on rather than checked.

(On reviewing these reports at the end of the term, it seemed to us that Peter's contribution was a crucial turning point in the long, slow effort to bring about co-operative action between the two opposing sections of the class.)

March 23

Barry, Rick and Robin were in process of being put out of the club just as we entered. The youth leader was, he said, doing his job, and there was no use arguing with him.

Two-character situations were drawn from the nearly forgotten spy

play; onlookers were asked to act as critics of the portrayals. The schoolish atmosphere suited the moment and a fair amount of discussion resulted. When, inevitably, the din accumulated and swallowed attention, we turned to exercises using only the hands and feet.

The now considerably reduced numbers sat about discussing and analysing the possible interpretations of various hand and foot gestures. They were then asked to "detach" their bodies and, using only their hands or their feet, perform wordless scenes. Thus, the onlookers shielded from sight all but the feet of two players and watched a mimed impression of a girl waiting with great annoyance for her date, etcetera. Phil was particularly good at this concentrated miming. Using only hands, he evolved a scene of shy courtship with a girl in a cinema. His miming was so intelligently expressive that a much finer sensitivity was revealed than one would have imagined from his (quite intelligent) conversation.

March 30

Prepared plots, all dealing with situations before and after an atomic blast, were distributed to pairs of players. Barry had been re-admitted to the club and was on good behaviour. He worked with Jim, a staunch conservative who steers clear of Barry and his gang. They worked together smoothly, building up a long suspenseful introduction in Epping Forest, walking together and talking about nature. Then the blast, their wonder, horror, and the scorching fall-out. It was by far the best of all efforts that evening. Others, trying familiar domestic settings interrupted by the explosion, were ill at ease because of the impending violence of emotion they were going to have to portray. Not only did they shy from the necessity of portraying so extreme an emotion as horror and fear, but they had virtually no concept of the Bomb, nor any interest in acquiring one.

April 6

Again we focussed on a single theme, hoping that by such a limitation in plot material, we would provoke more careful explorations. Last week the atom bomb; now: school leaving. Most of the kids leave school the very minute the law allows. One of the problems for our purposes was to stir up conflicting arguments, pro and con school leaving. Therefore we situated the scenes in radically different income groups and classes, and asked that specific characters find strong reasons for wanting their child to leave or remain at school. By and large the group was freest and most imaginative in their interpretations of the poorest social classes.

For example, in a slum tenement setting—Pat, a large, sharp-tongued arrogant girl, played a char who is anxious to see her son get

ahead and is willing to kill herself to pay for his education. It was a triumph for this difficult girl who would never before agree to perform seriously. Shielding herself behind a bold limp and an accent, she played with relish and ease, even when Howard (whom she clearly considers a pantywaist) was cast as her son.

Neither a council flat setting (i.e. their own ambience), nor the middle-class semi-detached TV-favourite house produced any interesting ideas. Arguments were lame and the acting flat. As for the upper classes—no one felt able even to attempt this leap into fairyland.

One of the year's achievements, however, issued out of a suggested setting in a tramp's hovel located in the East End docks. Phil was the elder, lazy tramp, and Jim was the younger, occasional worker. Their "charge", an orphan found long ago in a dustbin, was played by Kevin. This boy, a counterpart and good friend of Phil, had never before agreed to perform but had always been around, a persistent troublemaker. A fastidious boy, Kevin seemed to relish the idea of squalid surroundings and the opportunity to unleash ridicule on his elders for their indolent and messy way of life. As the plot grew, the boys became more and more absorbed, making elaborate use of the limited effects available—dimming the lighting, covering themselves with old newspapers and untidying their clothes. The crux of the plot: the boy wants to leave school, get a job and earn enough money to live decently. His tramp guardians are divided—one wants him to stay on and get further credits in order to better maintain his saviours when they are old. Howard could not contain himself on the sidelines and joined the play as a down-and-out meths-drinking friend. He had never attempted a characterization so removed from his own, and was hugely pleased with his success. Two girls, also eager to participate in what was clearly a hit, entered as visiting health inspectors from the boy's school. They worked with greater purpose and ease than they had been able to achieve earlier in the term, but with little imagination and the play became cluttered. The class ended with the promise to continue the same theme next week.

April 13

Still another youth leader was taking over; the deposed man was showing his successor around. The kids were wound up, itching to show the new man what he was in for and they managed very nicely. It was a thoroughly difficult evening, and to add to my problems, June was unable to attend.

After a long period of chaos and after many frustrating attempts to continue the discussion of school leaving as a theme, it was finally possible to start. This time we reversed the premise of the previous week: now the students wanted to *stay* in school and the parents wanted them to leave. Again we were to try scenes in widely different income groups and classes. Unfortunately the interruptions were effective in

cutting short every start. At one point Barry was leading a wild fray and I grabbed him by the arm, telling him to quit it. His reaction was very nasty. He became quite rigid, his features stiffened and flushed, and he growled at me through clenched teeth: "Let go . . . don't touch me! You talk to me like that and I'll go out and kick your car to pieces." He went on to say that I was picking on him, when he was no more responsible than anyone else.

Later, when some of the mob, at least, had withdrawn to the dance floor, Howard produced a large satchel of props and costumes he had collected especially for the tramp scene. It was his own idea and he had looked forward to the class—now he was quite flattened, for the club was in such an uproar that his co-stars, Phil, Kevin and Jim had left in disgust. As he was so eager to perform, I suggested that Rick and Barry try the tramps. I was very impressed with Howard's courage in agreeing to this, for he was almost alone—a solid citizen in the midst of a pack of wolves. There was a rush for costumes and props; in a few minutes six boys including Howard were decked out in baggy coats and ragged trousers, their pockets filled with broken watches, pencils, candles, and general pickpocket loot. The scene was played by candle-light, at their request, and the large assembly of onlookers hushed in the dim light. Howard struggled nobly to follow the plot as it had been worked out, but it was a lost cause. Rick and Barry took over. Their tramps were degenerate drunkards, the language was explicitly foul, and no action or theme was allowed to creep in to their private and extremely tedious "happening". Time was up; they flung off the costumes and departed, oddly unmoved by their own display of defiance. As Howard and I gathered up the bits and pieces, we discovered that three of the junk watches he had brought were missing. I don't think I have ever seen so poignant a study of dejection as Howard, still dressed in his too tight rags, blinking and fumbling for his spectacles.

April 20

Another emotionally exhausting evening. The situation in the club seems to have deteriorated to a new low, for, although the new youth leader is a decided improvement, he is having to cope with a great many inherited ills. He urged us to lock the door of the Quiet Room behind us. We protested that this has *created* trouble in the past, not cured it. He managed to persuade us that it would work tonight, but it did not. Somehow spare keys appeared magically in various pockets and the two hours were pocked with batterings at the door which we could not now keep *unlocked!*

Dogged, brave Howard was ready again with his bag of tramp costumes. Phil was back and tried his role again, but was evidently uneasy performing in the presence of such confusion. Kevin refused to perform at all, so one of the rebel camp took over his role (and, incidentally, did very nicely with it), until suddenly all hell broke loose.

It was Barry and his gang. The play had to be stopped and, after a long interval of unpleasant cracks aimed at us, we steered into a new channel with Barry and his gifted friend Peter, dominating the scene. They improvised on a workers' strike situation, and performed several "television interviews". They were wonderfully comic and inventive—even the wildest of the onlookers were tamed and spellbound. And once again we secretly wrung our hands at having to give over the floor to these two or three. However talented and amusing, they were calling the rules and we had no means of stopping them.

April 27

Probably the most interesting session thus far. We were pleasantly surprised to find only six or seven (all boys) waiting in the Quiet Room—Rick, Barry and some lesser lights in their gang, plus loyal Howard. A sub-current of apology from the roughnecks was in the air. We had prepared a plot, embellishing the workers' strike situation, touched on last week. They all fell for it enthusiastically. Rick and Barry were particularly keen to show off their first-hand knowledge of the working man's world. Barry created a marvellous burly, chest-thumping, gravelly-voiced character for himself, while Rick took a straightforward, realistic line, arguing the rights of the workers very soberly. Howard had the admirable guts to take the managerial line.

Later they plunged into another, more elaborate play involving embezzlement by the union leader, and were so absorbed that they moved from scene to scene without pause or prior discussion.

With the entry of a knot of girls, we tried to set up a plot concerning working women. These girls, always moving in a tight group, are reluctant to participate. Their presence inevitably will break up the concentration of the boys. A scuffle among the onlookers accidentally unloosed a metal bookshelf from the wall, which fell against Rick's head. Reacting savagely, Rick ripped the shelves from the wall and very nearly hurt a few other people. After calming down and satisfied that the incident was not intentional, he began sullenly setting light to a ping-pong ball. Challenged by us, and given the centre of attention, he was quite willing to discuss various causes of his anger. "Niggers", he pointed out, were frequently responsible for bursts of anger from him. Refusing to carry the discussion any further when he found that we did not share his racial attitudes, he and Barry left abruptly.

It was necessary to start on a fresh theme with the new larger group. We suggested Carnaby Street. Just that and no more was said. Suddenly we were witnessing Instant Drama. All the results of the months of work seemed to be on exhibition. A small shop complete with tailor and manager appeared in the middle of the floor. Another was established in a corner. Shoes and accessories found an outlet in still another corner. Everyone in the room got involved, either in buying

or in selling. Obviously there was a good bit of camp acting—fellows ordering blue suede or puce mohair outfits, from neck-tie to jock-strap. It was a three ring circus with dialogues sprouting from here, there, everywhere. The din was terrific, and nobody minded. Occasionally we had a frantic demand for a character idea: try being a one-legged pop star, or try a ballet dancer, we might suggest. In the main, however, it burned steadily on like a self-fuelling furnace. Even a few girls got into it.

It was discovered, at the end of this busy class, that my leather coat had been nicked from the room. A search was made with a few helping (Howard, Jim, Barry, Rick and Robin). The others watched, expressionless, as all parts of the club were searched. One could not help noticing that Barry, Rick and Robin were particularly anxious to be seen as innocent. They recommended going directly to the police, and offered to accompany us to the station. The boys spoke gloomily of the fundamental mistake in trusting anyone. We protested that trust was essential in human affairs. In the course of the conversation June and I both were satisfied that these three could have had nothing to do with the theft. Unfortunately, they are accustomed to being "in the wrong", and therefore protest elaborately when not guilty. (Naturally we did not accuse anyone.)

Exaggerated hostility, such as Rick's when accidentally hurt by the shelf, or Barry's when singled out for reproof, has a history too long and intricate for us to comprehend under the circumstances. Both have police records, one is on probation. Seeing us for only a couple of hours per week is hardly time enough for them to learn to trust us (we learned at one point that they suspected us of being psychiatric social workers), using "trust" in the fullest sense of the word. On the other hand, we had observed, over the months, that the gap between them and others in the drama class was narrowing, that the possibility of co-operation was increasing.

May 4

An almost heady atmosphere of goodwill in the Quiet Room—a reflection of a sense of group guilt, we thought, over the theft of the coat. Mostly boys, only three or four girls showed up and none of these stayed after the first play.

We suggested an obvious plot—curious to know what reactions we would get—concerning the stealing of a birthday gift at a party. Despite the setting being rather domestic for the tastes of Rick and Barry, both did their affable utmost to make a success of it.

Later we turned to a few take-offs of familiar television shows. This led to a gorgeous version of "This Is Your Life". A new boy, Tom, was a natural master of ceremonies, keeping the thing flowing smoothly. Rick played the "celebrity" (a delicious comic stew of Albert Schweitzer,

Livingstone and Ernest Hemingway), with fifteen or so friends and relatives coming forth from the group. Considering that there was no prior discussion, and that the "friends and relatives" were self-designed, Rick showed an uncanny sensitivity for timing and continuity, for keeping the threads of the story untangled, and for drawing out the fullest comic potential from each confrontation.

Part of the credit for the success of this improvisation should be put to the lack of interference from the dance floor. One reason is that the new youth leader is finding more for the kids to do. Girls are taking charge of the coffee bar. A dozen or so were actually dancing—previously they would simply gossip to the blare of music, scarcely bothering to tap feet.

May 18

Judo lessons given by the youth leader in the open air behind the club had attracted the majority of the regulars and we expected an all female class, if any. In fact, a group of seven boys drifted in—a mixture of "toughs" and "good guys".

We suggested a theme concerning the problems of living with old people: "Getting Rid of Grandpa". Robin, always a reluctant actor, dared to take on the central role only after I offered him my sun-glasses to hide behind. He chose to create a quite realistic portrait of a slobbering, deaf old man. Howard and one of the younger, tractable boys played his grandsons. They discuss whether or not to send the old boy to a home. Their arguments developed surprisingly well and one felt genuinely distressed by the helpless plight of the grandfather. Barry wandered in, watched for a while, then decided to join the play as the grandfather's old friend, who, not being deaf, is able to warn his buddy about the young ones' plans. Probably the most interesting feature about the improvisation was the completely democratic spirit shown by the four players; there was no upstaging, no dominating (Barry is a master scene-stealer), or twisting of the plot to get a laugh. When, in the end, the old grandfather has an attack and dies, Barry put so much emotive power into his mourning that he actually wept.

Another play, on a theme of vivisection, was less successful, though greatly enjoyed for a while. The entry of a large group of girls broke up the play altogether. We tried to get a few girls to participate in a new theme but they resisted all efforts. If it is possible, these girls are, as a group, louder and more troublesome than the boys of the same pattern. Most of them are still at school, but are counting the days until they can leave and go to work. Their intrusions have become the greatest destructive force in the drama class, their refusal to participate the source of our deepest frustrations.

May 25

Our favourite tough boys stopped their weight-lifting (another blessing initiated by the youth leader) to join the drama class. Barry was in a state of tension—not for the first time we wondered about drugs—and demanded that we try a plot he had in mind. Go ahead, we told him. Quickly he cast the play and set up the first scene; a jewellery shop. Barry, playing the robber, mimed a scene in which he breaks in the shop at night and steals the jewels, then is apprehended by the jeweller. When the policeman did not say or do precisely as Barry wished, he stopped him: “No, say this . . . do that”. We realized that Barry was pushing a real experience. Next scene: the police station where the robber is identified by the jeweller. Then the court room, and constant interruptions by Barry as he instructed his witnesses. Rick played Barry’s solicitor. June and I were appointed a two-man jury. Rick proved “beyond the shadow of a doubt” that the evidence against his client was too circumstantial to treat seriously. The judge and prosecutor disagreed and the jury was asked to make the decision. Barry’s jaw was strained as he loudly demanded the Not Guilty verdict from us.

None of the performances were of the quality we had come to expect from this group of boys. Everyone seemed to be going through their paces in deference to Barry. As soon as we nodded agreement to the demanded verdict, the group dispersed.

The girls had been sent away earlier—Barry refused to continue in their presence. Now we beckoned them, but they were so totally unruly that we could achieve nothing in the second hour. Only a very few have the self-confidence to perform alone. They seem, rather, to move and speak as a mass. One exception is Val, the large dumpy girl who has clearly built up a “Don’t Care” attitude concerning boys. This, together with her ready, acid wit, sets her apart from the others. She performed a fine scene with Howard, as her father, accusing her of stealing a motor bike.

June 1

For the first time since the beginning of the class, when various pieces were stolen, we brought in some costume pieces. A sheik’s head-dress, a French beret, a floppy woman’s hat, and similar bits were highly effective in sparking off a series of sketches. The usual core of seven or eight boys were the main performers, but Val joined in as well. Unfortunately the novelty of the costumes attracted a great many onlookers and good beginnings often collapsed for want of quiet and concentration.

June 8

As June was returning to the States, this was her last night. Most

of the evening was spent in farewell celebrations.

A Negro stranger hovered about and finally came into the class and introduced himself as a leader of another youth club. Rick and Barry made a rather exaggerated show of friendly back-slapping with him. They had long ago made it clear that they hated “niggers”: was this a display of their acting prowess for our benefit?

June 15

I had found a substitute partner to continue the class with me, for by now it was evident that one teacher simply could not cope with the chaotic and unpredictable conditions at the club. The kids were all very curious about Masha; the tough boys, especially, clustered around, asking questions about her private life, testing her reactions, asserting themselves. Almost immediately I saw that her European background was far less acceptable than American, and further that her reserved manner was not so stimulating as June’s outgoingness. They were suspicious and a trifle put off by her “posh” accent.

We had brought a couple of half-masks, both grotesque, one bronze and snoutish, the other bright pink and feline. There was a strong resistance to trying these masks. Howard was willing. So was Tom, and they performed a scene together, awkwardly it is true, but taking account of the mask’s purpose and using it with intelligence, and certainly no fear. Of the rest of the group, very few would agree to even put on a mask to look at themselves in a mirror. And of those few, all were tense and embarrassed, and cast it off after a moment. Barry, for instance, after much persuasion, put on the bronze mask and immediately seemed to lose all his inventiveness, doing little more than grunting. A pretty girl, who has frequently played in straight domestic scenes, finally agreed to try the pink mask, but could not bring herself to utter a word while wearing it.

Though it is a broad generalisation, one could say that the masks represented a threat to those of the group who are insecure. Tom and Howard, probably more than any others in the club, are sure of their “identity”, know what they are aiming for, and are not afraid of a temporary loss of themselves.

June 22

We tried working with grease paint, curious to know if the same reluctance to alter the face would obtain. It did. Again Howard was guinea pig (Tom was not there) and happily allowed a group of girls to smear on a clown’s face. The idea of staid Howard as a clown is theoretically ridiculous, but actually he was very good. He implored Val to join him in a clown routine, and though she refused to wear

make-up, she did go through a series of antics with him.

A batch of false hair intrigued the tough boys; they were happy to have moustaches and beards pasted on, but so intrigued were they by their virile fixtures that they could not co-operate on the Western plot they devised, but instead rushed about the dance floor, bellowing.

The appearance of Vicky was the memorable event of the evening. A small, slick blonde, wearing an enigmatic smile, a loner, self-assured, she wandered into a play about a tight-rope walker/burglar and made her debut by screaming piercingly on seeing the robber in her bedroom. Obviously, this is an actress.

June 29

Barry, Rick and Robin are away on holiday. Howard and Jim are doing exams. With these foundation stones missing, our troubles are multiplied by a large influx of new intractable kids. The youth leader has had to abandon his judo and weight-lifting classes and must rush about trying to keep order.

In the midst of wild non-co-operation, Vicky appeared and again made the evening. She asked if she might try a solo performance of an idea she'd had. Playing a highly neurotic woman, she answered a threatening telephone call from an unidentified person. She hung up, then unhurriedly mimed an agonizing interval. Then, answering a knock at the door, she screamed and fainted. Impressive, if melodramatic acting, and totally concentrated despite incessant jeering from the new young men.

July 6

Heavy going—the sort of class which seems to negate every step taken as painfully over the months, when a teacher wants to shriek: What's the use? and run. The return of Rick, Barry and Robin, was not, as anticipated, a cohesive influence among the throng of new roughnecks. They sat around showing off their photos and sun-tans; for a moment they wavered about dramatising one of their vacation adventures, then flatly refused. Suddenly it is square to do drama.

Vicky, for the third time running, justified the evening. Doing exercises in movement without speech, I asked Vicky to play a woman who has long ago lost her lover, entering a room where they spent their happiest hours. She was wonderfully subtle, and showed again her remarkable instinct for timing. The audience, who began by jeering, ended up in loud applause.

July 13

Desperate to achieve *something* in these last weeks, I arranged for a tape recording expert to come along. I telephoned the club the

night before, ostensibly to check on the electrical fittings, but mainly to spread the word that there would be a recording session in the hope that the best performers would be there. They were.

The presence of equipment, and of a sympathetic *man* at the controls made for a relaxed but serious atmosphere. There was considerable eagerness to perform, and so while Douglas turned the buttons and held the microphone, I corralled players and vetted their suggestions, emphasising that the locales of the plays should take account of the non-visual quality of tape-recordings. As television has swallowed the radio, it was a question of whether they would recognise the limitations. In fact, the more imaginative did adjust quite well. Rick and Barry, with their talented friend Peter, and Vicky (who, it turns out is Peter's girl friend), did the best work. Indeed, it was a job to keep them away from the mike to give others an opportunity.

July 20

After last week's success, we decided to do a repeat recording session. In view of the impossibility to rehearse and produce a play for an invited audience, at least these tapes might represent solid achievement to those who had shown a lively, if not dependable, interest in dramatic expression. Howard, the most persistent worker, would have very much enjoyed a live performance. He remarked that recorded drama was inhibiting for he liked and needed to embellish action with gesture; nonetheless he was pleased that something permanent had come out of the drama class. Barry, without confessing that drama meant anything to him, asked if Douglas was from the BBC.

We had less success this week. One of the main reasons was the blunt refusal of either Rick or Barry to participate. Their reason was beyond knowing, but their mood was unpleasant. Rick left soon after the class began. Barry stayed on to do his worst at breaking up the class. A pack of six young girls descended periodically to sing pop tunes into the mike. Only in the final quarter hour was there any concentrated co-operation.

Howard and Jim resuscitated the old tramp play and altered the plot to suit the medium. Robin joined them, remembering his success as the old grandfather, and a new mood settled over the room. Vicky appeared and played a suicide scene with Barry, who, in these last few minutes, turned pleasant. Unfortunately there was too little time left to do justice to either of these efforts. Officially it was the last night of the class.

July 27

I went back to perform a few last rites. Only a few of the kids were

hanging around; I sat in the office talking to the youth leader and the ping-pong instructor, quite naturally, about youth and clubs.

This particular one was a flop and was probably doomed to remain a flop, they claimed, because: (1) the very design of the open-plan building prohibits a variety of instructed activities from taking place simultaneously; (2) although the purpose of the club was specifically social, dancing, ping-pong and television were not sufficiently absorbing activities to cope with the erratic energies of young people—drama was, of course, a good idea, but bound to fail under such conditions; (3) the GLC had turned over the building complete with all furnishings and fittings, which the kids had been systematically destroying ever since—had they been given a building shell with materials for completion, they could have learned and used skills such as carpentry, electrical fitting, curtain making, plumbing and so forth, at the same time gaining a respect for their club; (4) given present conditions, a youth leader with one or two assistants was simply unable to keep order—at least five more strong-armed overseers were wanted to watch over all corners of the building, and there was no money to pay for such luxuries. (In recognition of his lack of success in controlling the club members, the Board of Managers was relieving the present youth leader of his job, and seeking a replacement. Qualifications: two years' training, as much experience as possible—this one has had 20 years, starting at 16 with the Scouts—muscle enough to bounce anywhere from one to ten rebels when necessary, and a great deal of genuine love for youth. Hard qualities to come by in a single package, as the Board has doubtless discovered.)

So this was the end of the project. The experience of working with these, for the most part, untamed spirits, has been at once extremely frustrating and rewarding for the instructors. For the kids—one doesn't know.

Disillusionment, anarchism and war

DONALD ROOUM

"After two years of government by Labour, we have few illusions left about the nature of party politics, the empty promises, and the humbug of firm assurances."

—ALDERMASTON MARCH COMMITTEE, *No time for silence* (a leaflet inviting people to join the 1967 march).

TO LOSE ONE'S ILLUSIONS is at least a step nearer common sense than keeping one's illusions at all costs, like poor old CND, still begging the Labour Party to listen to its socialist conscience, search its socialist heart, and return to the path of true righteousness.

Disillusionment may start you groping your way through the smoke screen put out by the forces of law and established order. Disillusionment may make you try to disperse the crude oil constantly washed up from the political parties.

Disillusionment may start you asking yourself: What do political parties *do*, as distinct from what they say they do? What is the state *for*? How does a government earn its living?

Disillusionment can be a healthy and useful state of mind, if it doesn't last too long. But disillusionment has nothing to do with anarchism.

* * *

Anarchism, to put it simply, is a body of opinion, a doctrine, about the purpose of society. We believe the purpose of society is to increase the opportunities, satisfy the ambitions, widen the scope, of individuals.

Most of the things that people do together do in fact fulfil this

DONALD ROOUM's article is the substance of a speech he gave to a meeting on 29th March, 1967, organised by the London Federation of Anarchists to explain anarchist and near-anarchist attitudes to the Easter demonstrators. The other speakers were Andy Anderson of Solidarity, Ken Hawkes of the Syndicalist Workers' Federation, and Robert Barltrop.

purpose in one way or another. Most social relationships are between mutually free people, co-operating each for his own satisfaction.

But there is one kind of social relationship which goes against the purpose of society, which confines the choices of individuals instead of expanding them. This is the kind of relationship in which one party is boss over the other, in which somebody is dominated by some kind of threat, no matter what. This kind of relationship restricts and confines both parties, the subject in an obvious way, and the boss, less obviously, by the fact that having adopted the role of boss, he must maintain his authority.

Anarchists approve of all the positive, free, co-operative kinds of relationship. What they oppose is the boss kind of relationship, at all levels. Anarchy, the end-point at which they aim, is what Robert Barltrop calls the good society, a society in which all relationships are of the useful voluntary kind, a society of sovereign individuals in which, as Malatesta put it, the domination of man by man is impossible.

How long it will take to achieve such a society, or even whether complete anarchy can ever be achieved, is not important. Anarchists are not a product of anarchy; they are a phenomenon of now. And the function of anarchy as an end-point is to direct and clarify the anarchist struggle now, the struggle for less government and more individual choice *now*.

* * *

Individuals acting by and for themselves are blamed for many things by well-meaning people, and others, who cannot see beyond the context of the state. The cause of war, for instance, is often said to lie in the aggressive urges of individuals.

Now of course these urges exist, and we have seen them expressed on the Aldermaston march, in such remarks as, to quote an incident I witnessed, "Who are you telling to keep marching? You've been giving orders ever since we were on the bus. Now belt up, or I'll belt your mouth up for you", and so on. But aggression plays very little part in modern war.

The pilot who flies out from Guam, presses the button to open his bomb doors over a Vietnamese village, and flies back to Guam, does not behave aggressively at all. The bombs explode a few children and burn a few women, to say nothing of any Vietcong in the neighbourhood. A few fragmentation bombs with delaying fuses might subsequently go off in the faces of orphans looking for their mothers. But all the pilot has done is fly a plane and press a button; about as aggressive as a postman.

Sitting in a comfortable bunker, and pressing a switch to launch a rocket carrying ten times the destructive power of all the bombs in World War II, is an even less aggressive job. Ordinary people make their immense contribution to modern war, not by aggression and selfish-

ness, but by peaceful acceptance of their relationship with the state, by unimaginative quiescence.

* * *

People disappointed that the Labour Party has not reduced arms since it came to office tend to blame the Right Honourable J. H. Wilson. At Easter 1966, for instance, CND put on a puppet show called *Punch and Judas*, calling Wilson a traitor and tending to suggest that had some other member of the Labour Party been Prime Minister, there would have been a measure of disarmament. This is quite unfair. Wilson has a job to do which includes maintaining the authority of the state, both in relation to its subjects and in relation to other governments. He is no more to blame for nuclear arms than Johnson, Kosigin, Mao, De Gaulle or any of the other individuals who are associated with the Bomb by cartoonists.

Nor is the Bomb the responsibility of any group in power: the Labour Party, the capitalist class, the Communist governments, the military. Weapons are an essential instrument of any government, necessary equipment in the business of governing. War is the health of the state.

Of course there are differences between governments; the British government, for instance, permits anarchist meetings, while the Chinese government does not. It is better to live in America than in North Vietnam, not only because Vietnam is being bombed and America isn't, but also because American government permits open hostility to its policies. But in the matter of War there is no discernible difference.

Some of us remember the difficulties of the anarchist movement in 1945. Others of us, respectable adults and parents of families, were not even born at the time, so there is no harm in describing the events of 1945 again. One thing that happened was that the then editors of *FREEDOM* were imprisoned, under a wartime Defence Regulation which had not before been applied. Another was that the horrors of Belsen, Buchenwald and Auschwitz were revealed.

We had known the concentration camps existed, but not until they were invaded did we know their incredible monstrosities. Prominent pacifists, including the editor of *Peace News*, resigned from pacifism after six dangerous years of wartime peace propaganda, because the horrible revelations of the camps made them think the war had been right after all. People said, "We told you all along Our governments were better than Their governments. Doubts we may have had when you pointed out the similarities, but here is a difference you cannot deny." So it went on until August.

Then on August 6th — Hiroshima — Boom! — and governments were all alike again.

* * *

The anarchists have not lost their illusions about party politics; they have never had any illusions to lose. They have always said what

Wilson has been saying since he came to power; a government has to govern.

We don't doubt that a government may have a real programme for reform. There must be some ideal to fire the enthusiasm of the ordinary people who struggle to get a party in power, either by peaceful electioneering or by bloody insurrection. There must be a higher hope than mere personal glory to sustain a politician on his way to the top, through the trials and disappointments, the risks of ruin and (in many countries) death, the sacrifice of personal friendships, the endless days and nights of a whole life spent jockeying for power.

But when a party achieves power, that isn't the end of the road. It isn't a matter of now you're in power, put your ideals and aspirations into effect—whop!—and Bob's your uncle.

A government, like it or not, has to govern. It has to maintain its authority, and that means it has to maintain its means of coercion and its means of war. That is what government is about.

"Labour in power minus the Bomb" is a lovely thought. So is "Labour has let us down, let's get the Peace-loving New Radicals into power" and "The Statesmen of the World must get round a table and give a monopoly of weapons to a World Government". All lovely ideas, all manifestations of wishful thinking.

Don't we all wish there was an *easy* way to rid the world of war? Don't we all wish we could get rid of war for a start, then settle down to the problems of poverty and servitude and injustice? But unfortunately it's impossible.

It is absurd and ridiculous to hope that any state, whatever its ideals, will volunteer to give up a substantial part of its military might. War is the health of the state.

The only way to get rid of armaments is to get rid of governments, and political parties, and all those institutions in which one person is boss over another. The only way to work for peace, now, is to encourage people to reject authority and act for themselves, now. The only way to make war impossible is to make the domination of man by man impossible.

If you found this issue of ANARCHY stimulating you would probably be interested in some other issues which are still available. In ANARCHY 15, several authors discussed the work of David Wills. In ANARCHY 18, teachers, parents and children wrote about Comprehensive Schools and, in ANARCHY 21, Secondary Modern Schools were explored. ANARCHY 11 reviewed the books and ideas of Paul Goodman, A. S. Neill wrote about Summerhill, and Harold Drasdo discussed the limitations of the "character-building" theory of education. (Outward Bound and all that.)

In ANARCHY 27, Joe Benjamin and David Downes wrote of their experiences of the beginning and the end of the Teen Canteen. The same issue had Charles Radcliffe on the public schools, Nicolas Walter on Cliff Richard. Colin MacInnes on Ray Gosling and Paul Goodman on New York street gangs.

Homer Lane was discussed by David Wills, A. S. Neill and Anthony Weaver in ANARCHY 39, parents and teachers in ANARCHY 43. ANARCHY 48 was largely about the ideas implicit in *Lord of the Flies*, but also had reports on Miss Lang of Kidbrooke and Mr. Duane of Rising Hill. In ANARCHY 53, the dilemmas of further education were discussed, ANARCHY 61 was about vandalism and so was ANARCHY 64 which also looked at the rigid child and failure at school. John Webb's remarkable article on the sociology of a school was in ANARCHY 71, and "free schools"—in the sense of ad hoc street schools were the subject of ANARCHY 73.

The idea of anarchism as a theory of organisation was illustrated in ANARCHY 62, and two outstanding long articles in recent issues were Peter Ford's examination of libertarian psychiatry (the work of Laing and Cooper) in ANARCHY 70, and Lewis Herber's account of ecology and revolutionary thought in ANARCHY 69.

All these issues are available from the publishers who will also gladly send you a specimen copy of the anarchist weekly FREEDOM. For subscription rates see inside front cover.