FIRST-CLASS EVENING ENTERTAINMENTS

IDEOLOGY AND SPECTACLE IN A MID-VICTORIAN MUSIC HALL PROGRAMME

The entrance to Hoxton Hall sits in a terrace of stuccoed houses, its modest facade, marked by nothing more than two chaste Victorian lamps, presenting no competition to the loud fascia of a nearby Iceland. Across the way a fifties housing estate stands on the site of the former Britannia Theatre, once described by Dickens as the grandest of East End theatres. Its thespian spirit lingers in the names of the estate buildings: Miranda House, Falstaff Walk, Rosalind Terrace. Further on up the street is what remains of the "Offices for the Relief of the Poor" (aka the Workhouse), built in 1863, the same year as Hoxton Hall, a barracks-like building which was largely demolished in 1982 before its potential for yuppy-loftification was recognised. The northern end of the street ends in a row of west-Indian shops: a newsagent that provides salted cod from its ice-cream cabinet; services offering cheap telephone calls to the Caribbean and - in the Latter-Rain Outpouring Revival Hall above one of the shops - salvation. At its southern end the street opens to Shoreditch where culture merges with commerce to offer a more contemporary kind of salvation.

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ILLUSTRATION – ORIGINAL PROGRAMME 1863

 "First Class Evening Entertainments" was the title given to a variety programme which was presented at Hoxton Hall when it first opened in November 1863. The programme was published in the local *Shoreditch Observer*, which had in September 1863 printed a not-coincidental leader on the subject of "Amusements and Morality". The programme [illustrated] offers an indiscrete mix of entertainment (magic acts and music), education (a talk on "Healthy Moral Homes") and information (illustrated talks on "Great Battles of the British Army from Hastings to Inkermann" and "The Prince of Wales's Tour to the East"; a practical demonstration of the telegraph).

By 1863 the East End of London had begun to gain its fearful reputation for overcrowding, poverty, disease and crime. In Shoreditch the numbers reached their peak in 1861, before the outer expansion of London began to relieve pressure on inner city. [Mander p.61] From the mid-nineteenth century the Victorian ruling classes recognised that in creating an urban working class they had given birth to a slumbering monster; a monster which had merely flexed its muscles in the first mass political movement of the

age, Chartism. With the collapse of Chartism in 1848 the rulers seized the initiative to implement an active programme of social and ideological control. Education and entertainment became a central part of this policy. And in a period in which it is estimated that only 3% of the population read daily newspapers the new ideological doxa had primarily to be transmitted orally and visually. [Raymond William, 1989, p. 121]

The 1863 Hoxton programme was clearly intended to contribute to this new social project of forging a hardworking, self-improving, loyal, patriotic and ultimately docile, working class. Victorian faith in scientific progress and social improvement, the new imperial mission, and a monarchy worthy of sentimental devotion, were all represented. The programme also exemplifies some of the ways in which ideology typically works through manipulation and deception: the promised demonstration of telegraphic news from the Civil War in America could not actually have taken place since the first transatlantic cable, laid in 1858, was not operative by 1863; the picture which was presented of British triumphs in the Crimean War, or of the exemplary character of the Prince of Wales, were equally "spun". The "entertainment of magical illusions" with which the original programme opens may serve as a controlling metaphor for the whole event. But as Deleuze and Guattari remind us, social control relies upon more than policing and ideological prestidigitation: "Modern power is not at all reducible to the classical alternative "repression or ideology" but implies processes of normalization, modulation, modelling, and information that bear on language, perception, desire, movement, etc. which proceed by way of micro-assemblages." [Deleuze Guatteri, 1987, pp.456-459]. Hoxton Hall must be seen as an experimental crucible for just such an array of micro-assemblages.

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Hoxton Hall survives today as a community centre. Once a temperance hall, it is now run by a Quaker foundation and is still dry. The centre runs art, drama and language classes and a legal advice service, although it can hardly compete with its neighbour, the spanking new and somewhat fortress-like Hackney Community College, nor the new art and leisure enticements of Shoreditch - nor, probably, the video store across the way.

But hidden behind its discrete facade and the drably institutional entrance hall is a secret gem: the original music hall: a well-like room with a high stuccoed ceiling, a narrow horseshoe lined with two ornate cast iron balconies. The stage is a series of platforms rising steeply to the level of the second balcony at the back. Clearly this is not a conventional theatre space for presenting plays: the building's founder James Mortimer would have required a different kind of licence for dramatic presentation - one which would not have allowed him to sell drink on the premises, which was crucial to his project of luring the working classes off the streets and away from their pubs and gin-palaces. The space is in fact clearly part lecture hall, part variety theatre, purpose built for Mortimer's programme of rational entertainments.

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The 1863 programme looks to our eyes distinctly post-modern in its eclectic confusion of information, education and entertainment. Although it thereby embraces the three cognitive realms of modernity, it also serves to alert us to the means by which ideology operates through the deliberate confusion of fact, value and pleasure, cognitive realms which, as Jurgen Habermas argues, it is the proper project of modernity to separate and keep distinct. Habermas refers here to Max Weber, who, in Habermas's words, "characterised cultural modernity as the separation of the substantive reason expressed in religion and metaphysics into three autonomous spheres. They are: science, morality and art." [Habermas, in Foster(ed), 1983, p. 9]

It is one of the projects of postmodernism to question the possibility of divorcing knowledge, pleasure and value, insisting instead that all knowledge is interested. In place of the immanence of a modernist critical philosophy in which the transcendental grounds for each intellectual realm are determined autonomously, a postmodernist method brings the different intellectual realms into a critical relationship with each other, offering a challenge to the ideological barrier once erected between positivism and naturalism on one side and purely formalist ethics and aesthetics on the other. As Habermas argues, "Communication processes need a cultural tradition covering all spheres - cognitive, moral-practical and expressive" to overcome the instrumental reifications of modernity."[11] But it is no less incumbent upon us to exercise vigilance against the complete collapse of these spheres into each other. We need only look at the deliberate confusion of information, education and entertainment, components once assumed to be safely self-contained by those who drew up the original charter of the BBC, in the slippery categories of infotainment and edutainment purveyed on modern television. In this respect the blurring of categories that took place at Hoxton Hall clearly followed the pattern of artful deception identified by James Cook when he describes how Victorian magicians "adopted a distinctly bourgeois form of dress (the tuxedo), stage design (much in the style of a Victorian parlour), and public rhetoric (they referred to their performances as scientific exercises, designed to instruct rather than deceive." [Cook, p.26]. The spheres of science and magic, information and education may remain notionally distinct at Hoxton Hall, but the rhetoric that surrounds suggests a more subtle collapse of categories. The Victorian providers of "rational entertainment" knew precisely what they were doing. James Mortimer's original prospectus makes his main project for Hoxton Hall quite clear. He planned it "with the specific object of affording to the humbler classes an entertainment that shall combine instruction with amusement…to form a nucleus for the regeneration, as it were, of that class of mankind who, even in the present enlightened century have not an idea beyond the pot house bar and ribaldry that appertains thereto." [*Shoreditch Observer*, Nov 7, 1863]

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Music halls developed in the 1840s as a means of organising and commercialising the more informal entertainment which was until that time offered largely in pubs and singing saloons. Musical saloons of this kind became one of the most important locations of urban leisure during the 1830s and 1840s and social reformers were quick to spot the potential offered by such spaces "to combine social enjoyment with wholesome instruction." [Bailey, 1978, p.43]. In 1858 the manager of Wilton's Music Hall, opened a few years before Hoxton, claimed that decrease of drunkenness and breaches of the peace in the East End since the 1840s could be attributed to "nothing else but the establishment of cheap and rational entertainment which these music halls have provided for the working classes of this country" [Honri, 1985, p.27]. And the benefits were not just with regard crime and drunkenness:

"Is not the working man… more beneficially, more properly, and less harmfully employed, when listening to such music and innocent entertainments… than he would be drinking and smoking in some taproom, talking politics until he becomes a Chartist or a rebellious democrat dangerous to society." [Russell,

But of course the entertainments were hardly innocent.

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ILLUSTRATION   INTERIOR OF HOXTON HALL

When Post-Operative Productions were commissioned by Hoxton Hall and the English National Opera Studio to make a new music-theatre piece for Hoxton Hall our first decision was to look at the specificities of this problematic space, a space which resists the illusions of dramatic fiction. Clearly the kind of event which would most suit the space was the kind of event for which the space was built, and the discovery of John Mortimer's original programme provided the pretext for a piece that avoided the arcane rituals of opera, whose 19th-century dramaturgy and naïve aesthetics of expression still inform most contemporary music-theatre.

Offered as Part-One of what will become a two-part event, we selected three items from the original programme: the magic act, the talk on housing and the telegraph demonstration. A number of approaches were considered. One would have been to have invited professionals in the relevant fields to present a talk or act - eg: an architect concerned with issues of contemporary housing; an expert in the field of communications technology; a professional magician. This approach was rejected on the grounds that it would not allow space for imaginative development of form and content. A second option

was to invite a playwright to script the whole piece, and to employ actors to enact the relevant roles. This was also rejected on the grounds that it would risk overdetermining the form and content of the material, erasing the element of genuine "variety" which was inherent in the original programme. The eventual solution was to commission two performance artists and a comedian to make new pieces based on the contents of original programme. Alternative comedian Andrew Bailey presented an act based on the entertainment of magical illusions; performance artist Anthony Howell made a piece in the form of a lecture-demonstration on "healthy moral homes" and performance artist Rebecca French offered a demonstration of new developments in internet sex. The Orpheus Quartet was represented by the electro-acoustic vocal ensemble VOCEM electric voice theatre.

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"an elegantly-fitted and brilliantly-lighted Hall" [*Shoreditch Observer,* **Nov 7, 1863]**

All of the contemporary descriptions of Victorian music halls admire their brilliant illumination. In 1858 Dickens visited the Britannia Theatre in Hoxton Street and noted that it was "magnificently lighted by a firmament of sparkling chandeliers."[Mander, 1996, p.92]. For people used to living in dank and poorly lit dwellings, whose leisure was customarily confined to dingy alehouses or murky gambling dens, the brilliant lighting of the music halls must have added a particular lustre to a night out at the theatre.

But let us cast light on the meaning of so much light. Of the Canterbury, the first music hall to be so designated, a contemporary journalist wrote in 1852 that "The magnificent and brilliantly lighted hall, in which the concert is held, exercises no little influence upon the morals of the audience." [Scott, 1975, p.139] Within these palaces of glitter and dazzle the illusions of ideology did not need to be secured through subterfuge; they were brazenly displayed as spectacle: the conjuror's nothing to hide. The real trick lay in the illusions of the illumination itself, which was turned not upon the performers on stage, but upon the audience. Music halls were spaces in the which the poor of the East End, enticed from their invisibility in back alleys and slums, or from the teeming life of the streets (taxonomised and theorised by Henry Mayhew as "nomadic"), could be contained and exposed to the light of surveillance. Thus Hoxton Hall is part of the general project of nineteenth urbanisation so clearly described by Situationist Guy Debord:

> "After the French Revolution, the efforts of all established powers to increase the means of maintaining order in the streets finally culminates in the suppression of the street…The general movement of isolation, which is the reality of urbanism, must also include a controlled reintegration of workers depending on the need of production and consumption that can be planned. Integration into the system requires that isolated individuals be recaptured and *isolated together*: Factories and halls of culture, tourist resorts and housing developments are expressly

organised to serve this pseudo-community." [Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, Detroit, 1983, section 172]

In England the creation of public spaces was a crucial aspect of the new agenda of the 1840s and 50s to provide recreational spaces in which the working classes might be visible and controllable. Foucault describes a new panoptic architecture "that is no longer built simply to be seen (as with the ostentation of palaces), but to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control - to render visible those who are inside it." [Foucault, 1977, p.172] Such buildings are described by Foucault as like "so many small theatres" for the display of subjects as actors. [Ibid. p, 200]. At the Britannia Theatre Dickens had observed that as a theatre catering almost exclusively for a working class audience it did not have to maintain the usual spatial distinctions of class.

> Here they were not put away in a dark gap in the roof of an immense building…they were in possession of eligible points of view…Instead of being at a great disadvantage in comparison with the mass of the audience, they were here the audience, for whose accommodation the place was made." [Barker, p.35]

If the audience was in possession of eligible points of view they were at the same time, of course, viewable.

But as Foucault and others insist, panopticism is about more than simply surveillance. The spectacular society works to produce subjects through the imposition of an array of disciplinary regimes and "rituals of truth". [Foucault p.194]. At the cheaper "penny dive" music halls in Shoreditch, dark and rowdy,   we learn that police had to be deployed to ensure that order was maintained. At Hoxton Hall (3d, 6d & 9d) no police were required to stand by, and such was the effectiveness of Mortimer's disciplinary format, requiring of his punters a new kind of silent attentiveness, that the newspapers could safely describe the audience at the first night as "crowded and well-conducted" [*The Era*, November 8, 1863].

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We played games in the space for two days and came to realise that the space itself is illusory, capable of alternating between dour lecture hall and illusionistic "box of tricks"; the stage has numerous entrances from doors, stairs and traps which link via concealed passages to the different parts of the stage and to the auditorium and balconies. This organisation of the space is potentially very controlling of the audience, who are placed in an infantalised position with regard to the high stage, but are also denied even this clear and safely insulated position from which to view events which may erupt unexpectedly from different places and in different locations. The metaphor of magic and illusion was therefore extended to the way in which the space was physically deployed by the performers.

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The Orpheus Quartett Union

The Orpheus Quartet is billed as singing choruses and "glees", which were chosen for their suitability to the different items of the programme. Even if the musical component of the Hoxton Hall programme was essentially considered as an item of entertainment rather than instruction Victorian educators could find many justifications for the disciplinary uses of music. Dr Kay Shuttleworth, the government's education Czar in the 1840s, argued that singing was "an important means of forming an industrious, brave, loyal and religious working class." [Bailey, 1979, p.58]

Shuttleworth's faith in the moral effects of singing would have been founded upon the value of participatory music making. This was indeed the basis of the entertainments in the song-and-supper clubs which had preceded music halls. The development of the music hall proper must be see as an aspect of the general trend towards the professionalisation and commercialisation of music in the 19th century. Jacques Attali identifies the relationship between the economic and ideological aspects of this process, whose effect is to "deritualise a social form, repress an activity of the body, specialise its practice, sell it as spectacle, generalise its consumption…" [Attali, 1985, p.5]. Participatory musical activity was to be increasingly relegated to the home as an aspect of domestic leisure for which specific forms of music could be marketed. Amongst these were thousands of formulaic glees and part-songs written by hugely successful composers such as Sir Henry Bishop (Britain's firm musical knight). Attali sees this dual professionalisation and commercialisation of musical activity as part of a progressive silencing of dissident voices: "The monologue of standardized, stereotyped music accompanies and hems in daily life in which in reality no one has the right to speak any more."[Ibid, p.8]

The presentation of what are largely domestic glees at Hoxton Hall in 1863 must be seen as a signifier of "respectability", offered in contrast to the newer forms of musical entertainment being developed in the commercial music-halls. Henry Mayhew informs us that in the 1850s many itinerant glee singers consisted of family groups, and one such complained vigorously to him that the new "character" songs were "now more approved in the concert-rooms than Bishop's". Mayhew's informants, who are proud of their "high musical education", are dismissive of the new character songs, noting that they are often lewd and improper. Used to plying their trade between public concert rooms of dubious repute and the street, often resorting to knocking on the doors of middle class houses, the Orpheus Quartet must have been well contented when Mortimer offered them what seemed like a permanent contract to sing respectable glees at Hoxton Hall.

The glees served as that part of the programme which worked affectively, operating beneath the basic economy of rational positivism and scientism which informs most of the programme to re-enforce its message through a subliminal appeal to the feelings - as in film and TV music. Adorno and Eisler offer a clear analysis of this function of film music as "the medium in which irrationality can be practised rationally" in relation to the positivism of the mechanical film image (or, indeed, Mortimer's magic-lantern slides):

"The function of music in the cinema is one aspect - in an extreme version - of the general function of music under conditions of industrially controlled cultural consumption. Music is supposed to bring out the spontaneous, essentially human element in its listeners and in virtually all human relations." [Theodore Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films*, London, 1994, pp.20-22]

In silent film presentations it was also the function of music to drown the disturbing whirring of the projector:

"There remains the question of why should the sound of the projector have been so unpleasant ? Hardly because of its noisiness but rather because it seemed to belong to that uncanny sphere which anyone who remembers the magic-lantern performances can easily evoke. The grating whirring sound actually had to be "neutralized", "appeased", not merely muted….The experience in question is probably a collective one akin to panic, and it involves the flashlike awareness of being a helpless inarticulate mass given over to the power of a mechanism…This is precisely the consciousness of the one's own mechanization. [Ibid, p.76]

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The Orpheus Quartet were represented by four singers and a sound engineer from VOCEM. Electronic amplification played an important role in creating a soundscape that responded to the whole theatre space, but its use was also foregrounded to problematise the ideological implications of the use of supposedly "neutral" technologies to broadcast and enhance a message. As the performance developed there was progressively greater deployment of amplified sound, leading eventually to a separation of live and amplified sound in which, through the placing of speakers, the singers' voices might appear from any part of the building, dissociated from their physical presence. From an initial function of anodyne background musak the presence of the sound (and the physical presence of the singers too, who roamed all parts of the hall) eventually took over and dominated the space.

The strategies employed were those outlined by Adorno and Eisler in their guidelines for a critical film music in which the relationship of music to image is based on "question and answer, affirmation and negation, appearance and essence" [Adorno and Eisler, p. 70].

The music by Luke Stoneham moved from a position of bland and discrete endorsement of what was presented on stage, via more pointed or oblique commentary and critique, to near hysteria. The intention was to make the audience asses critically the relationship between music and event as they became increasingly aware of, and hopefully uncomfortable with, the rhetorical persuasion at work. In addition, the singers' dynamic use of the space made it difficult for the audience to "position" them securely, literally and figuratively. At times it seemed that the Quartet ventriloquized an "audience" response to events from the auditorium, addressing the performers directly; at other times they positioned themselves as part of the performance; and at others they appeared to be entirely indifferent to the stage performances, pursuing their own agenda..

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"Professor Logrenia, the Royal Conjuror, and Great Ambidexetrous Prestigidateur's Entertainment of Magical Illusions, introducing the wonderful Performing Russian Cat, Learned Canary Birds and White Mice"

The term *prestidigitator* means literally nimble fingered, but its connotations extend to the idea of illusion, imposture, deception…

Magic as deception and illusion may be equated with the workings of both ideology and consumerism. The puzzle of ideology is how the great mass of people are persuaded to support systems which are contrary to their own interests. Marx himself uses the metaphor of the *camera obscura* to depict the way in which ideology works to turn things upside down, representing things as the inverse of what they really are. Like magic, consumerism is also a con trick which persuades people to invest in dreams and illusions which are never fulfilled.

[Magician Sonny Hayes suggests to me that the Russian Cat act may be found in the scene Bulgakov's great satire *The Master and Margerita* when the devil and his familiars, one of which is an enormous cat, force their way onto the stage of a variety theatre to present the best ever magic act. The act concludes with the theatre, and eventually the whole of Moscow, being awash with paper roubles which disintegrate as soon as anyone attempts to pay with them. Whilst we applaud Bulgakov's recognition that it is the Devil's magic that sustains the lottery of wealth, his Russian Cat was, of course, not a Russian Cat in Russia - just a cat.]

I like to imagine that Professor Logrenia must have been the same "street exhibitor of birds and mice" whom Henry Mayhew encountered in Shoreditch 1861, and who did indeed also work with a trained cat and canaries. "I have names for them all. I have Mr and Mrs Caudle, dressed quite in character: they quarrel at times, and that's self-taught with them…. They ride out in a chariot drawn by another bird…Then I have Marshall

Ney in full uniform, and he fires a cannon, to keep up the character. [Mayhew, 1861, Vol.3, pp.219-220].

Here is the perfect metaphor for the control of the animalistic natures of the urban working classes. Mid-century Social Darwinism had encouraged the transfer of observation from the animal kingdom to human society, and Caroline Arscott has demonstrated the way in which Victorian animal paintings at the South London Art Gallery were employed to this end. Referring to egregiously sentimentalised paintings of families of domestic rabbits, Arscott suggests that "At one level these well-behaved and contented rabbits offer a straightforward equivalent to the working class audience that the organisers of the South London Art Gallery wished to see." A cute image bred from acute stakes: "How could this marauding pest with libertine breeding habits and cowardly disposition turn tail to become the object of emotional identification?" Even closer to the concerns of Mortimer, "Rabbit farmers' handbooks of the period are filled with discussion about the most effective and economical means of providing heating and ventilation for the hutches…[Ventilation was an issue of the greatest concern amongst Victorian housing reformers]… All this translates very easily into the terms of the social policy of the interventionist state, or the measures proposed by paternalist philanthropy." [Caroline Arscott "Sentimentality in Victorian Paintings" in Giles Waterfield (ed) *Art for the People: Culture in the Slums of Late Victorian Britain*, Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1994]

With reference to the problematically "cowardly disposition" of the rabbit/working class man, the military apparatus of the street exhibitor's birds cannot pass unnoticed. It subjects the beasts to a very specific kind of disciplinary regime which was also extended to the ordinary working man when the civil defence Volunteer Movement was founded in 1859. The fact that the authorities considered it safe to allow tens of thousands of working class men to carry arms was itself a sign of the post-Chartist times, but the pay-offs were clear. Not only would it make working men "more attached to the government in every way, and less likely ever to promote political agitation". There were also more immediate disciplinary advantages: "It would impart unto the youth of the nation obedience, promptitude and self-respect, and provide a safe and salutary occupation for the increasing hours of leisure at men's disposal." [Cunningham, 1975, pp.28, 2]

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Great Battles of the British Army from Hastings to Inkerman
(including a talk on "Adventures in the Crimean War")

John McGilchrist was a journalist, writer and popular educationalist, the author of exemplary biographies of great Victorians. He was also engaged in political agitation for the Parliamentary representation of "working people and smaller tradesmen", a topic on which he spoke in a meeting at Hoxton Hall. [*Shoreditch Observer*, Nov 21 1863].

McGilchrist's views were typical of the petty-bourgeois radicalism of the period, maintaining a clear distinction between political and social/economic rights ("Social inequality is a natural difference; political inequality is an error and a wrong.") [McGilchrist, 1857, p.313] McGilchrist's electoral rights were also limited to the *respectable* working classes: "There are whole classes of men, amounting to hundreds of thousands in this community possess no kind of fitness. They are incompetent, from extreme ignorance or vicious habits, to the performance of the most ordinary duties of social life."[Ibid. p.291] Like most Victorian reformers McGilchrist made an essential distinction between the feckless and the "deserving" poor, at whom Hoxton Hall was clearly aimed. His battles talk alternated in the Hoxton programme with another entitled "The Story of the Lives of Poor Men who have risen from the ranks", presumably based on his book *Men Who have Made Themselves: whence they started, how they journeyed, what they reached* [London, 1863]. It was a theme that would have chimed well with Samuel Smiles's bestseller *Self Help* of 1859.

McGilchrist's talk on the history of the British Army would have been based on his book *The Military Heroes of England*, also published in 1863. In its positive portrayal of the British Army it conforms to the general agenda of the period to transform the image of an organisation whose credibility had been seriously damaged by the disastrous experience of the Crimean War. The project was both practical and ideological. "Through the Cardwell reforms and success of the Volunteer Movement the army lost its old unpopularity and became a central element in national life. Cults of heroes from both distant and more recent past were assiduously promoted through children's literature, a powerful iconography, and the new education." [MacKenzie, 1986, p3].

Representations of the Crimean War formed a regular item in popular theatrical representations both during the war and after. [See .J.S.Bratton, "Theatre of War: the Crimea on the London Stage, 1854-5" in Bradby (ed) 1980]. In 1857 a panorama of the Battle of Alma was presented at the Bolton Music Hall, accompanied by an address "interspersed with familiar descriptions of Military Tactics, Evolutions, Siege Operations, Gunnery, etc and profusions of interesting anecdotes" [Kift, 1996, p.56]

McGilchrist's history of the British Army is a classic example of Whiggish historiography, a narrative which describes the progress of Britain towards a nationhood based on the struggle for political and economic liberty based on free trade. Its tone is in fact far from militaristic, but what is inescapable is its *Boy's-Own* endorsement of the spirit of "heroism" and sacrifice.

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Original Sensation Story

The Era and the *Shoreditch Observer* elucidate this item, which consisted of "news conveyed in the latest telegrams from America, & the insurrection in Poland", "ventilated between the time the morning papers had been published and that at which they were recounted."

This item conveys the typical Victorian faith in science and technology; the race to be the first to lay key submarine telegraph cables played the same role in national morale as the space race in this century. The economic grounds for this faith were not hard to justify. The telegraph itself had proved to be the "e commerce" miracle of its day, second only to the railway as a source of profit (until its nationalisation in 1869 - the first nationalisation to take place in Britain, proving that the Victorians were very well aware of the relationship of information and power.) Like the railway, the telegraph had also contributed enormously to the development of trade and commerce [Standage, 1998, pp.155-7]. The military grounds for this faith in science and technology had been conclusively proved by the use of the telegraph in the Crimean War.

Demonstrations of new scientific and technological developments were a favourite item of mid-Victorian public entertainment. In 1850 the all-too aptly named *Panoptikon* in Leicester Square presented the following scientific novelties:

> Diving Apparatus, demonstration of Hydrostation [ascentional force of balloons in water], Holme's vacuum coated flask, Aurore Borealis Apparatus, the Thunder House, Manufacture of Pins, Gas Cooking Apparatus, Cork Hats, patent ornamental sewing machine, Euphatine, Exhibition of Pyrography [drawing with fire], the Musical Narrator [machine for recording improvised piano music], Electro-Magnetic Apparatus. [Scott, 1946, p.187]

The facts of science were, of course incontrovertible. Or were they ?

The telegraph was hardly new by 1863. It had been developed extensively throughout Britain in the 1840s, and used for police detection, news reporting and railway timetabling. A 1861 map of the telegraph network of the London District Telegraph Company shows that a telegraph line, which would have been slung across the rooftops, ran from the company's main office in Shoreditch to Dalston along Hoxton Street [Kieve, 1973]. The development of methods of laying submarine cables had allowed direct communication between London and Paris by 1852. In 1858 the first transatlantic cable was laid, an event which was widely celebrated. In a book hastily published in 1858 to capture to the moment, the cable was described as "The greatest event in the present century… It shows that nothing is impossible to man." [Briggs and Maverick, 1858, p.2]

The Hoxton entertainments took place at a crucial moment in the American Civil War between the Battle of Gettysburg in July and Lincoln's Gettysburg address on November 19. But the news conveyed to Hoxton Hall from America raises a puzzle. The first

transatlantic telegraph cable had indeed been laid in August 1858, but it had ceased to work after a month. News of its failure was kept under wraps for as long as possible, leading to speculation that the whole thing had been an elaborate hoax. [Standage, p.81] The second, and permanent cable, was not laid until 1866. How, then, could the latest news have been brought to Hoxton Hall by "the latest telegrams from America" in 1863, as is suggested by *The Era*'s reporter ?   Magic… illusion… con trick ? *The Shoreditch Observer* perhaps explains: it is news that has been "ventilated" since the morning papers; it has not actually been telegraphed from America, but from an office in London.

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Healthy Moral Homes

ILLUSTRATION   HEALTHY MORAL HOMES

James Mortimer's contribution to the programme for which he built Hoxton Hall was a talk entitled "HOMES of the PEOPLE: As they are and as they might be". In this talk Mortimer would have presented plans and a model for his ""improved dwelling for the industrious classes", show-house examples of which had already been erected near New Cross station in South London. Mortimer's plans and theoretical prospectus have survived what were described as his "suburban cottage residences", which were demolished in the 1960s. Mortimer's prospectus is entitled "Healthy Moral Homes for the Industrious Classes", for apart from providing ventilation and sanitation Mortimer is perhaps even more concerned to provide for the moral well-being of his tenants. "There are but few must have observed the heart-rending sufferings experienced, and immoralities practised, when no separation of the sexes, much less families in carried out, and this constitutes the great social want even of the more genteel portion of society."

Mortimer's housing project encapsulates a number of Victorian ideas on issues of housing and poverty.

In 1863 St Leonard's Workhouse at the top of Hoxton Street was rebuilt to house 1,200 inmates; those who were fit worked in a stone-breakers yard alongside Hoxton Hall. [Mander, 1996, p.52]. The working classes who were not poor enough for the workhouse were housed in appalling conditions provided almost entirely by private landlords. Overcrowding was normal, with seven or eight families living in one house, and insanitary conditions contributed to high mortality rates. Public concern about housing was initially roused by fears concerning public health - the slums bred and transmitted illness and disease from which even the ruling classes in the West End were not immune. The 1848 and 1875 Public Health Acts gave local councils the power to inspect and to regulate housing standards, and the 1868 Artisans and Labourers Dwelling Act gave local authorities powers to clear slums. But until the formation of the London Country Council

in the 1890s local boroughs lacked the power to provide public housing, and alternative housing was provided by private bodies such as The Society for Improving the Conditions of the Labouring Classes (1844) or The General Society for Improving the Dwellings of the Working Classes (1852), whose barrack-like but solidly built tenements continue to house the industrious poor of the capital.

Aside from health, the other issue which concerned Victorian housing reformers was morality - the possibility of incest occurring in overcrowded housing conditions, which is alluded to by Mortimer in his notice. The 1865 Sir John Simon report on public health and housing discretely raised this issue, which was directly addressed in a Royal Commission of 1884/5, leading to the 1890 Housing of the Working Classes Acts.

The majority of schemes for housing the working classes assumed high density inner-city tenements as the best solution. However, by the 1850s there were a number of proposals being made for the working classes to be housed in the suburbs, made possible by improved rail links to the city, and government legislation requiring railway companies to provide cheap commuter fares for the working classes. Mortimer's scheme makes reference to the nearness of his housing to New Cross Station, linking to Shoreditch in 15 minutes. This also had the advantage of removing the working classes outside the city, where they were less troublesome, and where eventually suburbanisation blunted their radicalism and diluted their voting power.

There is a clear correlation between Mortimer's domestic and cultural architecture: the healthy moral dwellings for the poor and the well-lit spaces of Hoxton Hall offering, in the words of his opening address, "intellectual, healthful and innocent amusement for the masses". Edwin Chadwick, the public-health Czar of mid-Victorian Britain, certainly saw social improvements as part of general panoptic system whose aegis spread across all aspects of the life of the working classes, [Donajgrowzki (ed), 1977, p.71] and whose wider benefits had been clearly advertised by his mentor Jeremy Bentham: "Morals reformed - health preserved - industry invigorated - instruction diffused - public burthens lightened" [Foucault, p. 207]

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The Prince of Wales Tour in the East

This item was a presentation of the young Prince of Wales's greatly publicised tour to the Holy Land in 1862. Like other items in the Hoxton Hall programme this was an item that was offered at other entertainment venues of the period. In October 1863 *The Era* had announced Talbin's diorama of the Holy Land, also illustrating the Prince of Wales's Tour in the East, would be shown at the Egyptian Music Hall, accompanied by a descriptive lecture. [*The Era*, October 25 1863]

The Victorians invented the modern image of the monarchy as an "ideal" bourgeois family devoted to duty and service. The 1860s were the crucial transitional period in this transformation. After the death of Prince Albert in 1861 Queen Victoria's removal from public life (in 1863 the queen refused to open Parliament) led initially to a period of deep unpopularity, giving rise to the most significant republican movement in post Cromwellian Britain [Cannadine, in Hobsbawm, 1983, p.111]. But this diminution of the queen's involvement in political life eventually cleared the way for a more ceremonial role; as the queen abandoned power she gained in respect.

But during the 1860s the absence of the queen from public life meant that public attention was focused on the young Prince of Wales. The spin doctors had a task on their hands, however, for the Prince of Wales was a notorious *bon viveur* and womaniser who fully enjoyed the aristocratic pleasures offered by his status. "The Prince of Wales, ensnared successively in the Mordaunt Scandal and the Aylsford Case, dammingly described by Bagehot as an "unemployed youth", was hardly able to add any lustre to this dowdy and unpopular crown." writes David Cannadine [Hobsbawm, 1983, p.110]. The Prince's visit to the Holy Land, represented in the contemporary press as a spiritual pilgrimage, was crucial in the repackaging of his image, along with his wedding to the Danish Princess Alexandra in 1863 - celebrated in a song specially composed for the occasion, God Bless the Prince of Wales, sung by the Orpheus Quartet as an introduction to the slide show of the prince's tour.

The promotion of a new image of monarchy was seen as an essential component in the binding of working class sentiment to the state. Mayhew was shocked by a young crippled Bird Seller who, on being questioned about his knowledge of the queen, replied: "It's nothing to do with me who's king or queen, it can never have anything to do with me." [Mayhew, 1861, vol 2, pp.66-9]. He was right, if course; but Victorian social and political theorists soon came to realise that it was important that it *should* matter.

<p style="text-align:center">********</p>

The Comic Adventures of a Tiger and a Tub

Storytelling often took the place of dramatic representation in those venues like Hoxton Hall which had a license for music and variety rather than for theatre.

This prohibition would probably not have troubled Mortimer. The purveyors of rational entertainment, many of whom were nonconformists, were typically suspicious of theatre and theatricality. As historian Alison Byerly suggets: "Victorian antitheatricalism found a perfect outlet in reading performances, which represented a domestication of theater, a compromise for people who wished to be entertained but were suspicious of overt theatricality." [See Alison Byerly, "From Schoolroom to Stage: Reading Aloud and the

Domestication of Victorian Theatre" in Scott and Fletcher, 1990, p.126] The best known of such reading performers was, of course, Charles Dickens.

Byerly also tells us that "The most popular Victorian readers…presented themselves as lecturers (rather than actors) in order to emphasise the domestic and educational connotations of reading aloud" [ibid]. The form of the lecture is ideologically crucial; its performativity consists in the concealment of performativity, as Erving Goffman suggested in an elegantly staged performance of a lecture: "the controlling intent being to generate calmly considered understanding, not merely entertainment, emotional impact or immediate action" ["The Lecture" in Forms of Talk, Oxford, 1981. P.165] The medium is, in effect, the message, for "Every lecturer, merely be presuming to lecture before an audience, is a functionary of the cognitive establishment". [Ibid p.195]. Unlike the other components of the programme, Mr Seppings and his comic tale have vanished without trace, leaving only the residue of cultural form.

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The disappearance of Mortimer's s Hoxton programme from the listings magazines shortly after the hall opened suggests that Mortimer's project may have soon collapsed. The hall is recorded as the home of the Hoxton Hall Academy of Dancing in December 1863, and in August 1864 it hosted "The North London Working Classes Exhibition". By 1866 the Hall had a new proprietor offering more familiar music-hall fare: character songs, comic acts, sketches and dance acts.

Elsewhere rational reformers had already learned that even with the introduction of music as an element of entertainment into educational programmes, "the working classes did not appreciate such a cheap and rational amusement as that." [Golby and Purdue, p.109]. The evidence of Mortimer's project suggests that indeed even the more socially aspirant working classes who attended Hoxton Hall sought less didactic forms of amusement and recreation. By the end of the Victorian era the cognitive spheres of modernity had fully asserted their autonomy. The press, the universal education movement and the entertainment industries had carved out their own social and economic domains, and had learned at the same time how to embed ideological and disciplinary strategies so effectively that they passed unnoticed. According to the now well-known thesis of historian Gareth Stedman-Jones, by the end of the Victorian era music halls had become one of the main vehicles for the dissemination of conservative ideologies of patriotic nationalism and contentment with one's lot.

Throughout our rehearsals the sorry saga of the Dome rumbled away in the background. With its replication of the cognitive spheres of Mortimer's Hoxton Hall programme (Science Zone, Spiritual Zone…), unsure whether to be worthy or tacky, to offer education or entertainment, the Dome could surely have learned from the Mortimer's failure.

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