

# Huntly Carter, the ‘First Workers’ Theatre Movement’, and British Modernism

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**Abstract:**

This essay recovers the history of the early phase of the Workers’ Theatre Movement (WTM) in Britain (1926–28). In 1928, the Hackney People’s Players took over the organisation of the WTM, and most discussions of workers’ theatre focus on this later, more celebrated, phase. This has had the effect of obscuring important connections between workers’ theatre and the theatre practitioners, artists, composers, and critics associated with early modernism. In its early years the WTM aimed to use experimental drama as an agitational tool, and committee members included Aleksandr Bakshy, Huntly Carter, Edith Craig, Eden and Cedar Paul, and Christina Walshe. The fullest account of this significant moment in the history of the British theatre is found in the writings of Huntly Carter. Since the October Revolution of 1917, Carter’s attention had been caught by the experimental theatres of the Soviet Union, which seemed to share his commitment to social transformation through art. This essay provides a detailed account of the development of the WTM’s ideas and activities and argues that the first WTM should be remembered as an ambitious, if abortive, British avant-garde.

**Keywords:** Huntly Carter, Workers’ Theatre Movement, Hackney People’s Players

What do we know of the ‘first Workers’ Theatre Movement’ in Britain? Raphael Samuel’s account in *Theatres of the Left* tells us that it existed from 1926 to 1928, that it was born of the General Strike, that

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it 'proclaimed itself modernist', and that its 'presiding spirits' were 'upper-middle class Bohemians'.<sup>1</sup> In 1928, the Hackney People's Players took over the organisation of the Workers' Theatre Movement (WTM) from those bohemian spirits, and most discussions of workers' theatre in Britain focus on this later, more celebrated, phase.<sup>2</sup> Almost all accounts view the first WTM as a 'false start', to quote Ian Saville.<sup>3</sup> There's certainly justification for this view from the perspective of the history of the WTM: after 1928 it became more successful, in terms of becoming more widespread and having a greater impact. But the criticisms of the first WTM are, as Morag Shiach pointed out in a penetrating analysis of Samuel's account just after its publication, framed to support his 'claim for sudden rupture, and the theoretical and political primacy and purity of the WTM', which 'cannot be maintained, even in terms of the evidence he himself produces in *Theatres of the Left*'.<sup>4</sup> Samuel's account—rich, important, and deeply researched as it is—nevertheless conflates stages of the WTM, confuses the positions of different critics and practitioners, and, in particular, fails to distinguish between ideas and practice. Its conflation is routinely repeated in standard histories.

This essay takes a different approach. It views the first WTM not as a prelude to a later, more successful version, but as an entity with its own significance, both for theatre history and the history of modernism and the avant-garde. The prevailing critical decision to neglect the two years of the first WTM has had the effect of obscuring important connections between workers' theatre and the theatre practitioners, artists, composers, and critics associated of early modernism. Historians of the workers' theatre movement and of labour history have understandably focused on the movement's relation to left-wing and popular, rather than modernist, culture and, conversely, historians of modernism do not discuss the WTM (the work of Claire Warden an exception here), even when their focus is on some of its protagonists.<sup>5</sup>

The main part of this essay recovers the history of the first WTM, focusing primarily on discussions in the *Sunday Worker*, the locus of its initial constitution. The aim here is to provide an account of the development of the ideas and activities of the organisation that named itself the 'Workers' Theatre Movement' in 1926, and to ascertain its relation to the extant theatre groups whose work was sometimes discussed in the newspaper. The last section examines the connections and tensions between the early modernist aesthetics of the first WTM's organisers and their later participation in workers' theatre. The fullest account of this significant moment in the history of the British

avant-garde is found in the writings of Huntly Carter. Carter's column for the *Sunday Worker* was a key resource in Samuel's and Saville's studies of the first WTM, but its arguments have not been studied in detail and, indeed, tend to be quoted as suggesting more uniformity in the movement than was the case.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Founding of the Workers' Theatre Movement**

First, it's necessary to return to the moment of the WTM's founding, in order to establish how the first WTM was founded, and by whom. On 25 July 1926, the *Sunday Worker's* regular 'Workers and the Theatre' column consisted of Christina Walshe's announcement that, 'in response to a growing feeling among Worker players, musicians, and artists and an actual demand from working-class bodies for a real move in the direction of the Workers' theatre, a committee has been formed which has taken the name of the Workers' Theatre Group'. Walshe continued:

Its object is to stimulate the growth of theatrical, musical, and literary groups among working class societies already in existence, with the direct aim to give them assistance and advice, and at the same time encourage them to develop their own local ideas and talents.

It is widely felt by militant Workers that art is of great value to the Workers **as a medium of propaganda, and it is this side of art more than the recreational side that will be aimed at.** Roughly, the scheme is this: (1) To get Workers in local groups to form their own committees and to get them to start right away by affiliating to the Central Committee (the charge for affiliation will be 6d per head per annum). (2) To draw up skeleton programmes which can be used by any local group with topical and local modifications. (3) To supply helpers who will give expert advice and assistance to any affiliated group on demand. (4) To promote the production of Workers' revues, in which topical events of great importance to the Workers may be dramatized satirically.

Among the members of this committee are the following: Huntly Carter, Rutland Boughton, Frank Brangwyn, Eden and Cedar Paul, Havelock Ellis, Wm. Paul, Joseph Southall, and many others.

The Workers' Theatre Group know that the Labour Movement can supply dramatic, musical, and artistic talent for the production of plays, revues, concerts, operas, and exhibitions. We appeal to trade councils, Co-op. guilds, Labour Party and I.L.P. branches, Communist Party locals, &c., to get in touch with Christina Walshe, 6 Coleherne Road, S.W.<sup>7</sup>

Walshe publicised the group to readers of the *Woman Worker* the following month, now referring to it as 'The Workers' Theatre Movement', and explaining that it was in fact an organisation, renamed, that she had announced in the previous issue of the same paper. 'A workers' theatre combines all arts in one', she began. 'That is why the Council for Proletarian Art has decided to concentrate on the theatre to begin with and also to alter its name to the Workers' Theatre Movement'. She provided an account of its plans similar to that published in the *Sunday Worker*, though by now one of the 'skeleton programmes', which 'will be called a Workers' Revue or Living Newspaper', was already in preparation and would 'soon be ready to send out to all groups who wish to affiliate'. To the names of committee members listed in the *Sunday Worker* were added those of Alexander Bakshy, Edith Craig, and John Goss.<sup>8</sup>

On the same page of the *Sunday Worker* that carried Walshe's first announcement of the WTM was a small advertisement for a performance. Under the heading 'Workers' Theatre' was the notice:

Upton Sinclair's 'Singing Jailbirds' will be performed to-morrow evening at 8 at the Battersea Town Hall.

The performance will be held under the joint auspices of the Plebs League, SUNDAY WORKER, and the I.W.C.P.A. [*sic*]. Proceeds to assist victims of political prisoners.

J.F. Horrabin will appear as Red Adams and Wm. Paul will sing groups of songs.

Ellen Wilkinson, M.P., will take the chair.<sup>9</sup>

Taking place just one day after the announcement of the WTM's foundation and advertising the *Sunday Worker's* involvement (including the contribution of its editor, William Paul), this performance is justifiably cited as the movement's first. But the common critical emphasis on this as a performance *by* the WTM is misleading. It derives from quotations of Samuel's brief reference in *Theatres of the Left* to 'Singing Jailbirds, the WTM's first production', which neglect or misinterpret his more detailed (though not quite accurate) description a few pages earlier of the series of performances in the summer of 1926 organised by the Plebs League and the closely associated Central Labour College.<sup>10</sup> On 30 June, the League had held a dramatic reading of the play in the Small Memorial Hall on Farringdon Street, with leading roles played by the editor of the League's magazine, J.F. (Frank) Horrabin, and his wife Winifred Horrabin. The Horrabins reprised their roles in a further performance at a garden party for the London Division of the Labour College in the College grounds at 334

Kew Road on 4 July, before the performance on 26 July at Battersea Town Hall, in collaboration with the WTM and the International Class War Prisoners' Aid (ICWPA).<sup>11</sup> The play was performed again on 29 July by the St Pancras Women's Committee at the Memorial Hall on Hawley Road, Camden (with no WTM affiliation, though the performance was advertised below Walshe's announcement of its formation in the *Sunday Worker*), and in October by a group in Lewisham (which described itself as the first group of the WTM).<sup>12</sup> In this context, it is clear that the performance was primarily a product of the Plebs League. While the announcement of the *Sunday Worker's* involvement might suggest that the performance was a 'joint initiative of the *Sunday Worker* [...] and the Central Labour College' from which the WTM 'seems to have come about', to use Samuel's words, in fact there is little evidence that the WTM was involved beyond attaching its name to an already organised event.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, it was not until 19 September that the *Sunday Worker* announced 'the first demonstration of the Workers' Theatre Movement', which would be held in St. George's Town Hall in Stepney on 6 October, with the composer Rutland Boughton, the novelist and critic Monica Ewer, and the artist Archie Ziegler speaking, and the trade unionist Tom Mann in the chair.<sup>14</sup> Until 1927, reviews of workers' theatre in the *Sunday Worker* are rarely explicit about affiliation to the WTM. This reminds us that the first stage of the entity called the Workers' Theatre Movement was, as Walshe emphasised in her initial announcement, an advisory committee, rather than a company of actors. But what was the nature of their advice?

While there is no record of what Boughton, Ewer, and Ziegler said on 6 October, the aims of the movement had been stated in a manifesto reported in the *Sunday Worker* three days before (Figure 1). The article in full reads:

The Workers' Theatre Movement has arisen in response to the need for real dramatic expression among the Workers, says the manifesto.

The plays already in existence do not express the real feelings of the Workers. Therefore the Workers must write and act their own plays. These plays must be very simple, so that they can be performed in any trades union room or Labour hall without trouble or expense.

They must have definite propaganda value, using: –

- (a) Class war as central theme.
- (b) Incidents of strikes, lockouts, blacklegging, fascism, &c.
- (c) Criticising leaders' attitudes, policy of government.

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- (d) Experiences of revolutionary work, converting work-mates, &c.
- (e) Problems of women, domestic life, factory life, birth control.
- (f) Children's problems, children versus parents, education, feeding, &c.

Plays can take the form of satirical comedy, farce, revue, tragedy, and group speaking.

In the main these plays will be a spontaneous expression of feelings common to all class-conscious Workers, and all are capable of taking part in some way or another. They can be written co-operatively if necessary.

Future developments of the Workers' Theatre Movement will be concerned with the other arts, music, literature, painting, and graphic art.

Those desirous of joining the Workers' Theatre Movement should get in touch with comrades at their various organisations, Trade Union branches, &c., and as far as possible affiliate as groups rather than as individual members.

Plays can be written collectively as well as individually. When written they should be submitted to the central advisory committee for criticism and approval.

The advisory committee includes Huntly Carter, Monica Ewer, Edith Craig, W. Paul, Havelock Ellis, Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, Archie Ziegler, C. Walshe, Beth Turner, Rutland Boughton, Cedar Paul.

For membership apply to C. Walshe, general secretary, temporary headquarters, 6 Coleherne Road, S.W.10.<sup>15</sup>

The ideas expressed in this manifesto derived primarily from one contributor to the *Sunday Worker*: Huntly Carter. This is not to say that there was no other discussion of theatre in the newspaper. It had a regular column of theatre reviews, first written by 'Macheath', and later by Charles Ashleigh and Elinor Dale.<sup>16</sup> Rutland Boughton, Walshe's former partner, was an intermittent music columnist, though in fact he also wrote about workers' art in general and theatre more specifically. Walshe herself, a costume and stage designer, had begun as a contributor to what was effectively the paper's 'women's page', though she also co-ordinated the *Sunday Worker's* May Day celebrations, including a Workers' Pageant directed by Boughton.<sup>17</sup> The tone and approach of all these contributions was quite different from Carter's 'Workers and the Theatre' columns, forty-six of which were published between 15 March 1925, when the newspaper began, and 3 July 1927.

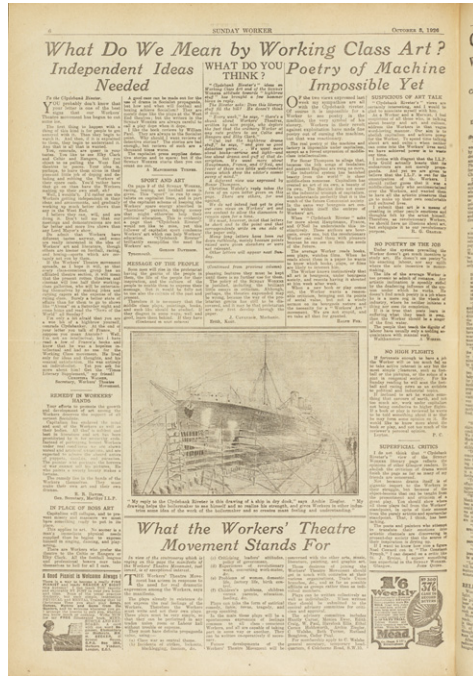


Fig. 1. *Sunday Worker*, 3 October 1926, p. 6, including the Workers' Theatre Movement 'manifesto'.

### The *Sunday Worker*: Advice and Debate

I now want to turn to Carter's columns, in order to clarify the relationship between Carter's ideas and those of his fellow *Sunday Worker* contributors—and, in turn, to establish how far Carter can be identified with the first WTM, as founded by Christina Walshe. Though the WTM manifesto demonstrates that, by 6 October 1926, the WTM was drawing substantially on Carter's arguments, considerable diversity of opinion was played out in the *Sunday Worker*'s pages, both before and after the manifesto's publication.

Carter had been introduced to the *Sunday Worker*'s readership with the editorial statement: 'No one has a wider knowledge of the world's theatre than Huntly Carter, who states a new viewpoint regarding the drama'. The column itself opened with Carter stating a practical goal: 'The aim of these weekly notes is a unique one. It will be, as far as I know, the first systematic attempt to awaken the theatrical consciousness of the workers in England and to convert them to a full recognition of the great importance of the theatre to the Labour

movement'.<sup>18</sup> In striking distinction to his fellow arts contributors, Carter argued not only for the immediate need, but also the immediate viability of a workers' theatre. While both Boughton and Macheath looked forward to the establishment of a workers' theatre, both saw it as a dream of the future, rather than an achievement of the present: 'The life of the Workers will be portrayed in the theatre one day; but that will be when the Workers have wiped out West Ends'.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, Carter's columns were based on the premise that 'to create a class-conscious drama is the real and immediate task of the Worker-playwrights'.<sup>20</sup>

The WTM manifesto focuses primarily on the need for workers to produce their own plays. The paucity of appropriate plays for workers' theatre groups had long been acknowledged, and by the time the manifesto was published in October 1926 Ashleigh, Walshe, and Barrett Robertson, among others, were all calling for plays by worker playwrights.<sup>21</sup> But they had been surprisingly slow to suggest that workers might create their own plays based on their own experiences. Macheath, reviewing George Kelly's *The Torchbearers*, suggested that this 'footling play' about bourgeois amateur actors could almost become propaganda if revised by 'someone with a proletarian point of view': his suggestion was, 'won't Miles Malleon or somebody give us a play about them?'.<sup>22</sup> Walshe's solution was: 'why not start by dramatizing parts of Morris's "News from Nowhere"?'<sup>23</sup> Carter, from the beginning of his series, insisted that the only viable plays were those produced by workers themselves.<sup>24</sup> 'It is axiomatic that there are no plays in this country which are suitable for Workers', he wrote in May 1925, 'the Worker's plays are a part of the Workers themselves, spun out of themselves like the spider spins a web'.<sup>25</sup> Even the playwrights lauded by the socialist press and frequently praised by his fellow contributors (Karel Čapek, Georg Kaiser, Eugene O'Neill, Upton Sinclair, and Ernst Toller) were criticized by Carter for 'cloudy symbolism', 'ignorance and superstition of the masses', 'prejudice against machinery', and 'impossible stage technique and dialogue'.<sup>26</sup> Miles Malleon was 'in the thick of the middle-class manner', according to Carter, and George Bernard Shaw dismissed for getting 'his Fabian tracts and sermons (like "St Joan") across the footlights', only because 'the technique and representation of such plays are middle-class'.<sup>27</sup> Two weeks after the latter comments, *Saint Joan* was the subject of a laudatory column by Macheath.<sup>28</sup> Even Sean O'Casey, the playwright praised most highly by Carter, was criticised for using 'the traditional middle-class technique' in *Juno and the Paycock*.<sup>29</sup>

Walshe's suggestion of dramatizing *News from Nowhere* appeared in the few paragraphs that constituted her first comment on theatre in

the *Sunday Worker*, on 21 June 1925. It was her answer to the question she thought Carter's columns raised. 'Mr. Huntly Carter seems the only man of the theatre who has grasped the strength of the weapon and wishes to put the weapon into the right hands', she began, 'So long as the theatre and cinema, which are the most educational influences in modern society, are in the hands of capitalism, the struggle of the proletariat is too heavily weighted. Once get possession of this armoury and progress is certain. But how to do it?'.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps motivated by the need to rebut Walshe's answer that the solution lay in adapting classic socialist utopias, Carter's next column provided practical instruction for constructing plays. On 28 June he outlined how to convert the 'vivid little story', 'A Day in the Life of a Building Trade Worker' by A.R.S.: 'nearly all action', minimal scenery ('scaffolding with just a suggestion of a roof'), involvement of the audience ('many of them go on stage and form the crowd'), and a final 'discussion of the moral, and the proposed method of removing the cause of strife and injustice in which all could join'.<sup>31</sup> A series of three columns the following year recounted Carter's visits to provincial dramatic groups, and his appeal that they cease performing 'up-to-date society plays' and instead base their plays on the experiences of their blacksmith, their miners, and their engineers. The lives of working people, he argued, were inherently dramatic, structured as they were by the 'great struggle between Labour and Capital'.<sup>32</sup>

Like the author(s) of the manifesto, Carter saw the workers' theatre as propagandist.<sup>33</sup> In fact, Carter argued, theatre produced by workers would be *essentially* propagandist, because it would authentically express their views. 'Workers want plays [...] that will enable them to let off steam about the men and system that are trying to crush them, and will tell people the way they want to develop, and will give them a chance to talk and act as they do in real life. Workers want to talk with their limbs not with their lips'.<sup>34</sup> Aspects of the manifesto echo this view: it begins by justifying the WTM as fulfilling a need for a theatre that will 'express the real feelings of the Workers', and states that its plays will be, 'in the main', 'a spontaneous expression of feelings common to all class-conscious Workers'. But the manifesto's requirement that plays, when written, 'should be submitted to the central advisory committee for criticism and approval' is notably in tension with the idea of the play as spontaneous expression.<sup>35</sup> And, in fact, even the assumption that a play will be 'written' largely contradicts the recommendations of Carter's columns. He consistently contrasts contemporary theatre's love of 'speeches a mile long like the one in "Man and Superman"' with a theatre based on physical expression, a

theatre of limbs, not lips. Accordingly, the priority the WTM placed on obtaining a set of plays and 'skeleton programmes' that could be shared across worker's theatre groups was not shared by Carter. The play, for Carter, was just a 'frame or scenario': 'what comes first in the W.T.' is, Carter asserts, 'acting'.<sup>36</sup>

Raphael Samuel describes Carter as 'the ideologue of the movement in its earlier phase', and his description of the WTM's aesthetic approach is almost entirely derived from quotations from Carter's columns.<sup>37</sup> But though Carter was influential in the workers' theatre and the Workers' Theatre Movement, aligning him so closely with the WTM as it was first realised by Walshe is less straightforward. His belief that 'the Worker-playwright must start with the rule that there are no fixed rules' and that 'the Workers of the world are equally fitted by nature to express themselves dramatically'<sup>38</sup> is at odds with the idea of a central advisory group of theatrical professionals and its 'helpers who will give expert advice and assistance to any affiliated group on demand', let alone 'an instruction circular which will suggest detailed lines along which to work'.<sup>39</sup> His aversion to this kind of centralized advice is apparent over a year before the WTM's founding in July 1926. On 22 March 1925, Rutland Boughton had used his second 'Music and the Workers' column to suggest starting 'Sunday Worker Clubs [...] for the enjoyment of music and drama', an unrealised idea that was, however, clearly the genesis of the WTM – and its predecessor, the Council for Proletarian Art – in the form established by Walshe.<sup>40</sup> Boughton proposed that each meeting would consist of two parts, 'first, the special study of some dramatic or musical form with such help as we can get from specialists and professional friends, and, second, the performance of music and dramatic pieces by members of the club'. The clubs would be affiliated to the *Sunday Worker* and the newspaper's editorial board would form a 'council of professional artists as advisers and workers in the same connection – men and women of experience who could visit the various clubs to help them if wanted with their various productions'. The council would only be needed until club members developing their own organisations and expressing their own ideas, and there was no suggestion that this model would be imposed: 'these are only suggestions; and none of them may be exactly what you want', wrote Boughton. 'But if you want *anything* of the sort make your will known to the Editors and we'll get a move on'.<sup>41</sup>

Boughton had prefaced his outline of the Sunday Worker Clubs by remarking that, 'if Mr. Huntly Carter will help, the idea will more effectively come into being, because he has seen something of the

sort on the go in Russia'.<sup>42</sup> Though Carter's eventual response three weeks later described Boughton's proposal as 'excellent', his column suggested a less centralized and hierarchical alternative, based on a Soviet model: an initial congress of representatives from labour organisations with an interest in workers' theatre, at which would be delivered an address 'by someone who has definite proposals to make regarding a start', to be followed by 'a discussion of general principles, of ways and means, a review of definite local concrete work, and reports of work actually being done elsewhere'. The points discussed at the congress would be communicated to local workers by their representatives at 'small and informal' conferences, tailored to their 'special theatrical needs'.<sup>43</sup>

Not only did Carter not take up Boughton's invitation to found Sunday Worker Clubs, he also resisted three requests to take the lead in the workers' theatre movement. Two came from Christina Walshe. The first, already cited, was in her column of 21 June 1925 ('Mr. Huntly Carter seems the only man of the theatre who has grasped the strength of the weapon and wishes to put the weapon into the right hands [. . .]. But how to do it?'), and the second, more direct, took the form of a letter to the editor on 27 September 1925.<sup>44</sup> Her letter began, 'The Workers' Theatre! That is what we want! And when are we going to get it? I want to ask Comrade Huntly Carter what he is doing about it? *How is it to come?*'. Actors could be found, she suggested, among unemployed workers, if only an 'organiser' could step in. 'It is work fit for the greatest man in the world of the theatre, and Huntly Carter is one of the men to do it. But is he doing it? Anxiously watching his weekly articles in the *Sunday Worker* for signs of actual birth I have been disappointed [. . .]. Begin from the bottom, Comrade Huntly Carter, and start a theatre of the unemployed'.<sup>45</sup> The third came on 27 June 1926 from Arthur MacManus, the former chairman of the Communist Party of Great Britain, who credited Carter's articles with contributing to the 'rising feeling among the rank and file for a Workers' Theatre', agreed with Carter that need had become urgent, and encouraged him 'to proceed with his efforts' in its organisation. Carter did not reply to either Walshe or MacManus, though by the summer of 1926 he appears to have seen more of a role for a central organising body, though formed by representatives of local workers' groups, rather than a body of experts: 'Workers' theatrical activities could be started at once in each industrial locality, in factories, workshops, clubs (especially athletic), schools, &c. Each local group of activities to be centralized in a single body called the Workers' Council of Theatrical Action, and to be represented on a larger body in town and in city, till a central

controlling body is realized that shall be responsible for the whole of the Workers' theatrical organization'.<sup>46</sup> The 'council of professional artists' described in Boughton's plans for Sunday Worker Clubs has become a 'Workers' Council' in Carter's outline; both perhaps stand behind Walshe's announcement of the Council for Proletarian Art the following month.<sup>47</sup>

The interest in a centrally-organised workers' theatre movement in the summer of 1926 was energized by the recent experience of the General Strike, the event usually cited as the impetus for the WTM's formation. Carter, certainly, argued from June onwards that a well-organised workers' theatre could have enabled strikers to communicate their aims and bypass anti-strike media organisations; like many, he believed the strike had established a new sense of power and unity in the labour movement.<sup>48</sup> An even more immediate impetus was provided by the workers' theatre of the Woolwich Trades Council, who wrote to the *Sunday Worker* to announce that they had actors, stages, and the support of the local trades unions, but needed the *Sunday Worker* to 'solve the problem of the distribution and exchange of proletarian plays and players'.<sup>49</sup> It was at this moment that Walshe, perhaps encouraged by the support for her organisation of the May Day pageant, announced the formation of the Council for Proletarian Art and, subsequently, the Workers' Theatre Movement.

### **The Example of Soviet Theatre**

When Boughton called on Carter to organise a workers' theatre movement, he cited Carter's first-hand experience of workers' theatres in Soviet Russia as the reason. Carter had visited Russia four times to study its theatre by the time he began writing for the *Sunday Worker*. Three visits had taken place since the 1917 revolutions, and his archive at the University of Notre Dame show that he was at this time in correspondence with leading figures in Soviet theatre, including Vsevolod Meyerhold, Alexander Tairov and his colleagues at the Kamerny Theatre, Alexis Granowsky, the founder of the Jewish Theatre, Henrietta Pascar, the founder of the Children's Theatre in Moscow, and Boris Yuzhanin, the founder of the Blue Blouse agit-prop group.<sup>50</sup> Carter's pioneering book, *The New Theatre and Cinema of Soviet Russia*, was published in the summer of 1924, and *The New Spirit in the European Theatre*, which contained sections on Russia, was published in the autumn of 1925. By 1928 Carter estimated that he had written over 170 articles about the Soviet Union.<sup>51</sup> Though he knew only a little Russian and communicated with his contacts either in English or

with substantial help from translators and interpreters, no other critic during this period combined his knowledge of European theatre with recent, direct knowledge of Soviet Russian culture.<sup>52</sup>

As we have seen, Carter presented post-revolutionary Russian theatre as a model for the foundation and organisation of workers' theatre in Britain. Referencing the conferences of popular theatre that began in 1919, Carter describes the new theatre as based on knowledge created and exchanged among workers, rather than disseminated and approved by professional 'experts'.<sup>53</sup> But Russian theatre not only provided a model of organisation; it also provided examples of new forms of performance. For example, as Gabriela Minden discusses in her essay in this issue, Carter points towards the Ballets Russes' move towards 'plotless' ballets, such as *Le Train bleu* (1924), where the 'acrobatic dances are a fresh move in the direction of free and natural expressive action'.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, his descriptions of acting informed by the forms and rhythms of machines are based on Vsevolod Meyerhold's biomechanics,<sup>55</sup> which Carter had described in *The New Theatre and Cinema of Soviet Russia* as applying the idea of the 'worker as a master of the machine' and 'society as a great industrial machine, of which each individual is a functional part' to actor training. In place of the 'emotional theory of acting', he explained, 'the new problem of the theatre is how to get this engine in full motion, with all its parts—muscles, sinews, tendons, representing flexible piston rods, cylinders, etc.—working at their full capacity' (Figure 2).<sup>56</sup> However, Carter's principal source of recommendations for the British workers' theatre was not derived from Russian companies in exile, such as the Ballets Russes, nor its professional theatres, such as Meyerhold's, but from the multitude of amateur theatres that sprang up in Soviet Russia in the aftermath of the October revolution: a study from 1930 recorded that by the late nineteen twenties trades unions were supporting a national network of 12,000 amateur groups created by soldiers, workers, peasants, students, and the unemployed.<sup>57</sup> *The New Theatre and Cinema of Soviet Russia* devoted chapters to 'The Proletcult Theatre', 'The Club and Factory Theatres', 'The Open-Air Mass and Street Theatres', 'Street Pageants and Workers' Cafes Chantants' and 'The Little Theatres of Revolutionary Satire'. It was from this research that Carter drew his emphasis on improvisation, on audience participation, on using daily life as source material, on the genres of satire, parody, and melodrama, and on dispensing with scenery.<sup>58</sup> Carter's experience of Russian theatre produced, in short, quite different prescriptions for the nascent workers' theatre from those derived from professional socialist theatre in Britain. In

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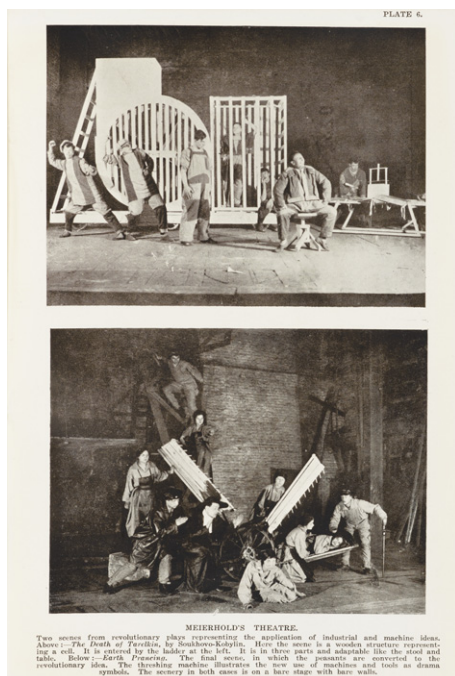


Fig. 2. 'Meierhold's Theatre', in Huntley [sic] Carter, *The New Theatre and Cinema of Soviet Russia* (London: Chapman & Dodd, 1924), plate 6.

particular, it led him to reject naturalist playwriting and acting styles, even if the argument of the play was manifestly socialist—as we have seen in his comments on the productions of plays by Miles Malleon, Sean O'Casey, and George Bernard Shaw.<sup>59</sup>

But how useful for workers' theatre groups in Britain was Carter's information about theatre in another country, with different theatrical traditions, which had, moreover, already proclaimed itself a socialist state? When one reads Carter's column in context, his continual recourse to Russian examples was in fact much less out of place than one might expect. The *Sunday Worker* was full of information about Russia. Its first masthead advertised 'News from U.S.S.R.', it ran columns entitled 'Russia week by week', 'Soviet News: Items of Interest from the Workers' Republic', and 'Building Workers' Russia', as well as articles on specific events, publications, and personalities.<sup>60</sup> The arts pages contained essays on Russian music, cinema, and literature, reviews of plays by Russian authors, and translations by Eden and Cedar Paul of Alexander Serafimovich's short stories.<sup>61</sup> Carter and

his first-hand knowledge of Soviet Russia were clearly valued by the journal. On 22 November 1925, an unattributed article, 'Workers' Theatres: First Steps Towards Them', listed as its first step that 'Huntly Carter's "New Theatre and Cinema in Soviet Russia" should be studied by individuals or groups'; the following week William Paul reviewed *The New Spirit in the European Theatre* as 'a milestone in the history of the theatre', concluding that it is 'just the sort of book that we all must insist upon being placed in the shelves of our local libraries'.<sup>62</sup> An article on workers' views on art from 24 October 1926, stated one should 'give encouragement to men like Huntly Carter, who have broken with the bourgeois ideas and are moving towards a new expression and new ideals'.<sup>63</sup> In January 1927, Paul's own article on Soviet theatre described Carter as 'a world authority on the subject' and the *Sunday Worker* began selling *The New Theatre and Cinema of Soviet Russia* directly at a reduced price, with the injunction that 'everyone interested in the Workers' theatre movement should possess a copy'.<sup>64</sup> By this point, the *Sunday Worker's* theatre critics are no longer praising Malleon and Shaw; following Carter, they are writing of expressionism and the Blue Blouse, and recommending the use of agit-prop and the revue.<sup>65</sup>

Carter's engagement with workers' theatre groups went beyond the ideas presented in his columns. Despite his refusal to take a leading organisational role in the Workers' Theatre Movement, he did respond to invitations to attend performances and give lectures. The columns themselves make this clear: he describes giving a lantern lecture to a branch of the Independent Labour Party in Enfield in December 1925, attending performances by two provincial theatre groups (one in Kent) in February 1926, and contributing to a discussion about workers' theatre at a trade union branch meeting in a 'big Midland town' in March 1926.<sup>66</sup> A notice in the *Sunday Worker* tells us that he also gave an open lecture on 'The Workers and the Theatre' at the National Council of Labour Colleges Training Centre in Earl's Court on 20 August 1925, and made a surprise appearance and a well-received talk at a performance in Plumstead at the end of December 1926.<sup>67</sup> His lecture at the Woolwich Co-operative Institute on 14 April 1928 demonstrated his 'profound knowledge' and was 'both informative and stimulating'.<sup>68</sup> Carter's archive contains several undated fragments of lectures, describing biomechanics and theatrical propaganda in Russia, and giving information about the different theatre groups there.<sup>69</sup>

It is difficult to assess the impact of Carter's columns on the work of theatre groups themselves during this period. After Carter's first three columns had appeared, Bonar Thompson, who had recently set up a group called the Proletarian Players, expressed 'appreciation

of the dramatic notes of the SUNDAY WORKER which are just the right thing'.<sup>70</sup> But in an exchange of letters about the arts content of the *Sunday Worker* the following year, one reader objected to 'glorifying and idealising machinery and machine labour', a criticism of Carter's account of biomechanics, and another complained about 'the "highbrow" attitude of the SUNDAY WORKER to dramatic art', when what was needed was 'something practical'. 'Tell us the plays worth producing, how to produce them, how to make scenery and get stage effects, tell us something about voice production, "make up," costumes, &c.'. <sup>71</sup> A debate at the beginning of 1928 raised more fundamental questions, following J.M. Flanagan's caustic review of a performance by the Central Group of the WTM for the Westminster Labour Party and Trades Council. Flanagan criticised the group's choices of plays and songs, and in particular disparaged their 'technique'. Echoing Carter, he had written that 'one had expected that the W.T.M. would attempt to work out a new technique suited to Workers without much leisure to give to the older methods of acting', but instead 'the old technique was attempted', with little success.<sup>72</sup> Both the group's secretary and producer responded the following week that the charges were unreasonable, given the lack of appropriate plays, the difficulty in finding participants, the lack of funds, and the fact that the movement had only recently been restarted, 'the enthusiasts who inaugurated it having left us'. Mark Phillips, the director of the Manchester WTM, also wrote in to say that adopting a new stage technique was 'very difficult without proper guidance', and his group had sought advice 'from London' on play choices and staging in vain.<sup>73</sup> Joe Corrie, whose Fife-based Bowhill Village Players was one of the most successful of the early workers' theatre groups, entered the discussion a few weeks later. His work was well known to *Sunday Worker* readers, and the performance of part of his play about the miners' strike, *In Time o' Strife*, by a London WTM group the previous year had been celebrated by William Paul as 'real Labour drama, [...] just the type of play that a Workers' Theatre Group can perform with real enthusiasm' (Figure 3).<sup>74</sup> Yet Corrie also rejected Flanagan's expectations. 'We have not lost any sleep so far over a new technique', he wrote. 'In fact we have no idea what this new technique is. A series of articles on the subject would be a good thing'.<sup>75</sup> This seems to be a striking dismissal of Carter's series of articles on the new, non-naturalist, technique.

At the same time, Corrie's characterisation of his plays as 'simple kitchen scenes and incidents of everyday life, without any plot in most cases', might be said to correspond with Carter's advice to dispense with plots, 'keeping it simple, free, and natural', and staging

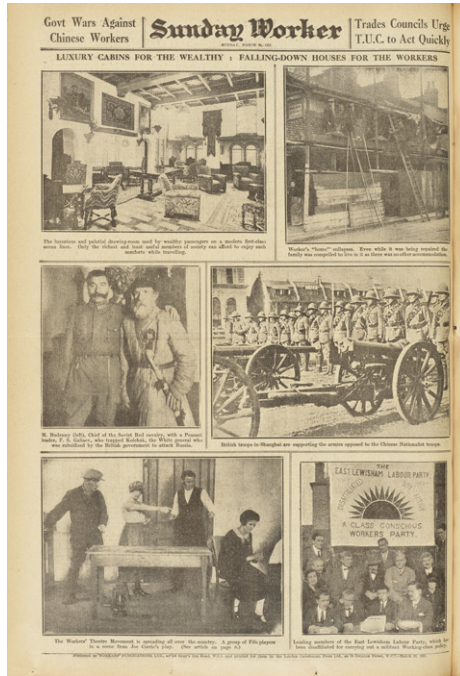


Fig. 3. Joe Corrie, *In Time o' Strife*, Bowhill Village Players, *Sunday Worker*, 20 March 1927.

the inherent dramatic conflict in the life of the miner. Whether or not this was a direct consequence of Carter's columns, there were some correspondences between Carter's columns and the work of other groups, too. The *Sunday Worker* makes several references to 'an experimental group', later 'the Experimental Group of the Workers' Theatre Movement', with which Christina Walshe appears to have been involved.<sup>76</sup> On 16 March it presented in Camberwell a variety show of three plays: Corrie's *In Time o' Strife*, *Passaic* (*Shades of Passaic: A Dramatic Study in Expressionism*) by Stanley Guest and Bonchi Friedman, students at Brookwood Labor College in New York, and *Baldwin's Dream* (also known as *Stanley's Pipe Dream*), a 'witty skit' by the Australian Communist, Percy Stephensen, then a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford.<sup>77</sup> Craig Munro's account of a paper on 'The Essentials of Revolutionary Drama' that Stephensen delivered at a WTM meeting in June 1927 suggests numerous correspondences with Carter's columns. Like Carter, he viewed expressionism, as represented by Toller's work, as too complicated for amateur actors, but recommended



much of her work for the movement because of a job with another theatre'.<sup>80</sup> In an unpublished lecture, probably from 1928, Carter writes that he has

been out of touch with the W.T. Movement for over a year. For one thing it seemed to me to be off the line. It had too much to do with the Ready-made theatres and its friends to please me. I have always looked upon the Workers theatre as a separate thing, a break with the Ready-made theatre and not a continuation of it. As the Workers' theatre movement showed no signs of making such a break, I turned to other things [...]. Recently I came into touch with it. I heard from Comrade Thomas that the movement was undergoing re-organisation and the people with fancy names and no theatrical ideas were being dropped. All for the best. I do not know who the new people are but I imagine they are the bull-men who are going to showw [sic] us what's what.<sup>81</sup>

The Workers' Theatre Movement now moved into its second stage, led by Tom Thomas and his Hackney workers' theatre group.<sup>82</sup>

### **The WTM and Early Modernism: The Legacy of the *Gesamtkunstwerk***

'The W.T. Movement [...] had too much to do with the Ready-made theatres and its friends'. What or who did Carter mean here? His sporadic contributions to the *Sunday Worker*, after he'd returned from Russia in December 1926, give no indication, nor do the few other articles he published elsewhere in this period.<sup>83</sup> But a clipping in Carter's archive of a newspaper article by Rutland Boughton, written during Boughton's three-week trip to Russia in 1927, is annotated with negative comments: 'article of doubtful value—since writer does not know whether it is all correct' written at the top, 'treachery' alongside Boughton's remark that 'interpreters largely belong to the educated class of pre-Soviet days'.<sup>84</sup> And *The New Spirit in the Russian Theatre* wilfully misrepresents another of Boughton's articles in the same series, suggesting a close connection with the theatre impresario Charles Cochran, one of the 'Big Six' capitalists of the commercial theatre Carter had castigated in the *Sunday Worker*.<sup>85</sup> Boughton did have contacts with the few commercial theatres that staged his works, but these had not increased after the WTM had been founded.<sup>86</sup> Nor was Boughton central to the WTM. One would expect Christina Walshe to be the more likely target of Carter's disappointment, but beyond the existing connections she had as stage and costume designer of Boughton's music-dramas, there is little evidence of her association

with commercial theatres. The only new work she appears to have undertaken in 1927 and 1928 was as costume designer for a production of *The Golden Legend* at Grotrian Hall, Wigmore Street in December 1927. The producer was another member of the WTM committee, Cedar Paul, and one of the singers was Ursula Greville, the editor of the music journal *The Sackbut*, to which both Walshe and Boughton contributed. *The Golden Legend* had been composed by Arthur Sullivan, the composing half of the Gilbert and Sullivan partnership.<sup>87</sup> Could this be the job Walshe alluded to in her letter to Stephensen, and these the people Carter referred to as having 'fancy names and no theatrical ideas'?

If so, it is an unjust charge, at least in relation to theatrical ideas. But Carter's criticism of the first WTM's organisation draws our attention to its advisory committee, and its difference from the Hackney group that succeeded it. This final section looks at the way this committee transferred aspects of their early modernist aesthetics into the WTM.

Raphael Samuel describes the members of the first WTM's advisory committee as 'upper-middle-class Bohemians', a characterisation that has been recycled and intensified in other critical accounts, but most of their backgrounds were more modest.<sup>88</sup> Both Boughton and the painter Joseph Southall were sons of grocers, the novelist Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's parents worked in Lancashire cotton factories, the singer John Goss 'had been in a variety of labouring jobs and had studied at Ruskin College', William Paul began his working life as a market trader, Beth Turner was a textile worker, Walshe's family were Plymouth Brethren, and the artist Archie Ziegler was born to an immigrant Jewish family in the East End.<sup>89</sup> Samuel's characterisation has more justification in relation to the other, better-known, committee members, the artist Frank Brangwyn, the theatre director Edith Craig, the sexologist Havelock Ellis, the novelist and drama critic, Monica Ewer, and the translators Cedar Paul and Eden Paul. The theatre critic Alexander Bakshy was a Jewish émigré from Russia whose origins are obscure.<sup>90</sup>

The core of the committee was drawn from Boughton's and Walshe's circle: Boughton and Southall had been part of a pre-war network of artists and intellectuals in Birmingham, where Boughton had also met Walshe, who studied art and design at the Birmingham School of Art from 1908 to 1911. Boughton and Walshe began collaborating on their Glastonbury Festivals ('Music, Dance and Mystic Drama') in 1914, and John Goss sang in their summer festival of 1920.<sup>91</sup> Bakshy met Boughton and Walshe after reading the manifesto

Boughton wrote with an early collaborator, Reginald B. Buckley, *Music-Drama of the Future* (1911), and in 1917 Boughton reviewed Bakshy's *The Path of the Modern Russian Stage* (1916) as 'the best book on the stage I have yet come across'.<sup>92</sup> Edith Craig attended performances by Boughton's Glastonbury Players, but appears not to have known Boughton or Walshe well.<sup>93</sup> Brangwyn and Ellis were both deeply admired by Boughton. In a 1924 lecture in Glasgow, a newspaper account of which Carter clipped and kept in his archive, Boughton cited Brangwyn, Shaw and Wagner as artists who 'are capable of stirring, and of satisfying, deeper and nobler religious emotions much more fully than can any services connected today with the Christian churches'.<sup>94</sup> In the *Sunday Worker*, Ziegler named Brangwyn as the leading living artist who was reclaiming art for the workers.<sup>95</sup> Boughton ended a 1929 article by quoting at length from Havelock Ellis's *The Dance of Life* to argue that art is 'an integral part of the general mental life, for all to share in the measure of their capacity'.<sup>96</sup> Carnie Holdsworth, Turner, and Ziegler, who were added to the committee at some point before 3 October 1926, were all contributors to the *Sunday Worker*; Ewer was the drama critic of the Labour newspaper, the *Daily Herald*, and editor of the Plays for the People series for the Labour Publishing Company.

It is not clear when Carter first met Boughton and Walshe, but he certainly knew of Boughton's work long before they appeared alongside each other in the pages of the *Sunday Worker*. His archive contains a clipping of Boughton's 1913 essay in the journal *World's Work*, 'The Rights and Wrongs of Stage-Craft', and also a prospectus for *Arthur of Britain* (1914), the textual base for a choral drama by Reginald Buckley and Boughton, with annotations by Buckley.<sup>97</sup> Boughton had also occasionally appeared in the *New Age* during the period of Carter's association with the journal.<sup>98</sup> Their aesthetic interests were markedly similar, both of them committed to the movement in the arts motivated by the Wagnerian idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, 'usually understood as the intention to reunite the arts into the one integrated work', but 'tied from the beginning to the desire to recover and renew the public function of art', as David Roberts has remarked.<sup>99</sup> Gabriela Minden's and Anselm Heinrich's articles in this special issue explore how Carter's pre-war writings on theatre had set out an ambitious vision of reform, which aimed to establish a theatre dedicated to art in place of both the commercial theatre and the predominantly realist tendencies of the independent theatre movement. 'The conception of dramatic action has changed from time to time according to the conception of the purpose of the drama itself, the means of its representation, and

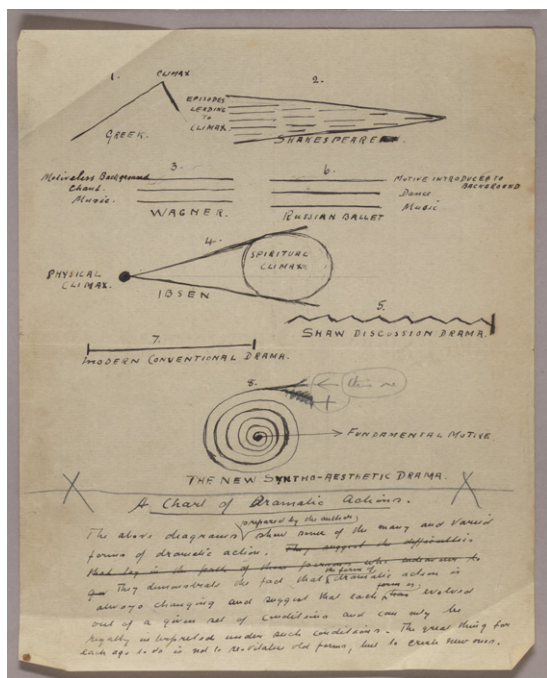


Fig. 5. Huntly Carter, 'A Chart of Dramatic Action', in Notes by Huntly Carter on post-war European theater, folder 288, Huntly Carter Papers, MSE/MN 5000, University of Notre Dame Rare Books & Special Collections.

the period in which it was written', Carter writes in *The New Spirit in Drama and Art*. 'To-day we can represent actions which a Shakespeare, or Sophocles, or Goethe could never attempt to express. These are tremendously important actions, carried beyond spoken language by the language of music and the visualised scene. By such means the greatest and most complex soul, its subtlest significances, its most delicate nuances, are caught up, revealed, and illuminated'.<sup>100</sup> In an unpublished 'Chart of Dramatic Action' (Figure 5), Carter names the modern drama he advocates 'syntho-aesthetic', a term he also used to describe the work of Léon Bakst, the Ballets Russes designer.<sup>101</sup> Other influences on Carter's conception of *Gesamtkunstwerke* included Edward Gordon Craig, early Ibsen, Max Reinhardt, and of course Wagner—a Nietzschean and symbolist genealogy that also informed Havelock Ellis's *The Dance of Life*, Edith Craig's pioneering productions of Russian symbolist plays, and Boughton's and Walshe's Glastonbury festivals.<sup>102</sup> While this might seem to be a surprising hinterland for a workers' theatre movement, Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal has shown that

this was also the hinterland of figures such as Aleksandr Bogdanov, Gorky, and Anatoly Lunacharsky, who played a major part in Soviet art policies.<sup>103</sup>

Nevertheless, the trajectory from this hinterland certainly created a number of ideological problems. Those problems were by no means unique to Carter's career, but the vociferousness of his commitment to first, the art theatre and, subsequently, the workers' theatre, provides a particularly explicit account of what was at stake in the attempt to establish a post-war avant-garde theatre in Britain.

Perhaps the most obvious problem that emerges from the *Sunday Worker's* attempts to establish a Workers' Theatre Movement is the relationship between workers and theatre professionals. This was a problem debated by Soviet workers' theatres too, as Lynn Mally has discussed. 'This question was highly politicized in the early Soviet years, not only in the arts but also in the army, trade unions, and education', she writes. 'Everywhere, the revolution provoked hard-fought battles over the status of experts and the significance of expertise, battles that sought to determine the meaning of social equality in the world's first socialist state'. Just as in Britain, conflicting models were proposed, models 'based on conflicting ideas of theater itself—was it a participatory activity infusing all of life or a skilled profession to be learned?'.<sup>104</sup> For the WTM advisory committee, with its background in the art theatre movement, these 'conflicting ideas' were not entirely in opposition. In their pre-war writings, both Carter and Boughton wrote of drama as instinctual. For 'primitive man', 'the first flowering of the dramatic instinct, the desire to play, the power to beauty, as H.G. Wells calls it, springs from the reality of life', wrote Boughton in his 1911 manifesto.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, we find Carter writing in *The Egoist* in 1914 that 'Art, Drama and Religion to primitive Man mean his individual feeling of relation to the world of emotional reality. When man became civilised or mass-man he lost this sublime feeling'. For this reason, both Boughton and Carter see drama as available to all: 'Drama promotes each of us to creative authorship in a spiritual sense', writes Carter.<sup>106</sup> But at the same time, the artist has a special status. For Carter, 'Drama is the great mystery of which the author alone has the key'; for Boughton, even though he believes in 'the truly popular nature of all the greatest art', he also thinks that 'the greatest artists acquire their superhuman power by acting as the expression of the oversoul of a people'.<sup>107</sup> The reason these art theatre proponents are committed to workers' theatre is that they do indeed see theatre, and art more generally, as a 'participatory activity infusing all of life'. But they also believe there are skills to be learned.

Boughton and Carter were well aware of this inherent problem their columns presented. Boughton's solution was pragmatic: he proposes that professional artists will advise workers' music and drama clubs 'until the time when the club members realise how much more fun it is to do the work for themselves'.<sup>108</sup> Experts will only be needed temporarily. Carter finds this solution inadequate: he never suggests that workers' theatre groups would benefit from expert advice. But of course, he is himself an expert dispensing advice. It seems to me that Carter attempts to resolve this problem by confining his expertise to, on the one hand, a critique of existing theatre in Britain and, on the other, information about Soviet theatre. He does not initially instruct readers on how to create a workers' theatre, since 'the Workers of the world are equally fitted by nature to express themselves dramatically'.<sup>109</sup> As we have seen, however, this solution proved unsatisfactory both to his fellow contributors, who called on him take on the leadership of a workers' theatre movement, and to some readers, who complained they needed practical advice. Reading through Carter's columns in context, it is notable that he only begins writing about how workers should actually produce plays and develop their technique after Walshe's demand that he set out 'how to do it'.<sup>110</sup> Another increase in detail occurs after the newspaper prints the Woolwich workers' theatre request for more action by the *Sunday Worker*.<sup>111</sup> At the outset, though, Carter confines himself to providing information about potential models for workers' theatre in Britain rather than telling groups what to do.

Carter's reluctance to instruct is connected, I think, to a further legacy of the art theatre movement in the approach of the first WTM. As we saw in the previous section, the *Sunday Worker* and its readers saw the lack of plays by workers as a major impediment to the development of workers' theatre. Carter, I argued, implicitly questions whether plays should be written at all when he compares the 'speeches a mile long' and the 'Fabian tracts and sermons' of Shavian theatre with the physical expression of Russian ballet, acrobatics, and biomechanics.<sup>112</sup> The opposition is a key one in the art theatre movement, where the Wagnerian and symbolist inheritance subordinate the play text to overall aesthetic effect. In his pre-war articles, Carter had praised works of art that were unimpeded by the constraints of words, that were able to 'break down as far as possible the mechanical barriers which man has set up between himself and vital and spiritual forms of expression', as he wrote in a 1912 article for *The Freewoman*, which considered Dalcroze eurythmics, Matisse's *La Joie de vivre* (1905–6), and a painting by Picasso.<sup>113</sup> In *The New Spirit in Drama and Art*,

he had maintained that Britain was in a period of 'psychic and æsthetic expansion', in which 'art is constantly opening new doors upon infinity', though 'drama has been prevented from doing so by evils of representation'.<sup>114</sup> This conception of art is still evident in the *Sunday Worker* articles, particularly in their focus on 'expression' and 'expressiveness' rather than representation. Though Carter asserts that there are no 'rules of "playmaking"' workers' theatres need to observe, he goes on to say that 'expression is the nearest to a fixed rule'.<sup>115</sup> The workers' theatre was to realise this early modernist expressivism.

In his pre-war articles, this expressivist aesthetic was linked to an explicitly individualist and vitalist politics that made Carter a natural contributor to Dora Marsden's journals promoting Max Stirner's egoism.<sup>116</sup> Carter saw his writing on art and drama as part of 'the renewed search for Individualism with which THE NEW FREEWOMAN is now occupied', and believed that 'what we call Art and Soul is that universal vibrative force known to science as Energy' that could liberate the individual from 'that gross impurity, Civilization'.<sup>117</sup> When he became committed to socialism in the early nineteen twenties, the language of individualism disappeared, but the symbolist understanding of art in terms of the soul remained. For example, in the Preface to *The New Theatre and Cinema of Soviet Russia*, Carter defined theatre in terms that would not have been out of place in the pages of *The Egoist*: 'To me it is an instrument for projecting the human soul into space in such a way that all who see it are initiated into its eternal truths'. Though in the Preface he links this view to Gordon Craig, Carter's most significant justification for retaining it appears in the chapter on the hero of the book, Vsevolod Meyerhold. There he provides an account of Meyerhold's journey from symbolist to socialist using a terminology far more appropriate to his own transformation than Meyerhold's:

Meierhold's post-revolution development has been of the same religious character (using the term in the sense of faith) as his pre-revolution one. He has always been strongly actuated by a deep religious faith in the theatre. This faith has shaped his thought and guided his action. It has formed the key with which he sought to unlock what might be termed the universal mystery of dramatic communication [...]. Meierhold now adds to the old faith a new one. He still regards the theatre as a temple, the Actor as the High Priest and a highly sensitised instrument of communication, and he still believes that spirit or the activity behind things is the element to be communicated, and the 'style' of the play is to be sought and reproduced. But it is no longer the spirit proceeding

from individualistic sources, but that proceeding from a new collective world order. Not the spirit of Maeterlinck, let us say, but the spirit of Marx. It is the spirit of the faith and standards and new values of modern communism. Meierhold now exalts Marx where Maeterlinck used to be. In other words, the Revolution has given him a new conception, not the function of the theatre, but of the material form from which the dramatic essence is to be extracted, and of the form necessary to communicate this essence.<sup>118</sup>

Though Carter's retention of his symbolist terminology is more evident in his books than in his articles for socialist newspapers, it comes to the surface in his discussion of the book that caused most excitement in the pages of the *Sunday Worker* during Carter's tenure: Upton Sinclair's *Mammonart* (1925). Sinclair was much admired in early discussions of workers' theatre and, as we have seen, a performance of his *Singing Jailbirds* was the first event with which the Workers' Theatre Movement was associated. Carter discussed *Mammonart* in his second column on 22 March 1925, William Paul reviewed it on 12 April, writing that 'this book is indispensable', and on 28 June Boughton wrote about it too, remarking that Carter's comments had made him want the book, and 'now I want everyone else to want it. It is the best history of the arts in existence'.<sup>119</sup> Though Carter also admired the book, he had one caveat, briefly mentioned in the *Sunday Worker* discussion, but much more fully set out in his substantial review of the book for *The Plebs*. He could not agree with Sinclair's argument, or at least the phrasing of his argument, that 'all art is propaganda'.<sup>120</sup> 'Art', Carter maintained, 'is probably an uncontrolled and uncontrollable and indivisible spiritual movement', and 'if Art itself is a spiritual movement, of course it has nothing to do with propaganda. Propaganda begins the moment the movement has passed through the emotions and mind of the artist and has taken definite shape according to the demand of plutocrat or pleb'.<sup>121</sup> Though he frequently expresses his view that 'Theatre has always been an instrument of propaganda', and frames the aim of his columns as handing that instrument to workers, art itself remains inviolate.<sup>122</sup> In this characterisation of art, Carter attempts to reconcile his pre- and post-revolutionary beliefs.

## Conclusion

The leaders of the later stages of the Workers' Theatre Movement developed techniques Carter had introduced to readers in his *Sunday Worker* column. Tom Thomas recalled that, at the point they took over

the movement, 'we were fumbling towards the idea of an Agit-Prop theatre – a theatre without a stage, a theatre which would use music and song and cabaret, and which could improvise its own material instead of going in for full-length set pieces, a theatre in which the audience could take part'.<sup>123</sup> But despite his apparent approval of the new leadership, expressed in the unpublished lecture quoted above, Carter does not seem to have been involved in the movement after 1927. By 1934 the impact of socialist realism had reversed its commitment to avant-garde techniques, and by 1936 the movement had largely dissolved.<sup>124</sup>

I've written elsewhere that we might view Carter's column in the *Sunday Worker* as one of the broadest transmissions of avant-garde art in the early twentieth-century. With its circulation figures of around 85,000 in 1926, the *Sunday Worker* had over twenty-one times the normal readership of the *New Age*, and eighty-five times that of the *English Review*.<sup>125</sup> Carter's articles not only introduced Soviet theatre to an enormous readership, they also – as the latter part of this article has attempted to show – outlined how the aesthetic values of a particular strand of early modernism might be pursued in the inter-war period. The genealogy of this strand is distinct from that of the version of Anglo-American modernism that became institutionalised in the nineteen twenties. It looks to Germany (Nietzsche, Wagner, Reinhardt) and Russia (Berdyayev, Ivanov, late Tolstoy), more than to France. It does not reject 'romanticism' for 'classicism'. New forms of literature are more closely aligned to new freedoms in life than they are to stylistic experiment. And, for this strand, performance – drama, theatre, opera, dance – is the central genre. While the dominant strand of post-war British modernism cultivated the individual reader absorbing a literary work (a novel, a poem, a closet drama) in private, this other strand cultivated the live, performing body and the mass audience collaborating with the artwork in public. This is the inheritance of the first Workers' Theatre Movement. To dismiss it simply as an ideologically-confused false start, as almost all labour historians have, is to narrow and simplify the cultural context from which it emerged, and to obscure the extent to which it developed from early modernist aesthetics. Brief as it was, it attempted to make good on the *Gesamtkunstwerk's* promise to recover the public function of art, and it should be remembered as an ambitious, if abortive, British avant-garde.

## Huntly Carter and the 'First Workers' Theatre Movement'

### Notes

1. Raphael Samuel, 'Theatre and Socialism in Britain, 1880–1935', in *Theatres of the Left, 1880–1935: Workers' Theatre Movements in Britain and America*, ed. by Raphael Samuel, Ewan MacColl, and Stuart Cosgrove (London: Routledge, 1985), pp. 3–73 (pp. 33, 42, 50, 38). Much of *Theatres of the Left* was published in *History Workshop Journal*, 4.1 (1977); Samuel's essay is an expanded version of his introduction to that issue.
2. Indeed, many important discussions of the WTM barely mention the first phase. See David Bradby and John McCormick, *People's Theatre* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 97, Richard Stourac and Kathleen McCreery, *Theatre as a Weapon: Workers' Theatre in the Soviet Union, Germany and Britain, 1917–1934* (London: Routledge, 1986), part three, Andrew Davies, *Other Theatres: The Development of Alternative and Experimental Theatre in Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 102–109, Jason Price, *Modern Popular Theatre* (London: Palgrave, 2016), pp. 81–82. However, the first historian of the movement, Leonard A. Jones, does discuss the first phase at length, though several aspects of his argument have been superseded as more source material has become available: see Jones, 'The Workers' Theatre Movement in the 'Twenties', *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 14 (1966), 259–81.
3. Ian Saville, *Ideas, Forms and Developments in the British Workers' Theatre, 1925–1935* (unpublished doctoral thesis, City University, 1990). Saville's unpublished (but online) study is the most substantial and reliable account of the movement.
4. Morag Shiach, *Discourse on Popular Culture: Class, Gender and History in Cultural Analysis, 1730 to the Present* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), pp. 132–44.
5. See Claire Warden, *British Avant-Garde Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012), pp. 32–35, 59–61, 66–68, 105–108, Claire Warden, *Modernist and Avant-Garde Performance: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), chapter three. Regrettably, the WTM falls outside the timeframe of Simon Shepherd's recent book, *The English Theatrical Avant-Garde, 1900–1925* (London: Routledge, 2023), though Shepherd does give considerable space to two of the key figures in the first WTM: Rutland Boughton and Huntly Carter.
6. See Samuel, 'Theatre and Socialism in Britain', pp. 42–43, where the aesthetics of the WTM are evidenced almost entirely by quotations from Carter.
7. Christina Walshe, 'Workers and the Theatre: Workers' Theatre Group', *Sunday Worker*, 25 July 1926, p. 8. Bold Walshe's.
8. Christina Walshe, 'The Workers' Theatre Movement', *Woman Worker*, 5 (August 1926), p. 2. There is little information about the Council for Proletarian Art. Most critics follow Samuel, who writes that the WTM 'owed its remote origins' to the Council, and that it 'was formed in 1924 by a joint group of Communists and ILP left-wingers possibly as a counterbalance to the kinds of theatrical initiative being taken within the ILP by Miles Malleison and ILP sympathizers from the West End stage' ('Theatre and Socialism in Britain', p. 37). Samuel's source is H.B. (Tom) Thomas, 'Die Entwicklung der Arbeiter-Theater-Bewegung in England', *Arbeiterbühne und Film* (June 1930), pp. 11–14 (pp. 11–12), which provides no evidence for its dates. Walshe's 'The Council for Proletarian Art', *Woman Worker*, 4 (July 1926), p. 2 strongly suggests that the movement has just been formed. Saville cites Walshe's article, implying that his view, with which I agree, is that Walshe founded the Council in July 1926 (Saville, 'Ideas, Forms, and Developments in the British Workers' Theatre', pp. 50–51).
9. 'Workers' Theatre', *Sunday Worker*, 25 July 1926, p. 8.

10. Samuel, 'Theatre and Socialism in Britain', pp. 41, 37. See also Robert Leach, *British Socialist and Workers Theatre: Red Stages* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2023), p. 89, Price, *Modern Popular Theatre*, p. 82, and Matthew Worley, *Class Against Class: The Communist Party in Britain Between the Wars* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), p. 204.
11. 'A Strike Play', *Sunday Worker*, 27 June 1926, p. 8, 'Singing Jailbirds', *Sunday Worker*, 4 July 1926, p. 8, 'The National Council of Labour Colleges', *The Plebs*, 18.7 (July 1926), 269–71 (p. 270), 'The National Council of Labour Colleges', *The Plebs*, 18.8 (July 1926), 302–304 (p. 303).
12. *Sunday Worker*, 25 July 1926, p. 8, X.Q.P., 'Workers' Theatre Notes', *Young Worker*, 23 October 1926, p. 3.
13. The involvement of William Paul is indicative less of a new joint initiative with the *Sunday Worker* than the fact that several of its contributors were active in the Plebs League: Paul himself was on the Executive Committee and was notably active in the League's theatrical and musical activities: see for example, 'Plebs Summer Schools', *The Plebs*, 17.7 (July 1925), p. 291.
14. 'Workers' Theatre Movement', *Sunday Worker*, 19 September 1926, p. 5.
15. 'What the Workers' Theatre Movement Stands For', *Sunday Worker*, 3 October 1926, p. 6. This manifesto was also published in the *Young Worker*, where it was followed by a letter from Jack Loveman about the demonstration on 6 October, which suggests the speakers emphasised the importance of workers adopting theatre as a propaganda tool and referred to the success of workers' theatre in other countries. See C. Walshe, 'Do Workers Need Dramatic Expression? A New Movement and its Aim' and Jack Loveman, 'Art is a Weapon – For or Against the Workers', *Young Worker*, 9 October 1926, p. 4. Loveman's retrospective account of the WTM was published as 'Workers' Theatre: Personal Recollections of Political Theatre in Greenwich during the 1920s and 1930s', *Red Letters*, 13 (1982), 41–46.
16. The pseudonym 'Macheath', like that of the *Sunday Worker's* book reviewer, 'Peachem', was taken from John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*.
17. Christina Walshe, 'A Real Red May Day', *Sunday Worker*, 18 April 1926, p. 7. Two of Walshe's designs for May Day banners were reproduced on the back page of the *Sunday Worker* on 2 May 1926.
18. Huntly Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre', *Sunday Worker*, 15 March 1925, p. 6.
19. 'Macheath', 'The Plays They Play', *Sunday Worker*, 17 May 1925, p. 9. See also, for example, Rutland Boughton, 'Music and the Class War', *Sunday Worker*, 15 March 1925, p. 6.
20. Huntly Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: Class-Conscious Worker-Playwrights', *Sunday Worker*, 14 June 1925, p. 10.
21. Charles Ashleigh, 'Workers and the Theatre: Plays Needed: Now is The Time', *Sunday Worker*, 11 July 1926, p. 8, 'Class Theatres for Workers', *Sunday Worker*, 12 September 1926, p. 5, Barrett Robertson, 'Ideas for the Workers Theatre', *Sunday Worker*, 5 September 1925, p. 9.
22. 'Macheath', 'The Plays They Play' (17 May 1925), p. 9.
23. C. Walshe, 'In the Country', *Sunday Worker*, 21 June 1925, p. 11.
24. Huntly Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: What Plays Feed Us?', *Sunday Worker*, 29 March 1925, p. 6. See also 'Workers and the Theatre', *Sunday Worker*, 10 May 1925, p. 10.
25. Huntly Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre', *Sunday Worker*, 31 May 1925, p. 10.
26. Huntly Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: Workers' Choice of Material', *Sunday Worker*, 18 July 1926, p. 8.

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27. Huntly Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: Prehistoric Plays', *Sunday Worker*, 7 June 1925, p. 10; Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: What Plays Feed Us?', p. 6. Carter's archive contains many notes and newspaper clippings about Shaw (especially about Shaw's visit to the Soviet Union in 1931): Notes by Huntly Carter on English Theater, folder 309, Notes by Huntly Carter on George Bernard Shaw, folders 309M, 309N, Huntly Carter Papers, MSE/MN 5000, University of Notre Dame Rare Books & Special Collections.
28. 'Macheath', 'The Plays They Play: "St. Joan"', *Sunday Worker*, 19 April 1925, p. 5.
29. Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: Prehistoric Plays', p. 10.
30. Walshe, 'In the Country' (21 June 1925), p. 11.
31. Huntly Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: A New Play Form for Workers', *Sunday Worker*, 28 June 1925, p. 10; A.R.S., 'A Day in the Life of a Building Trade Worker', *Sunday Worker*, 14 June 1925, p. 11.
32. Huntly Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: Dramatise the Blacksmith', *Sunday Worker*, 7 February 1926, p. 8; Huntly Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: Stage the Miner', *Sunday Worker*, 28 February 1926, p. 8, Huntly Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: Dramatise the Engineer', *Sunday Worker*, 7 March 1926, p. 5, Huntly Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: The Rule of No Rules', *Sunday Worker*, 19 July 1925, p. 9.
33. Huntly Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: A Weapon for the Workers', *Sunday Worker*, 19 April 1925, p. 6.
34. Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: Class-Conscious Worker-Playwrights', p. 10.
35. 'What the Workers' Theatre Movement Stands For', p. 6.
36. Huntly Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: Plot Me No Plots', *Sunday Worker*, 21 June 2025, p. 10.
37. Samuel, 'Theatre and Socialism in Britain', pp. 43–44.
38. Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: The Rule of No Rules', p. 9; Huntly Carter 'Workers and the Theatre', *Sunday Worker*, 12 April 1925, p. 6.
39. Walshe, 'Workers and the Theatre: Workers' Theatre Group', p. 8; 'Class Theatres for Workers' p. 5.
40. Indeed, Walshe devoted her column the following week to arguing the benefits for women if trades unions established Workers' Clubs with provision for arts and games: see Christina Walshe, 'Notes from the Country', *Sunday Worker*, 5 April 1925, p. 7.
41. Rutland Boughton, 'Music and the Workers: Sunday Music Clubs', *Sunday Worker*, 22 March 1926, p. 10.
42. Boughton, 'Music and the Workers: Sunday Music Clubs', p. 10.
43. Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre' (12 April 1925), p. 6.
44. Walshe, 'In the Country' (21 June 1925), p. 11.
45. Christina Walshe, 'The Workers' Theatre' (letter to the Editor), *Sunday Worker*, 27 September 1925, p. 8.
46. Huntly Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: Workers' Choice of Material', p. 8.
47. Rutland Boughton, 'Music and the Workers: Sunday Music Clubs', *Sunday Worker*, 22 March 1926, p. 10.
48. Huntly Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: The Strike and the Workers' Theatre', *Sunday Worker*, 6 June 1926, p. 8; Huntly Carter, 20 June 1926, 'Why We Need a Workers' Theatre', *Sunday Worker*, p. 8.
49. P. Kelly, Letter to the editor, qtd in Charles Ashleigh, 'Workers and the Theatre: Plays Needed—Now is The Time', *Sunday Worker*, 11 July 1926, p. 8.

50. Huntly Carter, letter to Natalya Gilyarovskaya, 17 February 1927, in correspondence with Vsevolod Meierkhol'd (1924–1936), folders 64, 68, 70, Huntly Carter, correspondence with the Moscow Kamernyi Theatre (1923–34), folders 49, 49A–J, correspondence with Aleksey Granovsky (1924–27), folder 60, correspondence with Genrietta Pascar (1923–24?), folder 61, correspondence with Boris Yuzhanin (1925), folder 26, Huntly Carter Papers, MSE/MN 5000, University of Notre Dame Rare Books & Special Collections.
51. Huntly Carter, letter to Varvara Polovtseva, 30 March 1928, folder 73, Huntly Carter Papers, MSE/MN 5000, University of Notre Dame Rare Books & Special Collections.
52. Huntly Carter, letter to Sergey Bogomazov, 12 August 1936, folder 25, Correspondence between Huntly Carter and Russian translators, folder 35–40, Huntly Carter, letter to I. D. Pliner, 4 October 1934, folder 80, Notes by Huntly Carter on the Russian language, folder 216. Theatres produced standard statements of their work and summaries of their productions in English, which were sent to Carter, and delegates at the theatre festivals received a pack of English-language brochures on the theatres and plays they saw: folder 166CC, Huntly Carter Papers, MSE/MN 5000, University of Notre Dame Rare Books & Special Collections. See also Rebecca Beasley, *Russomania: Russian Culture and the Creation of British Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 232–33.
53. Huntly Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre' (12 April 1925), p. 6. Carter also discusses the worker-peasant theatre conference of 1919 in some detail in *The New Theatre and Cinema of Soviet Russia* (London: Chapman & Dodd, 1924), pp. 105–106. For a less positive account of that conference, which also makes clear that there was far greater interest in centralization of the theatre than Carter allows, see Lynn Mally, *Revolutionary Acts: Amateur Theater and the Soviet State, 1917–1938* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. 21–23.
54. Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: Plot Me No Plots', p. 10.
55. See for example, Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre' (10 May 1925), p. 10, Huntly Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: What's the Use of Scenery?', *Sunday Worker*, 18 April 1926, p. 8, Huntly Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: Spreading the Good Work', *Sunday Worker*, 2 May 1926, p. 6.
56. Carter, *The New Theatre and Cinema of Soviet Russia*, pp. 69, 71, 70. See also Alma Law and Mel Gordon, *Meyerhold, Eisenstein and Biomechanics: Actor Training in Revolutionary Russia* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1996), and—on the influence of biomechanics in British theatre—Amy Skinner, 'Riding the Waves: Uncovering Biomechanics in Britain', in Jonathan Pitches, ed., *Russians in Britain: British Theatre and the Russian Tradition of Actor Training* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), pp. 86–109.
57. Mally, *Revolutionary Acts*, p. 3.
58. Carter, *The New Theatre and Cinema of Soviet Russia*, pp. 91–93, 95, 114–16.
59. Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: What Plays Feed Us?', p. 6, Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: Prehistoric Plays', p. 10.
60. 'Russia Week by Week', *Sunday Worker*, 15 March 1925, p. 2, 'Soviet News: Items of Interest from the Workers' Republic', *Sunday Worker*, 27 December 1925, p. 3, William Paul, 'Building Workers' Russia: No. 1—How Miners Fare in Don Basin', *Sunday Worker*, 24 October 1926, p. 6, A. F. Rothstein, 'A Russian Factory Club', *Sunday Worker*, 27 December 1926, p. 6, Charles Ashleigh, 'Purges for the Highbrow', review of Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (1925), *Sunday Worker*, 1 November 1925, p. 8.

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61. Wm Paul, 'Music for the Workers: Chaliapine', *Sunday Worker*, 8 November 1925, p. 8, William Paul, 'Leading the World in Cinema Art', *Sunday Worker*, 26 December 1926, p. 6, H.D., 'Taking Cinema Seriously', *Sunday Worker*, 31 July 1927, p. 8, 'Peachem', 'The Books They Write', review of [Alexander Chramoff, ed.,] *Flying Osip: Stories of New Russia* (1925), *Sunday Worker*, 19 July 1925, p. 9, 'Macheath', 'The Plays They Play: "The Cherry Orchard"', *Sunday Worker*, 14 June 1925, p. 9, Elinor Dale, 'The Play and the Players: "Katerina"', *Sunday Worker*, 11 April 1926, p. 8, Elinor Dale, 'The Play and the Players: "The Government Inspector" by Gogol', *Sunday Worker*, 2 May 1926, p. 5, A. Serafimovich, 'Tickets, Please!', trans. by Eden and Cedar Paul, *Sunday Worker*, 1 November 1925, p. 8 (the Pauls' translations of Serafimovich continued until June 1926).
62. Wm. Paul, 'Stage and Propaganda', review of Huntly Carter, *The New Spirit in the European Theatre* (1925), *Sunday Worker*, 29 November 1925, p. 8.
63. J. M. Flanagan, 'What Workers Think—and Don't Think', *Sunday Worker*, 24 October 1926, p. 6
64. William Paul, 'Building Workers' Russia—10: Liberating Dramatic Art', *Sunday Worker*, 2 January 1927, p. 8, 'Exceptional Offer: The New Theatre and Cinema of Soviet Russia by Huntly Carter', *Sunday Worker*, 16 January 1927, p. 10.
65. Charles Ashleigh, 'The Play and the Players: Conflict by Miles Malleon', *Sunday Worker*, 18 April 1926, p. 8, Elinor Dale, 'The Play and the Players: The Lyceum, "St Joan" By Bernard Shaw', *Sunday Worker*, 2 May 1926, p. 5, Barrett Robertson, 'Ideas for the Workers' Theatre', *Sunday Worker*, 5 September 1926, p. 8, J.M. Flanagan, 'What! Another Sex Play?', *Sunday Worker*, 20 March 1927, p. 8, 'New Technique for Workers' Plays?', *Sunday Worker*, 22 January 1928, p. 4, Charles Ashleigh, 'The Tragedy of Mr. Zero', *Sunday Worker*, 22 January 1928, p. 8. The back page of the *Sunday Worker* featured a photograph of the Blue Blouse on 26 June 1927,
66. Huntly Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: Check Off at Christmas', 13 December 1925, *Sunday Worker*, p. 9, Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: Dramatise the Blacksmith', p. 8, 'Workers and the Theatre: Staging the Miner', p. 8, 'Workers and the Theatre: Dramatising the Engineer', p. 5,
67. 'Meetings', *Sunday Worker*, 16 August 1925, p. 6; 'Workers' Theatre', *Sunday Worker*, 2 January 1927, p. 8.
68. 'The New Russian Theatre: Mr Huntly Carter's Lecture', *Kentish Independent and Kentish Mail*, 20 April 1928, p. 5.
69. Huntly Carter, ts. on agit-prop theatre, folder 148, ts. on workers' theatre, folder 149, ts. on theatrical propaganda, folder 150, ts. on theatrical propaganda, folder 151, Lecture notes on agit-prop theatre, folder 152, Huntly Carter Papers, MSE/MN 5000, University of Notre Dame Rare Books & Special Collections.
70. Bonar Thompson, 'Proletarian Players', *Sunday Worker*, 5 April 1925, p. 6.
71. 'Clydebank Riveter', 'Is Working-Class Art Mere 'Bunk'? Two Views', *Sunday Worker*, 26 September 1926, p. 6, Percy Howard, 'Beautiful Soap Ads', *Sunday Worker*, 10 October 1926, p. 6.
72. J.M.F., 'Will the W.T.M. Make Up Its Mind?', *Sunday Worker*, 8 January 1928, p. 8.
73. 'What's Wrong with the Workers' Theatre', *Sunday Worker*, 15 January 1928, p. 10.
74. Wm. Paul, 'Challenge to Boss Theatre: Good Show by the Workers' Theatre Movement', *Sunday Worker*, 20 March 1927, p. 8. Later the same year, the *Sunday Worker* published a laudatory review of a performance by the Bowhill Village Players', including the first act of *In Time o' Strife: 'Fife's Worker Players'*, *Sunday Worker*, 27 September 1927, p. 8.

75. Joe Corrie, 'Village Players Show Life As They Find It', *Sunday Worker*, 29 January 1928, p. 8.
76. 'The Workers' Theatre', *Sunday Worker*, 14 November 1926, p. 8, Christina Walshe, 'New Strike Play', *Sunday Worker*, 30 January 1927, p. 8.
77. Christina Walshe, 'Two Plays by the W.T.M.', *Sunday Worker*, 13 March 1927, p. 8, Paul, 'Challenge to Boss Theatre', p. 8. On *Shades of Passaic*, see Mary McAvoy, *Rehearsing Revolutions: The Labor Drama Experiment and Radical Activism in the Early Twentieth Century* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2019), pp. 84–86.
78. P.R. Stephensen, 'The Essentials of Revolutionary Drama' (June 1927), P.R. Stephensen Papers, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, qtd in Craig Munro, 'P.R. Stephensen and the Early Workers' Theatre Movement in London', *Australasian Drama Studies*, 1.2 (1983), 125–37 (pp. 130–32), Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: A New Play Form for Workers', p. 10, Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: Plot Me No Plots', p. 10.
79. 'Audience as Players: Workers' Theatre Groups Working Out New Idea', *Sunday Worker*, 26 February 1928, p. 8 (see Jones, 'The Workers' Theatre Movement in the 'Twenties', pp. 267–71). Although this article gives the name of the Hackney group as the 'Hackney, London, Labour Dramatic Group', the group had changed its name to the Hackney People's Players in 1926 and by 25 March 1928 it was referred to as 'the Hackney W.T.M. group': see Saville, 'Ideas, Forms, and Developments in the British Workers' Theatre', pp. 68, 82–84. It is also worth noting that Ness Edwards's book, *The Workers' Theatre* (Cardiff: Cymric Federation Press, 1930), which Samuel describes as 'the most systematic case for class struggle drama' ('Theatre and Socialism in Britain', p. 36), draws on Carter's columns and indeed—as Claire Warden discusses in her essay for this issue—quotes one of his suggested play formats approvingly and at length (pp. 75–78). But Saville disputes the influence of this well-known book (p. 261, n. 4).
80. Christina Walshe, letter to P.R. Stephensen, 13 May 1927, P.R. Stephensen Papers, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, qtd in 'P.R. Stephensen and the Early Workers' Theatre Movement in London', p. 130. Walshe's name did not appear in the list of secretaries of London WTM groups later that year: 'The Workers Theatre', *Sunday Worker*, 25 September 1927, p. 8, though in his account of this period Tom Thomas refers to Walshe as 'the convenor of the WTM' in 1928: see Tom Thomas, 'A Propertyless Theatre for the Propertyless Class', in *Theatres of the Left*, pp. 77–98 (p. 87).
81. Lecture notes on agit-prop theater, p. 1, folder 152, Huntly Carter Papers, MSE/MN 5000, University of Notre Dame Rare Books & Special Collections.
82. See Thomas, 'A Propertyless Theatre for the Propertyless Class', in Samuel, *Theatres of the Left*, p. 87 and Saville, 'Ideas, Forms, and Developments in the British Workers' Theatre', pp. 82–84.
83. Huntly Carter, 'Russian Art Movements since 1917', *Drawing and Design*, 4 (February 1928), 37–42, Huntly Carter, 'The New Age of the Moscow Art Theatre', *Fortnightly Review*, 123 (1928), 68–71. Carter takes a broader focus in 'The Theatre and Foreign Affairs', *Contemporary Review*, 133 (1928), 82–93.
84. Rutland Boughton, 'Musical Life in Moscow', *Manchester Guardian*, 4 November 1927, p. 11, in News clippings on Ballet, folder 222M, Huntly Carter Papers, MSE/MN 5000, University of Notre Dame Rare Books & Special Collections.
85. Huntly Carter, *The New Spirit in the Russian Theatre, 1917–28* (New York: Bretano's, 1929), p. 244, Rutland Boughton, 'Music in Moscow: The Opera', *Manchester*

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- Guardian*, 24 November 1927, p. 11, Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre' (10 May 1925), p. 10, Huntly Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: Playhouse Books in 1925', *Sunday Worker*, 24 January 1926, p. 8.
86. Boughton's opera, *The Immortal Hour*, had four runs at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 1921, 1922, and 1923 and was brought to London by the Rep's Director, Barry Jackson, for four very successful runs at the Regent Theatre (1923, 1924) and the Kingsway Theatre (1926): see Michael Hurd, *Rutland Boughton and the Glastonbury Festivals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 146–52, 177–78, and Rutland Boughton, 'Music for the Workers', *Sunday Worker*, 19 April 1925, p. 6, 'Important Revival', *Sunday Worker*, 17 January 1926, p. 8, "'The Immortal Hour' by Rutland Boughton", *Sunday Worker*, 31 January 1926, p. 8. Carter, however, gave a positive account of Jackson's work at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre: see 'Workers and the Theatre: Playhouse Books in 1925', p. 8.
87. See Ursula Greville, 'Excursions', *The Sackbut*, 8 (December 1927), 121–28 (pp. 126–27), Cedar Paul, 'The Golden Legend', *The Sackbut*, 8 (December 1927), 129–32, [Advertisement], *Musical Standard*, 30 (1927), p. 212.
88. Samuel, 'Theatre and Socialism in Britain', pp. 50, 52, Richard Hanlon and Mike Waite, 'Notes from the Left: Communism and British Classical Music', in Andy Croft, ed., *A Weapon in the Struggle: The Cultural History of the Communist Party in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), pp. 68–88 (p. 74).
89. On Boughton, Southall, and Carnie Holdsworth, see the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (ODNB); on John Goss, see 'Obituary', *Musical Times*, 94 (April 1953), p. 185; on Paul, see 'The Early British Communist Leaders, 1920–1923: A Prosopographical Exploration', *Labor History*, 61.5–6 (2020), 423–65, p. 431; on Turner, see John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, 'The 'Core' Leaders of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1923–1928: Their Past, Present and Future', *Labor History*, 62.4 (2021), 371–412 (p. 377–78), on Walshe, see Hurd, *Rutland Boughton and the Glastonbury Festivals*, pp. 47–48; on Ziegler see 'Obituary: Archibald Ziegler', *The Times*, 14 July 1971, p. 14.
90. On Brangwyn, Craig, Ellis, and Cedar and Eden Paul, see the ODNB, and also for Ewer (entry for William Ewer); on Bakshy, see James R. Russo, ed., *Drama According to Alexander Bakshy, 1916–1946* (Washington: Academica Press, 2022), p. 1, and James Milton Highsmith, 'Alexander Bakshy: Pioneering Critic of Drama and Motion Picture', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 29.2 (1970), 195–202 (p. 195).
91. John Drinkwater, *Discovery: Being the Second Book of an Autobiography, 1897–1913* (London: Benn, 1932), pp. 184–85; Hurd, *Rutland Boughton and the Glastonbury Festivals*, pp. 47–48, 381–83. Southall was also a contributor to the *Sunday Worker* and the newspaper printed a generous, illustrated review of his exhibition at the Leicester Galleries: 'Joseph Southall's Exhibition of Paintings at Leicester Gallery', D.R., 'Pictures and Painters', *Sunday Worker*, 21 March 1926, p. 8, 9.
92. Rutland Boughton, 'The Arts: Glastonbury Survey', review of Alexander Bakshy, *The Path of the Modern Russian Stage* (1916), *Central Somerset Gazette and Western Counties Advertiser*, 7 December 1917, p. 6, Rutland Boughton and Reginald R. Buckley, *Music-Drama of the Future* (London: Reeves, 1911).
93. A letter from Walshe, thanking Craig for her offer to help put on a WTM play, addresses her as 'Miss Craig': see Christina Walshe, letter to Edith Craig, 2 February [192?], EC-Z3,749, Ellen Terry and Edith Craig Archive, British Library.

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94. J.B.H., 'Socialism and Music: Mr. Rutland Boughton's Address at Glasgow', *Forward*, 20 December 1924, p. 11; folder 222L, Huntly Carter Papers, MSE/MN 5000, University of Notre Dame Rare Books & Special Collections.
95. Archie Ziegler, 'Art and the Workers', *Sunday Worker*, 12 September 1926, p. 6.
96. Rutland Boughton, 'In Mutual Contempt', *Musical Times*, 70.1037 (1929), 594–96 (p. 596). For a highly relevant discussion of Ellis's contribution to modernist aesthetics, see Laura Marcus, *Rhythmical Subjects: The Measures of the Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), pp. 31–38.
97. Rutland Boughton, 'The Rights and Wrongs of Stage-Craft', *World's Work*, 22 (November 1913), 600–609, in Articles on various theatrical traditions, ca. 1913, folder 275; Theater program [sic] for Arthur of Britain, folder 446B, Huntly Carter Papers, MSE/MN 5000, University of Notre Dame Rare Books & Special Collections, Reginald R. Buckley, *Arthur of Britain* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1914), Hurd, *Rutland Boughton and the Glastonbury Festivals*, pp. 41–43.
98. Several references to Boughton appear in articles in the *New Age* and he contributed twice to the letters pages, in the issues of the 21 December 1911 and 1 February 1912.
99. David Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), p. 1.
100. Huntly Carter, *The New Spirit in Drama & Art* (London: Frank Palmer, 1912), p. 86. This passage had first been published in 'Letters from Abroad: I. – The New Idea of Dramatic Action', *New Age*, 9.12 (1911), 271–72 (p. 272).
101. Huntly Carter, 'A Chart of Dramatic Action', in Notes by Huntly Carter on post-war European theater, folder 288, Huntly Carter Papers, MSE/MN 5000, University of Notre Dame Rare Books & Special Collections; 'Art and Drama: Ballet Bakst', *New Age*, 11.9 (1912), p. 211.
102. Havelock Ellis, *The Dance of Life* (London: Constable, 1923), pp. 57–61, 288–334, N. Evreinof, *The Theatre of the Soul: A Monodrama in One Act*, trans. by Marie Potapenko and Christopher St. John (London: Henderson's, 1915), Rutland Boughton, 'Music for the Workers: The Unimportance of Art', *Sunday Worker*, 21 June 1925, p. 10, Rutland Boughton, 'Festivaledication', *The Sackbut*, 11.5 (1930), 135–40, Christina Walshe, 'The Staging of Music-Drama in England', *Musical Opinion & Music Trade Review*, 40 (1916) p. 37. See also Beasley, *Russomania*, pp. 219–29, 233–34, Katharine Cockin, *Edith Craig and the Theatres of Art* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017) pp. 123–25, Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism*, pp. 116–19, Alexandra Smith, 'Nikolai Evreinov and Edith Craig as Mediums of Modernist Sensibility', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 26.3 (2010), 203–216.
103. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World: From Nietzsche to Stalinism* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), pp. 1–24.
104. Mally, *Revolutionary Acts*, pp. 10–11.
105. Rutland Boughton, 'An Essay on Choral Drama', in Boughton and Buckley, *Music-Drama of the Future*, 1–39 (p. 2).
106. Huntly Carter, 'Reviews: The House That the Set-Backs Built', *The Egoist*, 1.6 (1914), 114–16 (p. 115), Huntly Carter, 'Art and Drama: The Impersonal Note of England, Russia and Japan', *The Egoist*, 1.24 (1914), 461–62 (p. 461). See Shepherd, *The English Theatrical Avant-Garde*, pp. 122–23.
107. Huntly Carter, 'Theatricalising the Drama and "Pygmalion"', *The Egoist*, 1.15 (1914), 297–98 (p. 198), Boughton, 'An Essay on Choral Drama', p. 26.
108. Boughton, 'Music and the Workers: Sunday Music Clubs', p. 10.

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109. Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: The Rule of No Rules', p. 9; Huntly Carter 'Workers and the Theatre', *Sunday Worker*, 12 April 1925, p. 6.
110. Walshe, 'In the Country' (21 June 1925), p. 11.
111. Kelly, Letter to the Editor, qtd in Ashleigh, 'Workers and the Theatre: Plays Needed—Now is The Time', p. 8. See also Jones, 'The Workers' Theatre Movement in the 'Twenties', p. 267.
112. Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: Plot Me No Plots', p. 10, Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: Prehistoric Plays', p. 10.
113. Huntly Carter, 'The Dances of the "Stars"', *The Freewoman*, 2.45 (1912), [361]–362 (p. 362).
114. Carter, *The New Spirit in Drama and Art*, pp. 7, 8.
115. Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: The Rule of No Rules', p. 9.
116. See Bruce Clarke, *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism: Gender, Individualism and Science* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 141–46, Anne Fernihough, *Freewomen and Supermen: Edwardian Radicals and Literary Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 34–36, 171, and Michael Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine, 1908–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 63–68.
117. Huntly Carter, 'My Hypothesis', *New Freewoman*, 1.13 (1913), 255–56.
118. Carter, *The New Theatre and Cinema of Soviet Russia*, p. xv, 67–68. On Meierkhol'd's symbolism, see *Meyerhold on Theatre*, ed. and trans. by Edward Braun (London: Methuen, 1969), pp. 20–22, and Edward Braun, *Meyerhold: A Revolution in Theatre* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1995), pp. 32–34, 63–64, 200.
119. Huntly Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: Mammondrama', *Sunday Worker*, 22 March 1925, p. 10; Wm. Paul, 'What is Art?', review of Upton Sinclair, *Mammonart* (1925), *Sunday Worker*, 12 April 1925, p. 5; Rutland Boughton, 'Music for the Workers: A Revolutionary Musician', *Sunday Worker*, 28 June 1924, p. 10.
120. Upton Sinclair, *Mammonart* (Pasadena, CA: privately published, 1925), p. 9.
121. Huntly Carter, 'A Pageant of Propagandists', review of Upton Sinclair, *Mammonart* (1925), *The Plebs*, 17.5 (May 1925), 196–200 (p. 198).
122. Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre: A Weapon for the Workers', p. 6. Carter's archive contains a copy of the November 1927 issue of *The Plebs*, the 'Special Russian Number'. The most heavily annotated article is Maurice Dobb's 'The Revolution in Art and Literature', at the end of which Carter writes, 'In this article the principle of art is confused with "Art" as propaganda', folder 301, Huntly Carter Papers, MSE/MN 5000, University of Notre Dame Rare Books & Special Collections.
123. Thomas, 'A Propertyless Theatre for the Propertyless Class', p. 87. See also Shiach, *Discourse on Popular Culture*, p. 159.
124. Stourac and McCreery, *Theatre as a Weapon*, pp. 237–56, Samuel, 'Theatre and Socialism in Britain', pp. 58–64. See Shiach, *Discourse on Popular Culture*, pp. 162–170, for a nuanced analysis of the demise of the WTM which, against Samuel's argument that 'the WTM was a casualty of the Popular Front', demonstrates fundamental contradictions within the movement. Discussing how the WTM 'refused to pay any attention to the cultural forms being widely consumed by its audience', she quotes and endorses Carter's concern that the WTM was not popular with workers, and his criticism of its 'purity of isolation'.
125. Saville, 'Forms and Developments in the British Workers' Theatre', p. 29, L. J. Macfarlane, *The British Communist Party: Its Origin and Development until 1929* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1966), p. 143. See Ann L. Ardis, 'Democracy

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and Modernism: *The New Age* under A. R. Orage (1907–22)', in Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, eds, *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazine*, 1: Britain and Ireland, 1880–1955 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 204–225 (p. 205 n. 6): '*The New Age*'s circulation peaked at 22,000 in 1908, thanks mainly to the debates about socialism Orage staged in early volumes. More typically, its circulation hovered between 3,000 and 4,000', and Wulfman, 'Ford Madox Ford and *The English Review* (1908–37)', pp. 226–39 (p. 235): 'despite the high acclaim accorded *The English Review*, its circulation never rose above 1,000 copies a month – far lower than the 5,000 copies anticipated in the first print run'.