

Brecht On Magic

by Ian Saville

Various magic props are on stage, and a flipchart with title "BRECHT ON MAGIC" displayed. Ian enters.

IAN: Good evening. My name is Ian Saville, and I'm about to perform my show, **Brecht On Magic** for you this evening. This involves a certain amount of what I call Socialist Conjuring. I realise that some members of the audience may not be entirely familiar with this genre

(Ian turns page on flipchart, revealing title:

PROLOGUE: AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIALIST CONJURING.)

so to lead you gently into it, I thought I'd start off by showing you a trick that I saw an ordinary bourgeois magician perform many years ago. But in true socialist manner, I'll not only show you the trick but also how it's done, and a dialectically opposite method of performing it.

This is a trick I saw a magician do many years ago, with a red silk handkerchief (*shows hankie*) very similar to the one I have in my hand. The magician pushed the handkerchief into the top of his fist (*does so*), and then pulled it out the bottom, only to find that it had changed to an entirely different colour (*pulls out hankie to find it's blue, but leaves fist closed*). I thought this was absolutely amazing. I don't know what you think, but I was very impressed. But then my consciousness hadn't been raised very far at the time. (*looks at fist. Looks at audience. Raises fist.*) Solidarity! In fact, I was so impressed that after the show I decided to go backstage (*opens hand, showing it empty, and gestures back*) to ask him how it was done. Please, hold back your applause. He told me that to perform this trick effectively, you need not one, but two handkerchiefs. Some of you may have worked this out already (*gets other red hankie*) and they must both be different colours. That's very important. It's no good just one of them being a different colour, they've got to *both* be different colours. And before the show begins you take one of the handkerchiefs, in this case it's going to be the red one, and you push it well down into the top of your fist (*does so*). This is technically what we call the "preparation", and it must be done in complete privacy. Or as near to it as you can get. You could for instance do it at a Liberal Democrat meeting (*or other appropriate/topical line*), but if you can do it in complete and utter privacy that's better. Now you're ready to begin. But one thing you must remember, once you step on stage, is to keep this hand very tightly closed (*on this word, Ian opens hand, showing it empty, then shuts it again*), because otherwise some of the more astute members of the audience will see the red handkerchief concealed there, and they'll know exactly how the trick is done. So keep this hand closed (*opens hand again and shuts it*).

So you come on stage, and push the blue handkerchief into the top of your fist. As you do so, you carefully pull the red handkerchief out of the bottom of your fist (*does so*). Couldn't be simpler, really. Blue one in the top, red one out of the bottom. A little tip, though, if you do decide to do this trick, (which I can see a lot of you probably will) try not to talk too much during it. Because a lot of magicians spoil it with a lot of patter. And it is basically a visual trick. As you can see, the politics comes across visually. You'll notice that I'm doing the opposite of what the bourgeois magician did, going from blue to red in true socialist manner. It's a very politically effective trick, this. Although it's not subtle, I'll admit that. In fact, I could do this trick completely silently, and I would still be making the political point. Actually, there was a time when I used to do this trick, and the rest of the act, without talking at all. But I've had to stop that, because under present government legislation it could be construed as an admission of guilt.

Actually, I could tell you something about this trick. Shall I tell them? Well, they might think ... Yes, but they couldn't ... on the other hand would they just say ... well, I suppose so ... all right, I'll tell you. Sorry about that. I was just working out a little internal contradiction there. What I was going to say was that this is, in fact, the trick that I first performed for Fidel Castro. (*Pause to let it sink in, then in more confessional tone:*) Well, he said he was Fidel Castro. (*Pause again. Decide to come clean*) Well, what he actually said was, if you're a magician, I'm ... Anyway, never show the two handkerchiefs separately (*does so*) because then it's obvious how the trick is done. Just keep pushing that in there, and pull that out there, then you can put the red handkerchief in your pocket, stand back, and wait for the applause (*puts hankie in pocket, holds up both hands and shows them empty*).

(Ian picks up scarf. Waves and flourishes it about stage in an exaggerated series of theatrical gestures, with mock seriousness. Then, breaking and speaking to audience:)

I don't know why I do that.

It's got nothing to do with the trick.

Actually, I do know. It is, in fact, a bourgeois flourish, left over from when I was a bourgeois magician. Because I am, internally, a mass of contradictions, some of which emerge during the course of this show, and some of which I save up for the journey home. Or the next Labour government. Whichever is the sooner.

Actually, that is one of the political certainties of our time. I can be fairly sure that there won't be a Labour government before I get home. Unless the traffic is very bad.

Having mentioned there that I was once a bourgeois magician, I should point out, people don't always realise that. Just a minute, I'll put this down, because I want to talk to you about this (*puts down silk*). Because, people often ask me how I became a socialist magician. Not necessarily in exactly those words, of course. Sometimes it's after we've been talking for some time, and they say "Oh yes, you're a socialist magician. How did that come about?" or something like that. Anyway, in one form or another, the question comes up often. Very often. Very often indeed. In

fact I'm getting sick of the question. And that's why I devised this show. To answer that question, and the other questions that people ask a socialist magician. There are in fact three questions, and they will all be answered during the course of this show, though not necessarily truthfully.

As I say, the first question is "how did you become a socialist conjurer?". Now, to dramatise my transition from bourgeois magician to socialist conjurer, I'll be using a number of theatrical techniques, dramatic devices, some of which you may not be entirely familiar with, so I thought I'd better just go through them now, so you'll know what's happening. For instance there's a technique that I'll be using throughout this show, a technique known as acting. I don't know whether you've seen that, but I will be acting throughout this show. In fact, I am already acting, because the words that I'm speaking are part of a prepared text, which I've memorised and am now reciting with certain emphasis and gesture and, erm You see, even that little hesitation is written into the script, to foster an atmosphere of informality, and I think it works quite well. And, of course, that explanation is in the script. And what I just said. And that. We could go on all night like this. And that wasn't an ad lib either. Nor was that.

So that's acting. Don't worry, I am trained in this, so there's no danger involved. But apart from acting, there's another thing I should mention. because to show you how I was in the past, I'll use a technique borrowed from the films, the flashback. But I won't go straight into a flashback, because then you'll be confused - you'll think, "Why's he suddenly behaving in this strange way?". No, I'll have to give you some warning that I'm about to go into a flashback. For instance, there'll be a line in the text, a textual cue, that will hark back to the past. For example, to be concrete, there's a line coming up fairly soon which goes "I well remember ..." (that already gives it away, you see), "I well remember my last performance as a bourgeois magician". And when you hear that, you'll probably think to yourself "Oh, he's harking back to the past. I wouldn't be surprised if he goes into a flashback". And you'll be right.

But I won't go straight from the line into the flashback, because what I'll need to do then is change the atmosphere here subtly, which I'll do with a sound cue, by playing a couple of chords on this autoharp, like this. (*Gets autoharp and plays chords.*) There you are, you see how that's changed the atmosphere. But could you go back to how you were, because I'm not doing the flashback yet. (*Puts autoharp back at side of stage.*)

But I won't go straight from there into the flashback, either. Because this is a very visual show, as you've probably already noticed, and so I'll give you a visual cue before I go into the flashback. This is something also borrowed from the films - you've probably seen this many times - a technique known as the wavy body.

(Demonstrates wavy body technique.)

So that's filled you in on the techniques. What was I talking about, before I was so rudely interrupted by myself. Oh yes, I was telling you about the time when I was a bourgeois magician. Well, it was a phase of my life that lasted some time, and I look back on it without any regret, but it was a period that came to a sudden and

rather dramatic end. In fact, I well remember (yes, that's right), I well remember my last performance as a bourgeois magician.

(Gets autoharp and plays chords, then rushes back to replace autoharp.)

(to himself) Wavy body, wavy body...

(does wavy body movements)

And we're in the past.

(Changes title on flip chart pad to:

1. FLASHBACK: BOURGEOIS CONJURING.)

(referring to title) This is in case there's any latecomers.

(Smoothly) Ladies and Gentlemen, let me transport you for a few moments from this humdrum world of reality, into the mysterious world of magic ...

(Ian turns on tape recorder at side of stage, and music - Satie's 'Trois Gymnopedies', arr. Debussy - starts to play. Ian steps into blue spot backstage centre, and other lights go down. Silent magic - continuous card production, appearing cane, more cards, floating ball. All the while Ian smiles broadly at audience. Then music is suddenly replaced by sound of interference. Lights flash, then come back to full as at start. Ian stops what he has been doing, and goes over to tape recorder. Interference stops, and a booming voice issues from tape:)

VOICE: Greetings, Comrade!

IAN: I'm sorry about this, we're getting some interference. Sometimes the taxi drivers...

VOICE: No, we are not interference, comrade. We have come to talk to you.

IAN: Is this some sort of joke?

VOICE: Why, is anybody laughing?

IAN: No, they're not, actually. Look, what's all this about?

VOICE: It's too difficult to explain over a tape. We want to talk to you about *culture*.

IAN: Culture? But I'm in the middle of a show here ...

VOICE: What better time could there be? Stay there and we will manifest ourselves.

(Ian turns off tape)

IAN: And so they appeared to me.

(Ian turns to next page of flipchart, with title

2. DEVELOPMENT OF NARRATIVE.

Small inflatable cloud with rainbow behind is attached to flipchart.)

They were in fact Gods. Fictional Gods. They were the three gods from Bertolt Brecht's play *The Good Person of Setzuan*. I didn't know the play at the time, but they explained to me that in it, these Gods are very worried about people complaining that they find it difficult to live in the sort of society we have - in Capitalist society - and to remain *good*. So to prove that it is possible, they come down to earth to find some good people, who'll put them up for the night. But they can only find one such good person, and she happens to be a prostitute. So that she doesn't have to continue that trade they give her some money to enable her to set up in business. But she finds that she can't be successful in business *and* remain good. She has to invent an alter-ego, an evil cousin, to run her business affairs.

Now these gods had participated in this parable of capitalism many times. And they had become convinced by its arguments. In fact they had decided to act on them. They had reorganised the heavens as a Socialist Utopia. They'd solved all the social problems and established a just and equitable society. But of course, being socialists, they still had debates and arguments. And a particularly virulent debate that was going on at that time was over the question of Culture. Yes, culture. Was it possible, they wondered, *was it possible* (I'm sorry, I didn't mean to shout, but that's how they spoke to me. They tried to sell me a paper as well, but I...) was it possible to have socialist culture within capitalist society? It seemed like a trivial question to me, but they were very worked up about it. So they had decided to resolve the debate by coming down into Capitalist society and looking for some socialist culture. But unfortunately they hadn't brought with them enough money to get into any of the places where you can see real socialist culture. Like the National Theatre or the Royal Shakespeare Company. So they had tuned in to me. A lowly bourgeois magician. But they could tell that I had socialist ideas, and they could see that I was practising a *popular* cultural form. Could I combine, they asked, my socialist ideas with this popular cultural form of conjuring tricks? Now this was an idea that had never occurred to me, but I decided that it might have some merit, so, off the top of my head, I quickly improvised what was to become the first socialist magic trick. Funnily enough, the one I was about to show you with this silk scarf.

I tied a knot in this silk scarf. This knot, I told them, represents the knotty problems of society (well, this was off the top of my head). The question is, how do we solve the knotty problems of society. There are of course magic words, and the magic words, as you've probably already guessed, the magic words are "mass action for a radical transformation of society from a society based primarily on profit to a society based on human need". So can you all join in after three. In fact I'll leave it up to you. I'll count to three, thus providing the leadership, then you come in with the magic words as the voice of the masses. 1 ... 2 ... 3!

That wasn't very good, though we had a small vanguard section over here. Of course, the gods came back at me straight away, because they spoke like that all the time. But I can see that for this audience we're going to have to simplify it down to one word, which means basically the same thing - "solidarity".

Here we go. Don't say "here we go" though. We tried that over and over again during the miners' strike, and it didn't work. I'll join in as well this time. 1 ... 2 ... 3 ... Solidarity!

(Slowly and magically, knot unties itself)

There you are, knotty problems solved.

So anyway, I showed this trick to the gods, and they were very pleased. They said that this had now resolved the debate over whether it was possible to have socialist culture in capitalist society. They didn't actually say which way the debate had been resolved, but it *had* been resolved, so they were now able to go back again - they were a bit fed up down here.

But I realised that they had now opened up a whole new world of possibilities for me. But was I up to the challenge? Would I be able to create this *genre* of socialist magic tricks single-handed? Because I have my weaknesses, both artistic and political. For instance, I find it difficult to think up new material, as anyone who's seen me before will know. And I have my political faults as well. For instance, I do private children's parties for money - I'm not sure if that's really correct.

So (*Ian takes cloud/rainbow, holds it up and addresses it*) as they were leaving, I called out to them. I said, look, before you go, can you give me some help or guidance in this onerous task?

They stopped. (*some business with cloud*) Then they said:

(Ian runs over and turns on tape, then rushes back to same position, moving cloud in time with gods' speech on tape)

GODS: We have considered your request, and find that it is not unreasonable ...

IAN: I didn't think it was.

GODS: However, we are not allowed to meddle in the course of history.

IAN: That's a shame.

GODS: ...Accordingly, we have left you our suitcase...

IAN: Your what?

GODS: Suitcase. Over there.

IAN: Oh. Right.

GODS: Which contains some items which may be of use to you. Farewell, and good luck, comrade!

IAN: And so they went, leaving me this suitcase. What could be in it, I won...

GODS: Er, don't forget to turn off the tape recorder.

IAN: Oh, right. (*does so.*) So, what could be in the suitcase. There was only one way to find out, and that was to open it up and take a look. I looked down at the battered and well-used suitcase, and opened the lid. What's this? An old tatty portrait of Karl Marx. I don't know what I could use that for in my act, but maybe there's something. A copy of Bertolt Brecht's play, The Good Person of Setzuan. In German: "Ich bin ein wasserverkauf hier in der hauptstadt von Setzuan. I couldn't work out how I was going to use this in a magic act, either, but never mind. What else? Ah. Brecht on Theatre. The Epic Theatre. I see. "Show the world as changeable." Well, I could change the colour of things, or something. "Narrative rather than plot". Yes, yes. I wonder what that means. Still, might come in useful. What else? A copy of Bertolt Brecht's Poems, 1913-1956 edited by John Willett and Ralph Mannheim. Well, there's a lot of material there. A pair of glasses. Some old clothes. And that's all there was in the suitcase. A shame really. If there was more I might have been able to make a whole scene out of this. But there you are.

MUFFLED VOICE: Oh Der Haifisch

IAN: That's when I heard this voice.

MUFFLED VOICE: Der hat zahne/Und die tragt er, im gesicht/Und Macheath, der hat ein Messer/Doch das Messer, sieht man nicht

(*Ian opens and closes suitcase, with sound becoming louder and softer, during preceding singing*)

IAN: It appeared to be coming from the suitcase! Who could this be? Who was this in the suitcase?

(*coming forward*) Now, you may be wondering why I don't realise immediately that this is going to be Bertolt Brecht in the suitcase. Well, I must remind you that I am *acting*, and although I am portraying myself, I portraying myself as I was some time ago. I haven't seen any of the publicity for this show. I don't know that called *Brecht on Magic*. As far as I'm concerned I'm just opening up a suitcase - as you may have done many times in your life. You've never expected to find a dummy of Bertolt Brecht in a suitcase, have you? No. Kierkegaard, maybe, but not a materialist like Brecht. So when I see what is in the suitcase, you will see me assume an attitude of surprise. Great surprise actually. In fact, this is something of an acting challenge. Any of you who are studying acting should take note of this. Because you'll see that I just move directly from the one state to the other, I don't sort of slide into the surprise. Here you see me about to open the suitcase. As you can see I'm quite calm. Although there is a certain amount of tension, because I've just heard a voice coming from this suitcase, but that is an occupational hazard for ventriloquists. Anyway, fairly calm, and then I open up the suitcase and ...

(*jumps*) Oh my God!!

I think maybe I overdid it a bit there, but never mind. Oh my god, there appears to be a person in the suitcase.

BRECHT: Of course I'm a person. What do you think I am?

IAN: Who are you?

BRECHT: I'm Bertolt Brecht.

IAN: Dertolt Drecht?

BRECHT: No, not Dertolt Drecht. Bertolt Brecht. Haven't you heard of me?

IAN: Of course I've heard of you. Bertolt Brecht, the great German socialist playwright.

BRECHT: That's right. What am I doing here?

IAN: You were left here by three gods. The ones from your play The Good Person of Setzuan.

BRECHT: They dumped me here?

IAN: No, they didn't dump you here. You were left here for a purpose.

BRECHT: What purpose?

IAN: To help me.

BRECHT: And who are you?

IAN: I'm Ian Saville. I'm a magician. And you've got to help me become a better magician.

BRECHT: (*Pause*) Shit.

IAN: What do you mean, shit? Don't you want to help me?

BRECHT: Of course I don't want to help you.

IAN: Why not?

BRECHT: I'm a great German playwright, and I've got to help some stupid magician, some stupid conjurer do stupid magic tricks?

IAN: But you don't understand. It's not just helping me to do the magic tricks. You've got to help me put socialist content into the tricks.

BRECHT: Oh. I see. I see. (*pause*) Shit.

IAN: Could you please stop saying shit all the time. This is an intellectual show. I don't want it to be full of shit, shit, shit all the time. (*to audience*) Sorry.

BRECHT: All right, I'll say scheiss.

IAN: That's better. German. More intellectual. What does it mean, actually?

BRECHT: It means shit, of course. Scheiss Scheiss Scheiss.

IAN: Listen, I thought you might be interested in magic. After all, it's a non-naturalistic aspect of performance, which I thought was what you were after.

BRECHT: Well, I'm not. I'm not interested in magic tricks, I've never been interested in magic tricks, and as far as I'm concerned I never will be interested in magic tricks. Now will you put me back in this box....

IAN: No, wait a minute. I thought magic tricks might fit in with your theories.

BRECHT: What theories?

IAN: Whatsit. Alienation.

BRECHT: Alienation? You mean verfremdung. Alienation is a very bad translation of something I called verfremdung. The verfremdungseffekt.

IAN: All right, the verfremdungseffekt. Magic tricks might fit in very well with that. Whatever it is.

BRECHT: You don't know what it is?

IAN: Well, you could explain it.

BRECHT: All right, I'll explain. Verfremdung means, literally, "making strange". You see, in our everyday lives we take things for granted, so if they are shown on the stage exactly as they appear in life, we still don't look at them properly. This is why I'm opposed to naturalism.

IAN: I see.

BRECHT: So I devised a series of techniques to make us look anew at the things around us.

IAN: So, it's a way of sort of taking a fresh look at things we normally take for granted.

BRECHT: Yes.

IAN: Like trousers, for instance.

(Pause)

BRECHT: What?

IAN: Trousers. Just at random, I thought, trousers. Because people see trousers all around them all the time, and they don't think about the trousers ... what's behind the ... and ... erm ... Not trousers then?

BRECHT: Of course not trousers. What have trousers got to do with it? I'm talking about oppression and exploitation.

IAN: Oh, it's a political thing.

BRECHT: Of course it's a political thing. I'm a political writer, what do you expect?

IAN: So how did you achieve this *verfremdungseffekt*, this making strange.

BRECHT: Well, I would use a number of techniques. I would set a story in an unfamiliar location, or in a different time. I would encourage the audience to sit back and think about the issues, to weigh up the arguments. They could drink if they wanted to, smoke if they wanted to ...

IAN: Smoke?

BRECHT: Yes.

IAN: Well, I don't agree with that.

BRECHT: What are you talking about?

IAN: Smoking might help you think better, but in the long run you don't get so much thinking done because you die sooner.

BRECHT: Look, can you just put me back in this box and let me get ...

IAN: No, look - if you're not interested in magic - is there anything I do that you might be at all interested in?

BRECHT: Well, there is one thing. I don't know if you do it ...

IAN: What?

BRECHT: Well, it's this thing where they talk from here. What do they call it ... ?

IAN: I don't know ...

BRECHT: Ventriloquism. I'm quite interested in that.

IAN: Really?

BRECHT: Yes. That fascinates me.

IAN: Actually, I can see that. I can see why ventriloquism would fascinate you. Because a ventriloquist is, in a way, an actor playing two parts at the same time, so the audience isn't drawn into the character, but sees the process of performance, so that the audience doesn't just respond on an emotional level, but makes a critical response ...

BRECHT: In your case very critical.

IAN: ... a critical response to the ideas. Like in some of your plays the central character is split into two parts, and you could do that with ventriloquism. Is that what fascinates you?

BRECHT: No.

IAN: Well, what is it that fascinates you about ventriloquists?

BRECHT: It's the way they can speak without moving their lips.

IAN: Well, could you help me become a better ventriloquist?

BRECHT: Oh yes. I could help you become a better ventriloquist. Straight away. Easy.

IAN: How?

(Brecht puts hand over Ian's mouth)

BRECHT: There you are. Nobody can see your lips moving. "My name is Bertolt Brecht". I'm speaking much more clearly.

IAN: No, you're just making fun of me now. I'll tell you what. I'll lend you my book on ventriloquism, if you give me some advice on how to do socialist magic.

BRECHT: All right, all right. I'll take pity on you. I'll tell you what's wrong with your act.

IAN: What?

BRECHT: You talk too much. Too much theory, not enough practice. Too many abstract ideas. You're supposed to be a magician?

IAN: Yes.

BRECHT: Well, do magic tricks. Do good magic tricks. Don't just stand talking about it. The truth is concrete.

IAN: Yes, I like that. "The truth is concrete". But where do I get the truth?

BRECHT: From the classic texts. Study the classic texts.

IAN: You mean classic Marxist texts?

BRECHT: Well, I'm not talking about Romeo and Juliet. Also look at the world around you, and put all this into your tricks.

IAN: So you're saying I should adapt a classic Marxist text into a magic trick?

BRECHT: Well, you can if you want. I'm not saying ...

IAN: Yes, that's a brilliant idea. I'll do that!

And so it was, after fifteen hours of criticism and self-criticism, under the unblinking gaze of Bertolt Brecht ...

BRECHT: Actually, I can blink.

IAN: Can you? How?

BRECHT: It's the little ring at the back there.

IAN: What, this one? (*Brecht closes one eye*)

BRECHT: No, that's winking, not blinking. Here, let me do it. (*puts his hand up his own back. Both eyes close.*) There you are. If you want anything done properly around here, you've got to do it yourself.

IAN: ... And so it was that under the ... gaze of Bertolt Brecht, I worked out my next trick,

Flipchart title - 3. CLASS STRUGGLE ROPE TRICK

This trick is actually an adaptation of a passage from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' Communist Manifesto - pages 34-37 of the Lawrence and Wishart edition. Those of you who've brought it with can follow it as we go through, otherwise you can look it up when you get home. Though I think you'll find that Marx actually suggests you should use slightly thicker rope. Still, I don't think I can be accused of revisionism here. We've got to change with the conditions in society.

I have here three pieces of rope, a long one, a medium sized one and a short one. And they each represent a different class in society. This very small one - though it's small, it is immensely powerful in our society, because it owns the means of production, distribution and exchange. This is the ruling class, the *bourgeoisie*. Sometimes gets a boo, but obviously this is a more sophisticated audience than I normally work for.

This one here, somewhat larger as you can see, represents a combination of classes - small shopkeepers, large land owning peasants ... I don't go any further than that in case I offend somebody in the audience. These are the middle classes. They don't own the means of production, just a certain amount of property, a house, a car, that sort of thing.

This one here, the largest of them all, represents the working classes. A lot of them are out of work at the moment, but we still call them the working classes.

As you can see, there's a constant state of antagonism between the ruling classes and the workers, with the middle classes not knowing which side to jump on - stay there!

(*Ropes are waved about at one another*)

Now you've probably noticed how good I am at dealing with hecklers. I think you must have noticed that because nobody's heckled me so far. The reason for this is that I've been to weekend schools on heckling. Like most of us alternative performers. We go to a big house in the country, and then, after coffee and registration, we have to sit around in a circle and heckle one another, then we have to come back very quickly with a reply that is not only razor sharp, but also politically correct. It's a very difficult thing to do, but I've learnt a lot from the exercise. And one of the things I've learned is that to deal effectively with hecklers you've got to be able to *anticipate*. To know in advance the points in your act

where somebody's likely to shout something out, so that you can come *straight back* at them - sometimes even before they've said it.

For instance, at this point, I know that in an audience of about this size (or a little larger) somebody in the audience is almost certain to shout "well, what happens in a revolutionary or pre-Revolutionary situation?". You were going to say it weren't you? No use denying it, I can tell. Well, I'll tell you precisely what happens at the particular conjuncture that you've just outlined so succinctly. Sorry, I'm not being intimidating, am I? Because if I am, I'll criticise myself for it later.

Anyway, what happens in a revolutionary or pre-Revolutionary situation. Well, first of all things get confused. As you can see, the ropes are confused, I'm confused, no doubt you're also confused. This represents society in a state of confusion, in that state where it would just take a conscious effort on the part of the masses to change the whole nature of society from a society based on profit to a society based on human need. In case you don't recognise it, this is the point at which the TUC usually goes for arbitration.

But if that doesn't happen, we should find that we have three equal classes, three equal pieces of rope!

Ropes are now all same size. Applause

Now, those of you who clapped there are the reformists in the audience. As the rest of you understand, this is not a satisfactory situation. There are still three classes, though they may appear equal. The revolutionary process must continue, with more confusion, until at last we should find that we have just one class, or a classless society.

Three ropes have now become one rope. Ian acknowledges applause, and changes flipchart.

Flipchart title - 4. CRITICISM AND SELF- CRITICISM

IAN: ... And so I showed the class-struggle rope trick to Brecht, but I also had a few questions for him ...

So, what did you think of the rope trick?

BRECHT: I thought it was very crude. Maybe you should have read *Romeo and Juliet*.

IAN: But do you think it had any potential?

BRECHT: Maybe a little bit.

IAN: Well, actually, there's something I'd like to ask you about. Because I've been looking through your theoretical works ...

BRECHT: When?

IAN: What do you mean, when?

BRECHT: Well, you just changed the thing there, and walked over here. When did you have time to look through my theoretical work? You can't just skim through ...

IAN: But this is a play. I'm assuming a passage of time outside the actual period of performance. It's a dramatic device.

BRECHT: Oh, I thought you were observing the unities.

IAN: Of course I'm not. I don't even know what they are. I'm only a magician you know.

BRECHT: All right. So what have you seen in my theoretical works?

IAN: Well, you said that you weren't interested in magic tricks, is that right?

BRECHT: Yes.

IAN: Then how do you explain this. Look, it's a series of exercises for actors that you wrote about 1939 or 40,

BRECHT: Yeah ...

IAN: And there are 25 exercises, lettered "a" to "y". And what is the first thing on the list? Go on - you read it.

BRECHT: Let's see. It's very small print. You got my glasses?

IAN: Here you are.

(Ian puts glasses on Brecht a la Eric Morecambe)

Oh look. Eric Morecambe used to do that.

BRECHT: What are you talking about?

IAN: Eric Morecambe. He used to put his glasses on like that.

BRECHT: Who's Eric Morecambe?

IAN: He was a comedian. He's got something in common with you.

BRECHT: What?

IAN: He's dead.

BRECHT: Was that an ad lib?

IAN: Yes.

BRECHT: Don't do it again!

IAN: I just thought ...

BRECHT: (*Mutters*) Eric Morecambe! Now let's see. It says - "conjuring tricks, including the attitude of the spectators". "Conjuring tricks, including the attitude of the spectators"? "Conjuring tricks, including the attitude of the spectators"! What does that mean?

IAN: You told me that you weren't interested in magic tricks, and here you are, you put magic first on the list of exercises for actors. It's a complete contradiction of what you said before.

BRECHT: So what. I said a lot of contradictory things in my time. You shouldn't take what I say as gospel. You sure this (*the book*) is me, anyway? It's not Piscator is it? Oh. *Brecht on Theatre*. I suppose that's me.

IAN: So you did have some interest in magic.

BRECHT: I had a passing interest in magic on one particular day when I happened to be writing a list. And I felt like winding you up a bit in that first scene. Anyway ...

IAN: What ...

BRECHT: I've been looking at that book ...

IAN: Which book?

BRECHT: The book on ventriloquism ...

IAN: When?!

BRECHT: In that same passage of time, of course.

IAN: Oh. I see.

BRECHT: And I think ...

IAN: What do you think?

BRECHT: In my opinion ...

IAN: Your opinion ...

BRECHT: Yes ...

IAN: Carry on ...

BRECHT: Why do you keep interrupting me?

(*following passage very fast indeed:*)

IAN: Ah, well, that's because I read in the book ...

BRECHT: Which book?

IAN: The book on ventriloquism

BRECHT: Oh, that book

IAN: That you have to keep up

BRECHT: Keep up what?

IAN: A quick cross-flow

BRECHT: A quick cross-flow?

IAN: A quick cross-flow of patter

BRECHT: patter

IAN: So that it looks as though

BRECHT: as though what

IAN: As though we're talking

BRECHT: Talking

IAN: Talking at the same

BRECHT: At the same what

IAN: At the same

BRECHT: the same

IAN: At the same *time*.

(If there is applause from the audience, Brecht says "No, don't encourage him")

BRECHT: Well, personally, I think you should leave that bit out.

IAN: What, because it's too illusionistic, builds up too strong an illusion of two people talking to each other, thus leading the audience into a false state of consciousness. Is that why?

BRECHT: No.

IAN: Why, then?

BRECHT: Because they can see your lips moving. Have you ever thought of using a dummy of Marcel Marceau? I should think that would suit your style of ventriloquism. Or doing more work on the radio. That's the medium for you as a ventriloquist. And a magician.

IAN: Could you stop making fun of my ventriloquism?

BRECHT: All right, I won't say another word about it.

IAN: Just tell us what you thought of the book on ventriloquism.

BRECHT: I thought it was lousy. Shit. I mean scheiss.

IAN: What do you mean?

BRECHT: These ventriloquists, they just do these lousy little skits and sketches, they have no idea how useful this skill could be ...

IAN: Look, this is just a stream of invective. Could you be more specific in your criticisms?

BRECHT: All right. All right. I'll be specific. Take *you* for example.

IAN: What about me?

BRECHT: Well, apart from the fact that your lips move ...

IAN: I thought you weren't going to mention that.

BRECHT: I said *apart* from that fact. I wasn't mentioning it. In fact I was trying to draw a veil over the fact that your mouth is wide open when I talk, so that they can see at the back of the theatre ...

IAN: All right, all right ...

BRECHT: Anyway, apart from that not inconsiderable fact, I don't know why you don't use a bit of imagination.

IAN: I use imagination. I've used a lot of imagination in this show ...

BRECHT: No. You can't develop a scene for 5 minutes without it becoming an argument. You say something, the dummy contradicts. The dummy says something, you contradict.

IAN: No I don't.

BRECHT: There you are! Anything for a cheap laugh. And it doesn't even get a laugh.

IAN: Look, what you don't understand is that this antagonism between ventriloquist and dummy is basic to this form. It's always there, along with an underlying affection for the dummy. It carries the whole thing along. It's basic to the form, it's *dictated* by the form.

BRECHT: What do you mean, dictated by form? What are you, a man or a mouse? Why don't you *play* with the form? Upset the audience's expectations. You could even cooperate with the dummy.

IAN: Cooperate with the dummy? You think that would be more radical?

BRECHT: It would be less boring.

IAN: All right. So how can I cooperate with the dummy?

BRECHT: You could actually make this ventriloquism almost like a historical play.

IAN: A historical play?

BRECHT: Look, will you stop repeating what I say? If they don't understand it when I say it you should practise a bit more. Don't just keep repeating things. We'll be here all night at this rate.

IAN: All right. But what do you mean by a historical play?

BRECHT: Well, I've been thinking about this, and I've even done a little bit of work on it. Get me that picture over there.

IAN: What, that one?

BRECHT: (*pointing*) That's right.

IAN: That one over there?

BRECHT: Yes.

IAN: That picture? The one that was in the suitcase?

BRECHT: Look, stop moving my hand, and just get the picture!

IAN: OK.

(Ian gets picture of Karl Marx with moving mouth.)

IAN: It's Karl Marx.

BRECHT: Who did you think it would be? Father Christmas? Now let me just get my hand in here ... this is uncomfortable ... I haven't felt this bad since I died ...

Now, watch this.

(Brecht operates Karl Marx image and moving mouth)

Hello Karl Marx.

MARX: (*in Cockney accent*) Hello.

BRECHT: How are you?

MARX: I'm not too bad.

BRECHT: Actually, Karl, I was just wondering - why is it that you speak with an English accent?

MARX: It's because of all the years I've spent in Highgate cemetery.

IAN: Just a minute, let's see you do that again.

BRECHT: What?

IAN: Get him to say that again.

BRECHT: All right.

MARX: It's because of all the years I've spent in Highgate Cemetery.

IAN: I thought so! I can see your lips moving!

BRECHT: Well, I'm a playwright, not a ventriloquist! Anyway, Karl.

MARX: Yes.

BRECHT: My name is Bertolt Brecht.

MARX: Dertolt Drecht?

BRECHT: No, not Dertolt Dreht. Bertolt Brecht. Haven't you heard of me?

MARX: No, I haven't actually.

BRECHT: Well, I was born after you died.

MARX: It's not surprising I haven't heard of you then.

BRECHT: No, but listen, you'll be interested in this. I discovered "alienation".

MARX: No, I discovered "alienation".

BRECHT: No, no. This is a different sort of alienation. Because you see, what I discovered was called, in German, verfremdung, the verfremdungseffekt, and your form of alienation was called entfremdung.

MARX: Oh.

BRECHT: The trouble is that we are both Germans, and we're speaking in English.

MARX: Yes. Actually, since we both are Germans, why are we speaking in English?

BRECHT: It's something to do with him. Anyway, now that you're here, why don't you explain your theory of alienation, of entfremdung?

MARX: All right, if you like. Well, what I said was that within capitalist society the workers are separated not only from the good which they produce but can't afford ...

BRECHT: That's right

MARX: ... but also from their own labour power, which becomes a commodity to be bought and sold by the capitalists without them having any control over it.

BRECHT: That's right. And my version of alienation, or *verfremdung*, was a theatrical technique to help explain how the world works in accordance with your ideas.

MARX: I'm glad you did that then.

BRECHT: Yes, well, it wasn't for your sake of course. There was a certain amount of self interest involved ...

So - there, you see, Ian, if you take this up you could develop it - you might even make this work. (*Brecht turns his head to face back, while his body remains facing front.*) Oh look, we could have done this in the round after all.

IAN: (*ignoring this*) And so I developed another aspect of my act, the conversation with Karl Marx. You'll hear more about that after the interval.

Flipchart title - INTERVAL.

Brecht on Magic - Part 2

(Ian enters with larger version of the Karl Marx cut-out)

IAN: And so I took up Brecht's suggestion, but on a somewhat larger scale.

(Ian turns over flipchart page:)

Flipchart title: 5. CONVERSATION WITH KARL MARX

IAN: Hello Karl Marx

MARX: Hello.

IAN: How are you?

MARX: Not too bad.

IAN: Are you enjoying the show?

MARX: I'm enjoying it immensely.

IAN: Actually, Karl, I was just wondering ...

MARX: Yes

IAN: If in your day ...

MARX: In my day, yes

IAN: ...whether you ever had anything like this.

MARX: In what way?

IAN: Well, I wondered if you ever had this sort of socialist culture - socialist songs, music, humour, or even socialist conjuring tricks?

MARX: We had socialist culture, of course.

IAN: You did?

MARX: Oh yes. We had socialist songs, music, humour. All that sort of thing. But we didn't have socialist conjuring tricks.

IAN: You didn't?

MARX: No, although it's a little known fact that originally I wanted my theories done as conjuring tricks.

IAN: Did you really?

MARX: Oh yes.

IAN: What was it that stopped you doing your theories as conjuring tricks, then?

MARX: Engels.

IAN: Friedrich Engels, your collaborator.

MARX: Yes.

IAN: In what way did he stop you?

MARX: Well, I used to come home after a hard day at the British Museum ...

IAN: Yes.

MARX: ... and I'd go into my house. Through the door of course.

IAN: Yes.

MARX: And I'd go into the living room, and I'd say "Engels" (*Pause. Louder:*) "Engels!" (*Pause. Louder:*) "ENGELS!!". (*Pause:*) Because he didn't live at my house.

IAN: Didn't he?

MARX: No. He lived in Manchester, and I was in London. So I'd write to him, and in the letter I'd say: "Look here Engels, I've discovered this important new principle. We've got to get it out to the general public somehow. What about this idea - what about bringing it out as a rope trick?"

IAN: And what would his reaction be to that suggestion?

MARX: He'd say something like: "No!"

IAN: He was against the idea, was he?

MARX: He'd say "No! Bring it out as Capital Volume 1, or Theories of Surplus Value, or The Grundrisse, or Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts ...

IAN: In other words, bring it out as a book. He was telling you to bring out your theories as a book.

MARX: Yes. Actually, I was trying to avoid that word. For your sake.

IAN: Anyway, I'm glad you didn't bring out your theories as magic tricks, because I don't think you could explore the level of complexity in a rope trick that you could in three volumes of Capital ...

MARX: Yes, I've noticed that with your tricks.

IAN: Is there anything else you'd like to suggest to help me with my socialist magic tricks?

MARX: I'd like to say that "all previous magicians have only interpreted the world. The point, however, is to change it."

IAN: And I'm sure these people will change it. Though not immediately, of course. You see, this show is so effective that sometimes, when I say "Change the world", people immediately want to get out there and change things. So they leave. Sometimes even before the show is over. But you can wait till the end. Because you probably won't be able to get much changed this evening. And tomorrow's the weekend. But anyway.

Are there any other constructive criticisms you could offer me, Karl?

MARX: Well, what I've noticed is that you've only dealt with a small part of the picture. I know you've done something about class and solidarity, but there's a whole world of ideas and emotions to be tackled with this socialist conjuring business. I mean, for example, you haven't mentioned anything about surplus value.

IAN: No, I haven't. I'll get onto that straight away.

And so I began to get the act together ...

(Flipchart title: 6. GETTING THE ACT TOGETHER)

... and I decided to begin with a trick explaining surplus value.

(IAN gets small box with removable front and back flaps, and holes in side)

The factory in our society, is like an empty box (*shows box empty*) empty box, into which day after day, week after week, go the workers. I have two workers here (*shows two blue silk scarves*), and they go into the box. (*Pushes them in through hole in side. Ventriloquial voices of scarves are heard as they go in*).

SCARF: No, we don't want to go in.

IAN: Well, you have to get in.

SCARF: But I feel alienated.

IAN: Well, of course, you feel alienated. As a worker you have no control over the means of production, therefore you're bound to feel alienated.

SCARF: Oh, I didn't realise that, I'll go in then.

IAN: That was the educational process, of course. That's all in the National Curriculum. Anyway, there they are inside (*shows scarves in box*) working away. Are you working?

SCARVES: (*voices getting louder and softer as flap is lifted and lowered*) Yes, we're working, we're working.

IAN: The boss takes a surplus from their labour (*takes out multi-coloured scarves*) which the boss keeps, and they come out at the end of the week exactly as they were at the beginning, because they've spent all the money they earned, and the factory, once again, is an empty box. (*Shows box empty again*).

I'm glad you didn't clap there. Because a lot of less sophisticated audiences do, you know. They burst into torrents of applause at that point. But I can see you've been through a bit of a learning process in the first half. Probably by the end of the show you won't clap anything I do. And that's how I'll know I've succeeded!

Anyway, the following week. Or it could be a few weeks later, or even a month. It's more a sort of allegory, so I don't know why you ask. They go into the factory (*pushes silks back in through hole*)

SCARF: No, I don't want to go back in.

IAN: Well, you have to go in.

SCARF: Why do we have to go in the window anyway?

IAN: Just get in.

SCARF: I'm going to see the health and safety rep about this.

IAN: And once they get in, they find that as far as the boss is concerned they no longer exist (*opens box to find scarves have disappeared*), because they've been made redundant.

Of course, although they've been made redundant, that doesn't mean that they show up on the unemployment figures. Because that is a very exclusive club, very hard to get into. I put my son's name down on the waiting list for the unemployment figures when he was six. Just to give him that little extra start in life - so that when he grew up he would at least be a statistic.

But it wouldn't be surprising, after this has happened a few times, if one day they were to come out somewhat changed

(removes scarves, now changed to red, and tied together, from previously empty box. Applause)

Then I decided to do a trick which would be an exposé of the workings of the stock exchange. As you can see, I have here two glasses, a large one and a small one. The small glass represents the authority of those powerful figures that control our fate - the owners of those multinational companies that dictate the running of the economy. I place the small glass on the stand so that you can see it better. Over that I invert this large glass, to represent the tall glass building of the stock market, and over the whole lot I place this silk scarf, so that the workings are shrouded in secrecy.

Over on this side of the stage I have four coins on a stand to represent the wealth of the masses. Now the stock exchange is a machine for transferring the wealth of the masses to that elite group. And it works like this - you'll know it's happened, even though you don't see them do it.

(One by one the four coins are picked up, and vanish as they are tossed into the air or over the heads of the audience:)

This one will turn to fluid capital ...

(As each arrives, it is heard to clink in the inner glass. Finally Ian removes scarf and outer glass, to show that coins have arrived. Applause.)

And so the wealth of the masses ends up, by this trick, in the pockets of the rich.

Brecht also explained that I should base my art on what actually happens in the world, so I should use my own experience. And it so happened that one of my experiences was ready to be adapted into a magic trick.

(Ian picks up Newspaper)

I was waiting for a train the other day, and this bloke came up to me with a newspaper. He came right close up to me with this paper, and he said "I've got the Times". And I thought, look, he's invading my personal space, and boasting about the fact that he's bought a copy of the Times. That's the triumphalism of the right nowadays.

Well, he hadn't reckoned on the fact that I was a socialist magician. I wasn't going to let him get away with it. I grabbed his newspaper, and I said "So what!?" *(Starts frenziedly tearing up paper)* I don't care if you've got a copy of the Times! You can stop boasting about that! I wouldn't buy the Times, or the Sunday Times, or the Sun, or any of Rupert Murdoch's papers. I don't approve of his attempts to control all of our media. You may think you're clever, coming up to a complete stranger and boasting about your purchase of the Times, but I remember what happened at Wapping! So I've torn up your copy of the Times. So what do you think about that? Eh! Eh! Eh!!?"

And he looked at me. And by now a lot of other people in the station were looking too. And he looked at me, and he said: "What did you think I said?". Because he was quite soft-spoken, like that. "What did you think I said?" And I said, "Well, you said you'd got the Times". And he said "No." He said "No, what I said was 'have you got the time?'"

So I said: "Well, my watch is broken. But anyway, I don't care what you said. I'm glad I tore up your copy of the Times, because you were invading my personal space with it ..."

And he said "If you'd looked carefully - if you'd looked carefully, you would have seen that it wasn't the Times I was carrying anyway. It was, in fact, The Independent."

So I said: "Are you sure?". and he said "I am, it is, are you?"

So I said: "It looked like the Times to me. I know what's happened. After hearing what I said, you're so ashamed that you're pretending it was The Independent."

So he said "I know what paper I bought." So I said "Prove it". And he said "Prove it?" And I said "Prove it". And he said "How can I prove it? You've just torn my paper up!"

So I took it off him, and put it back together (*bits of paper form into whole newspaper in a flash*), and he was quite right, it was the Independent. (*Applause*).

So it just goes to show, you've got to be very careful with this sort of thing. If you see somebody carrying a copy of this sort of newspaper, look at it very carefully. If it's the Times, tear it up, but if it's the Independent ... well, that's up to you.

By now, my act was beginning to get more successful. Brecht got more interested in magic as well, and was always looking for new ideas. (*Ian picks up Brecht and removes a toy rabbit from his jacket*). In fact, Brecht and I started to develop a routine together. Do you remember that, Brecht?

BRECHT: Oh yes, the mindreading routine.

IAN: That's right. You see, Brecht would be blindfolded, and I would go out into the audience and get somebody to take out any small object that they had about their person ...

BRECHT: And I would name the object ...

IAN: ... without moving your lips ...

BRECHT: ... And I'd say something about its place within the capitalist economic system.

IAN: That's right. But eventually we stopped doing that. Partly because too many people would hold up a bottle of beer. But also because Brecht wasn't all that keen on performing. So I did a routine with Karl Marx. Remember that?

BRECHT: The Prediction Routine!

IAN: That's right.

BRECHT: A good routine.

IAN: A very good routine. Except that Karl Marx would always predict the same thing - that capitalism would eventually be unable to resolve its own inherent contradictions, and would therefore have to be replaced by a different system which I don't know why he couldn't just name the card chosen, but he said that was trivial. Still, we got a lot of laughs with that routine.

BRECHT: Very funny.

IAN: Until that final performance, that is. That was scary, wasn't it?

BRECHT: Very.

IAN: Actually, I've got a tape of that last performance. I could play it now, couldn't I?

BRECHT: Well, it might get the show back to the narrative that you were on before all these magic tricks interrupted.

IAN: Yes. I'll play that tape.

(Ian starts tape running. It is a live performance of his cabaret act with the portrait of Karl Marx. Lots of laughter from audience on tape:)

IAN: *(on tape:)* All right, Karl, what do you want me to do?

MARX: First of all I need to be blindfolded.

IAN: Well, I've got a blindfold here but I don't know if it'll fit you ...

MARX: It should do, you made it for me.

IAN: You're not supposed to say that.

MARX: I'm trying to demystify things.

IAN: Well, we're working at cross-purposes then.

MARX: That's it, put it on me.

IAN: Now, will you confirm, Karl, that you cannot see?

MARX: I can't see a dicky bird. Not a surplus value anywhere. Now spin me round ... Not like that ... I'm feeling sick ... I shouldn't have had that pint before.

Now, Ian, I'd like you to go into the audience and get somebody up to select a card.

IAN: Right. But just a minute. If I go into the audience now, and leave you on stage, you will be the focus of attention, because everyone's looking in this direction, and the lights are pointed at you. So you'll have to keep people entertained and amused while I'm out there. What will you do, Karl, to keep people entertained and amused?

MARX: Well, I'll stay here and speak without moving my lips.

IAN: That's very good. I could just see the corner moving, but then I'm very close ...

VOICE OF GODS: STOP!

(Ian stops tape, changes flipchart to:

7: RETURN TO NARRATIVE)

IAN: The performance was suddenly stopped. It didn't take long to establish that once again it was the gods from the socialist utopia that were interfering. But they were different gods. Apparently there had been some changes in the Socialist Utopia, and a different lot were running things. I didn't understand it entirely, but the important thing from my point of view was that the cultural policy had changed. All art now had to conform to the tenets of Socialist Realism, (as outlined by the writers' congress at Kharkov in 1930). This meant that Brecht's ideas were now out of favour, because his "alienation effect" was considered formalist. And my socialist magic was definitely beyond the pale, as I was "trivialising the cause of socialism" and had to be stopped. So they'd been sent to stop me.

It was a very frightening moment.

You know, this is where the limitations of this sort of one-person show become very apparent. It's very difficult for me to represent the terribly frightening situation I was in here, alone on the stage as these figures came towards ... actually, I wonder if somebody here might be able to help.

(Ian goes into auditorium)

In fact there were two figures coming towards me. I wonder if you, and you could come and help me represent this situation? Thanks.

(Ian selects two people from the audience to come up and help him. They come on stage).

Now, could you represent these two gods, coming towards me from opposite corners of the stage, in a threatening manner ...

(Volunteers make an attempt to do this. Ian stops them)

Thanks, that's very good, but I should really have given you a bit more direction there. Could you do the same thing, but in a more bureaucratic and Stalinist manner?

(Volunteers try again)

Yes, that's much better, but I realise now that there was something I forgot. Because these two were carrying implements. I think I should let you have the props, because it'll give you something else to help you in your interpretation of these important parts. You see, one of them had a shackle, like this, and the other had a couple of padlocks and keys. You can take a look at these now. As you can see, the shackle is just an ordinary shackle, such as you might find at home, made of thick steel, with solid steel chains attached. And the padlocks are normal padlocks. You'll notice that with these padlocks it is possible to lock them without using the key, but it is impossible to unlock them without using the key. They'd be useless as padlocks otherwise.

Now if you could come towards me with the shackle and padlocks, and lock me into them as tightly as you can.

(They do so. Some interplay and comment ad lib. Ian explains that he is securely locked in, and audience can see that this is so. Nevertheless, every so often, his hand moves out to shift one of the volunteers slightly, or to emphasise that his pocket has no concealed key. Immediately after showing his hand free, he displays the shackle secured behind his back, apparently very tightly locked, making no reference to the previous freeing of his hand. Eventually:)

They were about to lead me away, when I looked down at the shackle, and realised that it was actually made of the same stuff as the Tories' commitment to the National Health Service, and I was able to escape completely.

(Does so. Thanks volunteers and they go back to seats)

So I gathered as many of my props as I could, and ran quickly from the theatre. For a time after that I had to keep a low profile. I appeared little in public. And I appeared on television far less than my talent justified. Luckily, I was helped in this by the many television producers who resisted the temptation to ring me up, thus saving me from the embarrassing chore of having to refuse the offer of my own television series.

But eventually Brecht persuaded me that I couldn't carry on like this. I had a responsibility to bring the genre of socialist magic to the public. Certainly nobody else was going to do it. And if it involved some risk to myself, what did that matter in the larger scheme of things. I couldn't let myself be worried by the goings on in some phoney utopia. Perhaps the regime which was trying to stop me would have another change. So I decided to continue performing.

It was at this point that Brecht called me to his office for a little talk.

(Ian changes flipchart title to:

8: THE MATERIAL PROBLEM OF EXISTING IN CAPITALIST SOCIETY

then picks up Brecht)

BRECHT: Ian.

IAN: Yes?

BRECHT: There's something I've been meaning to ask you.

IAN: Yes, Brecht?

BRECHT: At the beginning of this show, which now seems an extraordinarily long time ago, you said that there were three questions that people ask a socialist magician.

IAN: That's right.

BRECHT: Well, so far, you've only dealt with one of them - that is, "How did you become a socialist magician?". What about the others? What is the second question?

IAN: Ah, yes. The second question that people ask a socialist magician is "can you make a living at it?"

BRECHT: And can you?

IAN: No.

BRECHT: No?

IAN: No, well, it would be a contradiction, wouldn't it, to be able to make a living out of being a socialist magician in Capitalist society.

BRECHT: Never mind the contradiction, what are you going to do about it?

IAN: I don't know, really.

BRECHT: This is a material problem. It must be overcome. You've got to eat. You'll have to do something.

IAN: I suppose so. But I don't know what.

BRECHT: You know, this reminds me of one of my plays - The Good Person of Szechuan, which you've already mentioned. In that, Shen Te can't remain good, without her evil alter ego.

IAN: So you think I might be able to do something like that?

BRECHT: Think about it. Talk it over with yourself.

IAN: So I did just that.

(Ian puts Brecht into suitcase and picks up life-size cut-out photo of himself, with moving lips and eyes)

IAN: Hello Ian.

IAN 2: No, that's October 31st.

IAN: What's October 31st?

IAN 2: Halloween. It's October 31st.

IAN: That's a terrible joke.

IAN 2: Well, I represent the two dimensional aspect of your personality, so I would make that sort of joke.

IAN: Never mind all that, I want to ask you something.

IAN 2: Actually, there's something I want to ask you.

IAN: What?

IAN 2: Well, I'm meant to be you, aren't I.

IAN: Yes.

IAN 2: Then why do I speak with this silly voice? After all, I look like you, so I ought to have the same voice as yours, which is marginally less silly than this one.

IAN: Ah, but that would be confusing. Since we both look the same, the audience would get confused about who was speaking when.

IAN 2: No, they wouldn't. It's obvious. When you speak, your lips move. When I speak, both our lips move.

IAN: Look, I've got more important things to discuss.

IAN 2: What's that then?

IAN: Brecht has suggested that in order to solve this material problem of existing in capitalist society, I could create an alter-ego.

IAN 2: What do you mean?

IAN: I'd have to split myself into two characters. Both still magicians, of course, but apart from the socialist magician there would have to be a dialectically opposite magician. A capitalist magician, doing tricks which uphold capitalist ideology.

IAN 2: I see.

IAN: And of course, this alter-ego would have to live a lavish life-style. Lots of conspicuous consumption. Helicopters, boats, swimming pools, that sort of thing.

IAN 2: Yes.

IAN: The only thing is, which one of us is going to do it. It's a terrible thing, having to give up one's identity ...

IAN 2: A lavish lifestyle, you say?

IAN: Yes.

IAN 2: Lots of money and material goods?

IAN: Yes.

IAN 2: I'll do it.

IAN: You're sure?

IAN 2: Absolutely.

IAN: Right then. You just go behind this curtain and change.

(Ian 2 is placed behind curtain on stand. Some discussion of his changing clothes and voice. Then screen is drawn back to reveal cut-out of Paul Daniels)

IAN: Now, not many people realise that Paul Daniels is, in fact, my alter-ego. That's why he goes around making right wing statements and supporting the status quo. But like Frankenstein's monster, this has got beyond my control. My alter-ego has taken on a life of its own, and it is now quite independent of me. To the extent that I don't get any of his money.

This is obviously not what I intended. I talked things over with Brecht. I explained to him that my ambition was to become a legend in my own lifetime. He said that at the rate I was going I'd be lucky if I became a rumour.

But Brecht said that if I associated myself with somebody who was famous, like him, that might help me to make a name for myself. So I thought about his advice, and decided to use one of his books in my act. That thick book of poems that the gods had left me on their first visit seemed ideal.

(Ian changes flipchart to:

9: MAKING A NAME FOR MYSELF

and picks up copy of Brecht's collected poems)

I'd like to hand this book to a member of the audience - though I if anybody has brought their own copy of Brecht's poems 1918-1956 I'd be quite happy to use that. No? Well, here you are. *(Hands book out)*

Will you please examine that book and make sure that it is a perfectly ordinary copy of Brecht's Poems - that it has no secret compartments or concealed pockets, or pages sewn in.

Thank you. Now, I shall hand out this notebook, and I will ask three people to write a number between one and a hundred, in three columns so that they can be added up. Don't let me see what you're writing.

Now, could you hand the notebook to the person on your left, and the pen to the person on your right, and keep handing the on to the end of the row. When they've reached the end, pass them towards the front. When they both reach the front row, pass them towards the middle, and they should meet at one person.

(To person who is now reluctantly holding both pen and notebook) Could I ask you to help me by coming onto the stage, and adding those three figures together. Thanks. Here's a calculator if you'd like to use it.

(Volunteer adds figures and announces result)

Now could the person with the book turn to that page.

Now we've got a page number, we just have to find a line number. *(To volunteer)* As you can see, these business cards each have my name and telephone number on. They'd be no use as business cards otherwise. But the unusual thing about them is that they each have a number between one and 50 on the back *(volunteer confirms that this is so)*. Will you place the cards into this

clear plastic bag, mix them round, and take out one card. (*Volunteer does so*).
Could you read out the number on that card?

(*Volunteer reads number, person with book counts down to that line number on the page previously chosen*)

Could you tell me if there is a name on that line?

BOOK HOLDER: There is.

IAN: What is it?

BOOK HOLDER: Ian Saville!

IAN: Thank you. So you see, I had managed to associate my name with Brecht's.

Now, you're probably wondering about the third question. Well, when I started doing this show, in 1985, the third question was obvious to anybody. After people had heard how I became a socialist magician and whether I could make a living at it, they invariably asked "Can you make Margaret Thatcher disappear?"*
Fortunately, after years of doing it symbolically, I finally managed to do that properly in 1990. But since then another third question has taken its place.

That question is "Why?"

"Why be a socialist magician?"

After all, people say, socialism is now dead. It's gone in the countries of the East. It's not very popular in Britain, why bother with it?

And after years of being told that this was so, I began to think maybe they were right. Why should I hold on to this outdated ideology? What good did it do for Bertolt Brecht? He never saw a real socialist society, only East Germany. And Karl Marx - he died without the establishment of even a state that called itself socialist. All that travelling backwards and forwards to the British Museum - he could have saved himself the bus fare. Then he wouldn't have had to borrow so much money off Engels.

* Actually, in the original version of *Brecht on Magic* I did go straight into the vanish of Margaret Thatcher and a cruise missile at this point. However, after I stopped performing my next show, *Getting Nowhere - Again*, it seemed appropriate to salvage the following sequence and the poem "The Vision" from that show, and include it here. For purists, however (if there are such creatures with regard to my shows) the show can continue directly with the vanish of the current Tory prime minister, whether it be Margaret Thatcher, John Major or Tony Blair.

No, I could do better than that. After all, I'm quite creative, I could use my talents within the current system to make something of myself.

I could get in on the next privatisation campaign, I thought. Because the next thing that will have to be privatised will be sleep. It's obvious when you think about it. Because everybody sleeps, and most people dream. But the trouble is that sometimes poor people have good dreams, and rich people have bad dreams. And that's not right. It doesn't fit in with the market economy. If people want good dreams, they should have to pay for them. Otherwise there's no incentive for improving yourself. And poor people don't really need such good dreams anyway - a basic safety net of fairly boring dreams is quite sufficient.

And people will invest in SLEEP PLC. And then somebody will be making a profit. And I thought, yes, that somebody could be me, and... and...

... Then in the distance I saw a mist
And the mist turned into a cloud.
And as I stood and watched, each drop
Of vapour turned into a face. The crowd
Moved around me in laughter and song
With eyes that were bright and voices strong
Each face separate and distinct.
Though all in common purpose linked.
But who were these people? Somehow I knew
That if only I guessed, my guess would be true.
And so I decided that one band of figures
From centuries past were Winstanley's diggers
Proclaiming all folk were of equal worth
To share in the treasures of the Earth.
Some Luddites were holding a great hammer high
They'd been slandered by history, but I could see why
They'd set about smashing their masters' machines
Which were not tools of progress, but used as a means
To steal from these people their labour and skill
And ensure they were bent to their masters' will.
Some faces I knew - Paul Robeson was giving
Full voice to a tune that said Joe Hill was living.
Joe smiled, and agreed that in each mine and mill
Where the workers were fighting his spirit lived still.
Mary Seacole was resting from easing the pain
Of those men sent to die so their rulers might gain.
She's forgotten by history - her skin wasn't pale
Though she healed just as surely as Nurse Nightingale.
Harriet Tubman rejoiced with the slaves that she'd freed
From those 'civilised' gentlemen driven by greed.
From Central America, no more invisible
Those who vanished from lands where dissent's not permissible.

Hilda Murrell, who died fighting nuclear might.
Blair Peach - killed by police for supporting the right
To protest against fascism. Others who'd died
Fighting fascist battalions in Spain's countryside.
There was Sacco, Vanzetti. There were Suffragettes too.
There were miners and matchgirls, and some people who
Had been friends of mine. They died with much still to give
But they'd all used their lives to find new ways to live.
Gazing in awe on this great panorama
I wondered what part it could play in my drama.
Then, as I wondered, they all spoke in chorus:
"There's something," they said "that we'd quite like done for us
"We are dead, and our life's work is not yet fulfilled
For we all tried, in some different manner, to build
A world that is decent and honest and fair
Where we all get what's needed, and what's left we share
But the world is not like that - that's clear and that's plain
And we're not blaming you, but don't make it in vain
That we lived lives of struggle - continue the fight
While you live, you can change things - we know that that's right."
And I looked, and I saw that in each of their eyes
Stood a part of a new world, and to my surprise
I could now see what they saw, and so understood
We become fully human by working for good.
We may fail, but it's better to know that we've been
A part of humanity - not a machine.
I stood there renewed, thinking "no, life's not tragic
Then they piped up again and said "show us some magic"

So I decided to show them the trick. I have here a scaled down model of John Major. Hello John.

MAJOR: Hello.

IAN: How are you?

MAJOR: I'm not too bad.

IAN: I'm sorry to hear that. Now John, I'm going to ask you to get into the red box, here.

MAJOR: Not the red box!

IAN: Yes, the red box. The red box represents socialism and internationalism.

MAJOR: I don't want to go in the box!

IAN: You have to go in the box.

MAJOR: No!

IAN: (*placing him in the box*) In you get.

MAJOR: (*from in the box, getting louder and softer as lid is opened and closed*) Let me out! Let me out!

IAN: Now, I also have here a scaled down model of a Trident missile. Hello.

MISSILE: Hello.

IAN: Shut up, you can't speak. I place the missile in the box with John Major ...

(*cries from box*)

What are you saying?

VOICE: I don't want to stay here with this thing, it's dangerous!

IAN: Well, you have to stay in the box! That was the missile speaking. Now just to show that within socialism and internationalism there is no place for either John Major or any sort of nuclear missiles, I will now take the box to pieces (*does so, showing that each panel is merely a frame covered with red tissue paper, which he breaks over his arm*) and there they are, vanished into the obscurity of history, where they belong.

Well, I've now answered the three questions that people ask a socialist magician.

(*Ian changes placard to*

EPILOGUE)

But it may be that another question has arisen in your mind as a result of this narrative. That is - "what eventually happened to your relationship with Bertolt Brecht?"

Well, it's rather sad, really. One day, I opened Brecht's suitcase, to find that he had gone, leaving behind a cloud of cigar smoke. (*Cloud rises from case. Ian coughs and waves it aside*). Oh. That's a terrible effect.

BRECHT: (*voice from case*) I told you not to use wholemeal flour.

IAN: I thought it would be more healthy.

But apart from the smoke, there was also this letter, addressed to me. I looked and saw that it was in Brecht's handwriting. And as I read the words, it seemed that Brecht's voice was coming back to me ...

(Ian ventriloquises Brecht's voice, and looks around puzzled)

BRECHT'S VOICE: Dear Ian...

IAN: Amazing. A talking letter. Just like in the films.

BRECHT'S VOICE: Dear Ian, I hope this isn't too much of a shock, but I've decided it's time for us to go our separate ways

IAN: What?

BRECHT'S VOICE: It's a ridiculous idea, anyway, me becoming real again. I can't get any new writing done, and if I did, I don't know how to deal with the copyright.

IAN: But Brecht, how will I manage?

BRECHT'S VOICE: You'll manage!

IAN: But I've always had you there to help and guide me.

BRECHT'S VOICE: It'll be all right

IAN: No it won't, I need your understanding and experience...

BRECHT'S VOICE: No you don't.

IAN: But...

BRECHT'S VOICE: Listen, this is supposed to be a letter, not a conversation.

IAN: Oh.

BRECHT'S VOICE: Don't take it too hard. You've come a long way

IAN: Have I?

BRECHT'S VOICE: Yeah. Remember what I told you to aim for?

IAN: Yes, I remember. You said that after the show, people should feel like leaving the theatre and changing the world...

BRECHT'S VOICE: Well, you're halfway there.

IAN: And then he says PTO. Pto? Pittow?

BRECHT'S VOICE: Please turn over!

IAN: Oh yes.

BRECHT'S VOICE: Seriously though, we are now nearly two hours nearer to the end of exploitation than we were when we began this show. Whether this has anything to do with you I don't know, but at least you haven't hindered the process.

IAN: And then he says: (*Ian continues to read, but now in his own voice, without attempting to keep his lips still:*) Strive to make the mighty feel a little less safe in their seats, and the dispossessed more capable of victory. Tell those who see that the world is rotten that it can be changed, not by magic, but by their own actions.

By the way, for the last few lines your ventriloquism has got worse than ever.
Fraternally, D.D.

(*Ian looks at audience*)

BLACKOUT

END.