

If the top half of the map on p.78 is about those who tried it on, the bottom half is mainly to do with those who resisted. I don't want to make too much of **Terry Southern** as the link between the two – he just happens to be the right man for the job. This section is about American radical politics as theatre (and therefore showbiz). It starts with **Southern's** scripts for *Easy Rider* and *Barbarella* (1968). *Barbarella* was a bit of fluff – but then things open out fast (which often happens in showbiz). **Fonda**, who starred in the film, was a strong opponent of the Vietnam war. She married **Tom Hayden**, who'd started off as a student radical – he later became a Californian senator – and was one of the **Chicago 8**: an assortment of radicals who went to the **1968 Democratic Convention** in Chicago with the intention of disrupting it and were charged with crossing state lines for the purposes of inciting a riot. (**Abraham Lincoln** would have been prosecuted under the same law.)

All the defendants have their significance (see SECTION 5, p.149 for **Bobby Seale**; SECTION 7, p.153 for **Rennie Davis**) but **Hoffman's** the man for me. **Norman Mailer** described him as a ballsy clown, a holy ghost of the Left, a *bona fide* American revolutionary. He described himself as half-martyr, half-hustler. He was one of the founders of the **Yippies** (who ran a pig – that's **Pigasus** – for president in 1968), part of a long tradition of subversion by mockery. Their predecessors were Dada, Surrealism and the Dutch Provos, all of whom saw that it is the world, reality itself, which is subversive, which refuses all restrictions.

If you live in power's shadow – and we all do – the only options are to join, to resist (openly) or to be insignificant. Resistance will always be contained (if the authorities are feeling benign) or suppressed (if they're not). So why not try other ways, ones which the institutions, because of their very size and seriousness, find puzzling and difficult? Enter the buffoons and clowns, closely followed by an assortment of crackpots and weirdos, not to mention pirates, hijackers and outlaws. They have some questions: 'Who says?', 'What's it to ya?' and 'Are you serious?'

The **Yippies** used improvisation and spectacle to turn the establishment inside out. Like this. Three thousand people, selected at random from the Manhattan phone book, were sent a reefer along with a note telling them how to smoke it and some information about the law: that it was illegal to have such a thing in their possession regardless of how they came to have it. Result: general confusion and foolishness. Law-abiding citizens complained to the police. Naturally, they weren't charged. The law wasn't meant for them and everybody knew it. But everybody was pretending that it was impartial and universal. **Hoffman** thought up the wheeze. **Jimi Hendrix** paid for it.*

Hoffman's account of the **Chicago 8** trial is a delight. The defendants refused to follow the conventions of courtroom behaviour and turned the proceedings into a comedy of manners. They dressed as they wanted and were cheerfully disrespectful. They addressed the judge (who was also called 'Hoffman') by his Christian name. He was affronted – but there's no law that says it can't be done. All the defendants were found guilty but were released on appeal. The defence submitted 135 instances of the judge making serious errors. Every single one was upheld.

Hoffman says that what he wanted to do was make outrage contagious – on a grand scale. The aim was to show the government for what it was: power masquerading as justice. And he succeeded. It was protest as theatre and theatre as protest. All you needed was flair – and the ability to hold your line under fire. A lot of this is learned on the streets – you know, where everything bad happens: disease, homelessness, lawlessness. "It was liberating just being there."

But this liberation has a hot side to it. He tells the story of a flight that had to make an emergency landing. The cabin crew were cheerful and helpful. The passengers prepared themselves.

Suddenly the pilot announced over the intercom: "We are beginning our final descent. At this moment, in accordance with International Aviation Codes established at Geneva, it is my obligation to inform you that if you believe in God you should commence prayer."

There are some things about society you have absolutely no way of discovering unless you're in crisis. As it happened, the belly landing went without a hitch. No one was injured in the slightest. The next day I called the airlines and asked about the prayer rule. No one would volunteer any information on the subject. It was strictly 'No comment.'

I could see their side. There are lots of secret rules by which power maintains itself. Only when you challenge it, force the crisis, do you discover the true nature of society. And only at the time it chooses to teach you. Occasionally you can use your intellect to guess at the plan, but in general the secrets of power are taught in darkened police cells, back alleys, and on the street. I learned them there. And I think the cops learn them there too. Like those airplane passengers we all learned them just before the possibility of the final descent.

Hoffman's own descent was pretty serious. He was arrested 40 times in his life – a high price to pay for public buffoonery. One of the last times was in 1974 when he was caught in a cocaine sting set up by the police. He jumped bail, had plastic surgery and went underground, using the name 'Barry Freed'. He surrendered to the authorities in 1980 and was found dead in his apartment in 1989. His death was ruled suicide. I don't know if it's true: it's what I read. Don't believe it unless you've got more to go on than that.

Not an uplifting end to the **Abbie Hoffman** story. But let's not get sentimental. "There is absolutely no greater high than challenging the power structure as a nobody – and winning." Not many can say that – and we need more who do. Of course, you never know where it's going to lead. *You do not know how proud it makes a man feel when he knows he is to be hanged on a charge of high treason.* Now, is that winning or not?

We're getting into some hot water here – and it's crossing over with the cold and the deep. We're about to dive into the American political underground.

* Of course, one wing of rock'n'roll loves all this. **John Lennon** was certainly a **Yippie** supporter for a while, and if I had the space we could go from him to **John Sinclair**, the manager of **MC5** (**Lennon** played at a concert for him after he was busted for possession of marijuana), and thence to a whole range of rock'n'roll protest. But I've put it on the **AVANT-GARDE MAP** instead. (See **MC5**, p.163.) All three maps are simply different dimensions of the same world.