

GETTING NOWHERE - AGAIN

by Ian Saville

(Lights up, and Ian walks straight up to the audience and speaks:)

IAN: ... And so I continued to practise the art of Socialist Magic.

(Lighting suddenly changes to blue wash. Ian rushes round with long plastic tube which makes singing sound as it whirls. He opens and closes large box at back of stage to show it empty, then comes to front of stage. Lights suddenly revert to previous state)

Good evening. My name is Ian Saville, and I've just begun performing my show, *Getting Nowhere - Again*. Some of you may have noticed that I began this show in a rather unusual way. I'm referring, of course, to the fact that I began with a conjunction, a practice which is frowned upon by purists. But this was not a mere mistake. I began this show with the word "and" because, like so much of life, this story begins in the middle.

Perhaps I should say something here about *story-telling*. In fact, there is no "perhaps" about it. I'm now going to say something about story-telling, whatever you or I would like me to say, since it is written into the script, and though I may be a theatrical experimenter, I would not go so far as to improvise my way through this show.

To prove this, I have here a copy of the script, which I will ask this person here to look at and confirm that everything I've said so far is written in there.

Will you confirm that what I've said is absolutely true?

PERSON: Absolutely.

IAN: Even what I just said?

PERSON: Yes.

IAN: And what you're saying now?

PERSON: Correct.

IAN: Could you just read out some of the script to convince people? Here, read this bit here.

PERSON: Could you just read out some of the script to convince people? Here, read this bit here.

IAN: Thank you. Now, having cleared all that up, I'll tell you something about *story-telling*.

The conventional form that most people use for telling stories is very simple. Let me show you a diagram:

(Ian shows chart with approximately the following diagram, indicating figures 1, 2 and 3 for beginning, middle and end:)

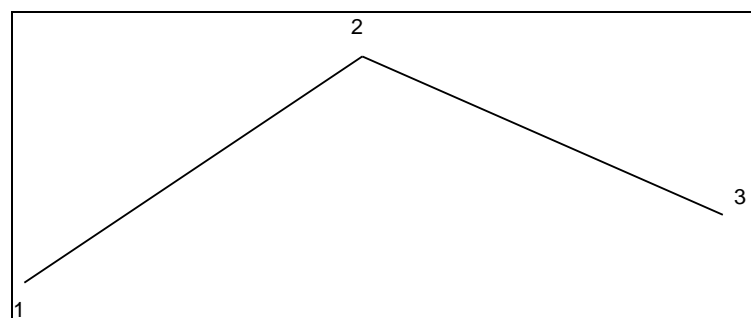


Figure 1

You begin at the beginning, move towards the middle, and having reached the middle you're within sight of the end, so that's where you aim for.

That's the usual way of doing it, and most people are served very well by this system. But I prefer a different structure. Let me show you another illustration.

(Ian shows next chart, indicating as before:)

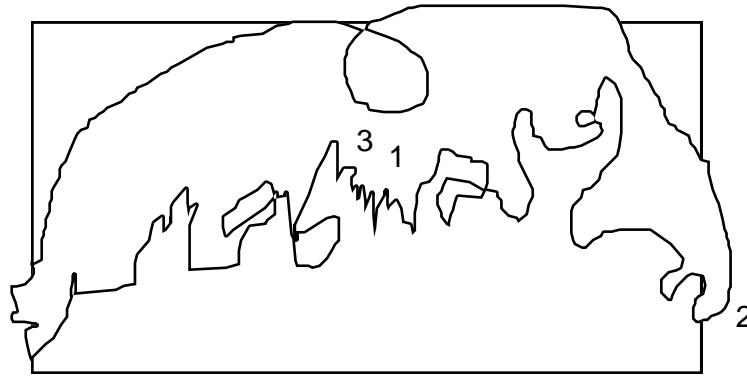


Figure 2

What I like to do is to start right there in the middle, where everything is happening, and jump about, mostly forwards, but occasionally sideways, and sometimes even backwards, until I reach the end. Then I take a great leap backwards, doing a bit of a somersault on the way, and find myself at the beginning. From there, of course, I steer my way towards the middle, where I started from, and that's where I end up. You'll notice, this reflects the development of the Labour Party defence policy over the last twenty years, but this is a mere coincidence.

You may wonder why I prefer to do things this way. It is *partly* because I am a modernist. This may come as a surprise to some of you, but I am not only a *socialist* conjurer, I am also an *avant-garde* conjurer. That's why I'm performing at the Gate. You can tell that this is an avant-garde theatre, because the seats are uncomfortable. But that's not the only reason.

In my childhood I used to go to the cinema a lot with my family. We were usually late, and in those days they had continuous programming. When the film finished it started up again. So we'd arrive, disturb everybody in the row as we found a seat, watch the second half of the film, wait for the first half, then when we got to the place where we started we'd have a whole new lot of people to disturb as we left. This is a diagram of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* as I saw it with my family in 1962:

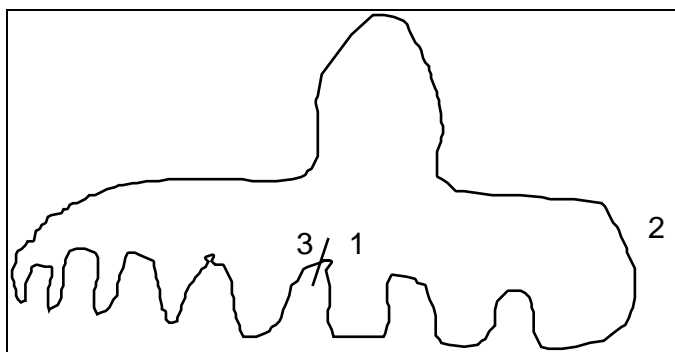


Figure 3

Nowadays, of course, they throw everybody out of the cinema after they've shown the film, so I only ever see the second half.

Anyway, this gave me my particular sense of form. I believe it's more radical. The Marxist philosopher, Althusser, of course, said that you should read volume 2 of Marx's *Capital* before volume 1. then you should read volume 3. I don't know what films he saw as a child, but I have a feeling he was influenced by Jean-Luc Godard.

All of this is of course, a slight digression. (*points to appropriate shape on diagram of structure*) To get back to the story...

... And so I continued to practise the art of Socialist Magic. Yes, it's all very well me saying that, but what, I hear you ask, *is* the art of Socialist Conjuring?

Karl Marx said that the ruling ideas in any society are the ideas of the ruling class. What goes for society must go for conjuring tricks, so the ruling ideas in the conjuring tricks of any time have been the ideas of the rulers of that time. This is the basis of my class history of magic.

In ancient Egypt, the priests impressed their followers with conjuring tricks, to make them believe they had divine powers. This method of impressing the masses began to lose its effectiveness, as people became more critical of their leaders. In our society such measures are confined to Conservative Party Conferences.

By mediaeval times, some people had discovered how to do the priests' tricks, and had made up a few themselves. This was rather disconcerting for those in charge, so the strolling players, jugglers, magicians were now charged with witchcraft.

But conjuring really came into its own in Victorian times. The top hat, tail-coat, cane (*items appear*) were the very symbol of the ruling classes. The Magician was the representative of the Great British Empire, (*turns red, white and blue silks into union jack*) which could accomplish all the miracles with the aid of British Craftsmanship, produced in British Workshops.

So, in each era, conjuring is like a barometer of the state of society. Magicians represent the power structures between men and men, and even more between men and women - women who are sawn in half, hypnotised, levitated, vanish, or merely serve as decoration. But the new moon holds the old moon a whole night in its arms, and there are times when the coming *change* in society is reflected, rather than just the way things are. So it fell to me, a mediocre modern magician, working mainly in playgroups, as it happens, but with progressive politics, to represent the coming socialist era with my socialist magic tricks. Out with the top hat and cane, in with the cloth cap and red flag (*cane suddenly turns into red flag*). Away with the bourgeois flourish, take up the austere agitprop stance.

Why was *I* chosen for this rôle? An accident of chance had put me in the way of three gods from a socialist Utopia - reconstructed characters from Bertolt Brecht's play, *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. They supplied me not only with the *idea* of Socialist conjuring, but also with some of the wherewithal to carry this idea into practice, in the form of a ventriloquist's dummy of Bertolt Brecht (*show dummy*). The great socialist playwright bullied and cajoled me into attempting, developing and finally perfecting the art or skill of Socialist magic, until I had become the leading practitioner...

BRECHT: (*Mumbles*) Only!

IAN: What did you say?

BRECHT: Because you were the *only* practitioner.

IAN: Will you let me tell my story my own way.

BRECHT: Tell it how you like. Only I don't remember it quite like you said.

IAN: So how do you remember it?

BRECHT: You had some crackpot idea about socialist conjuring tricks, I humoured you for a while, then as soon as I could find a plausible excuse I left.

IAN: You've never wanted my ideas to succeed, have you?

BRECHT: If you had better ideas, they might succeed.

IAN: Just you stay out of this for the time being.

BRECHT: You take your hand out of my body and I won't say another word.

(Ian puts Brecht down)

BRECHT: Has anybody ever told you that what you are trying to do is completely ridiculous?

IAN: Yes, many times. Sorry about that. One of Brecht's little jokes. He can't help it. He's a genius.

Nevertheless, Brecht *did* leave me, but not without some written instructions, in the form of a letter. I have the letter here. *(Opens letter)* Some of this is of a personal nature, so I won't read the whole thing. The important part is this final injunction:

(Reads): "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

Fraternally, Bertolt Brecht. "

By scrupulously following this advice I achieved great *personal* success, gaining something of a cult status. A very *small* cult, admittedly, but a cult nevertheless. Still, I could not be content. I had a pervading sense of dissatisfaction. There was an irritating question somewhere in the back of my mind which I couldn't entirely formulate for myself.

Let me take you back in time to Yarmouth, 1987. I am appearing as a support to Bobby Davro for the summer season. I am about to perform a new trick.

(Flashback - lighting change)

I shall need to borrow a £10 note. Thank you. Would you please sign the note, so that we're absolutely certain which one is yours. Good. In exchange for the note, I'll give you this envelope, which should fully compensate you if anything goes wrong. Don't worry, it never has so far. Though as I said, this is a new trick.

This note represents the taxes you have paid this year. I shall place it in this envelope, which represents the public services - health, education, housing and so forth - into which your taxes go. As you can see, it's a window envelope, so that you can keep an eye on your money, and because all our public services are accountable, of course.

(Ian gets cigarette lighter.)

The lighter I'm now holding represents privatisation, which seeks to make these public services more efficient by applying the heat of the profit motive to them. Of course, this heat is not meant to *destroy* these services... *(Ian "inadvertently" sets fire to envelope.)*. Sorry about that. Has anybody got another note?

Never mind. Perhaps you'd like to open the envelope I gave you earlier.

(Spectator finds envelope empty.)

Well, you've been through a learning process, and it's really been quite cheap. You see, the assurance I gave you earlier about the envelope was, in fact, what is technically known as a Manifesto Commitment.

But you really want your money back, don't you? Of course being a trained magician, I know that to get out of this embarrassing situation, I just have to find the missing note in an entirely unexpected place, preferably in the middle of a piece of fruit. This banana represents the Labour opposition in Parliament. Will you unpeel it please?

(Opens banana, finds it already sliced, but no £10 note.)

Well, that doesn't seem to have worked. I can see you're looking a little nervous about your note.

Let's try some more fruit. This lemon represents the bitter fruits of oppression. Will you take this knife and cut it in half?

(Spectator cuts knife and finds note saying "Why don't you try the magic words? ")

I had neglected to tell you that when the Gods from the socialist Utopia left me, they gave me some magic words, with which I could summon them in an emergency. This was just such a situation. The magic words were, of course: "*Mass action for a radical transformation of society from a society based primarily on profit to a society based on human need.*"

(Lighting change)

GODS: Yes, what do you want?

IAN: I was wondering if you could give me some help with a magic trick. I've lost a £10 note.

GODS: What is that?

IAN: Oh yes, I forgot. You live in a Utopia where there's no money. Well, let's just say that it's a sort of token that has great value for this comrade here. It's a sort of representation of her/his labour.

GODS: So, it is *money* that you seek. We have heard of this barbaric system, but we have no experience of it.

IAN: I don't have all that much experience of it, actually.

GODS: Who are you, anyway?

IAN: I'm Ian Saville.

GODS: Ian who?

IAN: Surely you remember me. You know, the socialist magician. The one you gave the dummy of Bertolt Brecht to.

GODS: Oh yes. How are you getting on?

IAN: That's what I've been trying to tell you. I've got a problem with this person's money.

GODS: But how are you getting on with transforming society?

IAN: Ah, yes... well. I'm still in the early stages on that one.

GODS: Well, get on with it. We've done our bit. We gave you the idea of socialist magic, and introduced you to Bertolt Brecht. Isn't it about time we saw some results?

IAN: Actually, I wanted to talk to you about that. Brecht's not much use. First of all he kept criticising the whole idea, and now he's talking about leaving me.

GODS: He'll come back. But our experiment is beginning to look like it's failed. You must prove that socialist magic can achieve something, or we will withdraw our support.

IAN: I *am* trying. I just need a bit more help.

GODS: Stop making excuses. We've given you plenty of help. What more do you want? We haven't got *unlimited* resources you know.

IAN: All right.

GODS: So we're off now. Ta-ta.

IAN: But what about the money?

GODS: Why ask us? You've got Karl Marx there somewhere, haven't you?

IAN: Do you think he can help?

GODS: He wrote *Das Kapital* didn't he?

IAN: True, that's all about money.

GODS: And maybe he can give you some advice on how to make your work more effective. We must be going now.

There's lots to be done in Utopia.

IAN: Yes, I was going to ask you, what *is* to be . . .

GODS: (*ignoring Ian's question*) And don't forget - practice!

IAN: You mean *praxis* - the synthesis of theory and practice through which ideas are made into a concrete force in the world.

GODS: No, we mean *practice* - keep practising the tricks so that you can get them right at least some of the time. Then maybe you can bring about some real change.

(*Lights change back, Ian gets Marx picture*)

IAN: Hello, Karl Marx.

MARX: Hello.

IAN: How are you?

MARX: Not too bad.

IAN: Enjoying the show?

MARX: Oh, has it started?

IAN: Of course.

MARX: I thought you were just telling these people about what had happened to you.

IAN: That's what the show is. It consists of me relating my experiences.

MARX: Oh. Is that all that's going to happen then?

IAN: Isn't that enough? Look, never mind about all that, I need your help.

MARX: What's the problem?

IAN: I need to get back this money that I borrowed.

MARX: Invested it unwisely, did you?

IAN: No, it's this trick.

MARX: What, the one with the envelope and the tax system?

IAN: Precisely.

MARX: Well, I can tell you your problem there.

IAN: What is it?

MARX: You've got your politics wrong.

IAN: Really?

MARX: Oh yes. You see, when the Tories destroy public services, the money that ordinary people have put into those services in taxes is not destroyed along with the services.

IAN: That's what I thought. That's why I looked for it in the fruit.

MARX: Well you're not going to find it there, are you? No, for the purposes of this trick, you have to represent a rich person.

IAN: I see.

MARX: Now, get out your wallet.

IAN: I'll have to put you down.

MARX: That's all right, I'll speak without moving my lips. What's in the wallet?

IAN: Extraordinary! There's a sealed envelope with the words "Tax Rebate" on it. (To audience member) Will you reach inside and tell me what you find?

(£10 note with original signature is revealed)

IAN: So, having been put straight on the politics by Marx, I tried to carry out the task that the gods had set me - to change the world with conjuring tricks. I went at it indirectly - not actually redistributing the wealth by sleight of hand, like a magical Robin Hood, but endeavouring to raise the consciousness of my audiences with the tricks, so that they would begin to feel the urgent necessity to create a new social order, and they would go out and bring about that change. Because, of course, there would be many more of them than me. Well, a few more, anyway.

(IAN does three tricks: a rope changes from white to red, two glasses cling to a tray while it is turned upside down, thus representing the socialist

project to turn the world upside down, and a red scarf representing a political prisoner (at that time Nelson Mandela) releases itself from a locked box and appears with its comrades on the other side of the stage)

So I carried on performing these tricks, and many others. Some of them were very good. But I didn't want to show you those for the sake of my argument. But despite all of these efforts, I couldn't help noticing that we were still living in a capitalist society. Exploitation and oppression were as rife and as vicious as ever. In fact, if anything, things were getting worse. I don't think that that was because of my magic, but that possibility couldn't be ruled out.

I decided it was time to talk once again to Karl Marx.

(IAN gets Marx again)

IAN: Hello, Karl Marx.

MARX: Hello.

IAN: How are you?

MARX: Not too bad.

IAN: Enjoying the show?

MARX: You already asked me that.

IAN: So I did.

MARX: What's up now, then?

IAN: Well, I don't know quite how to ask this.

MARX: Don't worry. I won't bite your head off.

IAN: Well - and I ask you this because you are, of course the world expert on the dialectical process of change which capitalist society is undergoing even as we speak.. .

MARX: It's only you speaking, actually, as is quite apparent .. .

IAN: .. . be that as it may - do you think it would be possible to bring about some concrete change to society, using magic tricks?

MARX: No.

IAN: You sure about that?

MARX: Absolutely

IAN: Why not?

MARX: It's only the decisive action of the proletariat, as a class, that can bring about the overthrow of capitalist society.

IAN: This is surprising.

MARX: Why?

IAN: For years I've been doing this act with you, and you've always said that you originally wanted your theories done as conjuring tricks. Didn't you say that?

MARX: Yes.

IAN: And that it was only Friedrich Engels who stopped you bringing out *The Communist Manifesto* as a rope trick, or *Theories of Surplus Value* as a trick with silk scarves. Didn't you say that?

MARX: Certainly.

IAN: Well why did you tell me all those things, if you don't think conjuring tricks can actually change anything?

MARX: It was a *joke* of course. That's the trouble with some of you left-wing people, you've got no sense of humour.

IAN: I see. But don't you think I could take some part in the process of change? Maybe my magic tricks could act as a sort of catalyst.

MARX: I've told you what I think. But then again, I don't necessarily have the last word on cultural theory.

IAN: Don't you?

MARX: No. I'm really more of an economist and a philosopher than a cultural theorist. You could try asking that other bloke what he thinks.

IAN: Which bloke?

MARX: The one I met last time. The one whose name you can't pronounce without moving your lips. In common with many other words.

IAN: You mean Bertolt Brecht.

MARX: That's right.

IAN: I haven't seen him for a long time. We went our separate ways.

MARX: Well, I meet him from time to time. I'll have a word with him if you like.

(Brecht and Marx discuss Ian Saville)

MARX: Hello Bertolt.

BRECHT: Hello Karl Marx.

MARX: How are you?

BRECHT: I'm not too bad. Yourself?

MARX: Very well. Family all right?

BRECHT: Oh yes, all getting along nicely. How about your family?

MARX: They're very well.

BRECHT: Though we've been having a few colds, recently.. .

IAN: Listen, will you hurry up and get on with this scene. This is all irrelevant.

MARX: We were just trying to add a bit of human interest.

BRECHT: That's right. You can't spend a whole scene discussing cultural theory. Your audience will fall asleep.

IAN: Just get on with it!

BRECHT: OK, but don't say I didn't warn you. What did you want to ask me about, Karl?

MARX: Well, I understand you're an expert on cultural matters.

BRECHT: That's right

MARX: Well, whassisname, Ian Saville wants some help in that area. I thought you'd be the best person for him to talk to.

BRECHT: I see. What's his problem?

MARX: He wants to use magic tricks to change the world. Maybe you could talk him out of it.

BRECHT: I'll have a try if you like.

MARX: Good. He might listen to you.

BRECHT: Because of my experience in theatre?

MARX: Yes. But also because you're three-dimensional.

BRECHT: You think that makes a difference?

MARX: Definitely. People just don't take you seriously when you're flat.

BRECHT: Is that so?

MARX: Of course, it's not as bad as being entirely fictional. Like those gods who keep interrupting Saville's act.

BRECHT: No. Well, I'll talk to him.

MARX: Actually, do you think he's real?

BRECHT: Who?

MARX: Ian Saville.

BRECHT: I have my doubts. But I'll talk to him anyway.

MARX: Good. Cheerio then.

BRECHT: Bye bye.

(The idea of Utopia)

BRECHT: Hello, Ian Saville. Long time no see.

IAN: Hello Bertolt. How are you doing?

BRECHT: Not too bad, for a dead playwright. How are you, and your family?

IAN: Fine, a few colds... never mind about that. I won't beat about the bush. I presume Karl Marx has filled you in on the picture.

BRECHT: He has. No doubt he told you that your idea was highly unscientific.

IAN: Not in so many words, but that was the gist of his argument.

BRECHT: So why didn't you take any notice? Is it because he's flat?

IAN: Are you implying that I would take someone less seriously simply because they lacked the dimension of depth?

BRECHT: All right, all right. I was just checking.

IAN: So what do you think my chances are of changing the nature of society using conjuring tricks?

BRECHT: If you think a few of your puzzles and conundrums are going to bring to an end thousands of years of oppression, you're an even bigger fool than I thought you were in the last show we did.

IAN: What about really *good* tricks. Couldn't they effect a fundamental change?

BRECHT: Of course not. The idea is absurd.

IAN: Well, if you think that, why did you write your plays? I don't see why plays should be inherently superior to magic tricks in this respect.

BRECHT: I don't claim that my plays will change things in themselves. Plays, and I suppose even your magic tricks, might get people to look critically at things - especially at your ventriloquism - and when they are accustomed to criticise the world, people may feel more able to change it. But this can actually only happen when the productive processes in society are in a state that can be changed, and when the working class is politically and economically powerful.

IAN: Well how about this, then - if I can use my magic tricks to show people a picture, a vision of how society *could* be, maybe people will be so inspired by it that they'll overcome all obstacles to bring that sort of world into being.

BRECHT: I don't know about that. Sounds like Utopianism to me.

IAN: Maybe it is, but I'm getting desperate. Nothing else I've done has got me very far, so maybe utopianism isn't such a bad idea.

BRECHT: If this is the course you're determined to go on, maybe you should talk to those gods again. After all, they live in a socialist utopia.

IAN: Very well, I will. "*Mass action for a radical transformation of society from a society based primarily on profit to a society based on human need.*"

(Lighting Change)

Hello, can you hear me?

GODS: We hear you. What do you want now?

IAN: I've been thinking over what you said before, and I've decided that the best thing I can do is to use my magic to show people a vision of a perfect society.

GODS: Go ahead then.

IAN: The problem is, I'm not sure what a perfect society would look like. Do you think I could just have a quick peek at your Utopia to give me an idea?

GODS: No.

IAN: Why not?

GODS: It's against the rules. You have to find out how to make such a society yourselves. Anyway, our Utopia wouldn't suit you.

IAN: Why wouldn't it?

GODS: Ours is a Utopia for *Gods*, not human beings.

IAN: Oh well, there goes another idea. Thanks anyway.. .

GODS: Wait. Your plan is not entirely devoid of merit.

IAN: Really?

GODS: We are therefore willing to equip you with an aid to its execution. We are giving you some control over *time*.

IAN: Oh. Thanks very much.

GODS: Be sure to use this power wisely. You only have it until the end of the summer season.

(Lights change back)

IAN: So I found that suddenly, I possessed a new skill - something like *time-travel*. This was very useful to me as a conjurer, and I immediately put it to good effect.

I could send objects through time. So, If I wanted to make an object disappear, I could just send it into the past. Of course, I had to be very careful about how far into the past I sent it. For instance, if I wanted to make a giraffe disappear from this very stage, I'd have to send it back to a time when giraffes were roaming freely around this area - a distance of probably more than 50 years. Supposing I just sent it back 25 years, and it suddenly appeared in this room. I don't know what this room was used for 25 years ago, but supposing there was a masonic meeting going on, and they all had their trouser legs rolled up and were swearing to pull out one another's tongues if they breathed a word. Suddenly, a giraffe appears. The giraffe sees the whole ceremony. They can't reach its tongue, so they have to get two very long pairs of trousers made for it, roll them up to the knees, and swear it in.

If I wanted to make an object appear, I simply reversed the process - I waited until after the show, then sent the object back to the exact moment in the

show when I wanted it to appear, like this: *(Nothing happens)*. I must get my watch mended. *(silk appears in glass)*

If I wanted to make two objects change places, that was more complicated, involving something called a *double transposition*. Let me show you with this glass and bottle:

(Ian tries to make a bottle and glass change places using this principle, but finds instead that more and more bottles (or, as he claims, the same bottle at different times) keep appearing)

Occasionally, I would get stuck in a time loop. Let me demonstrate:

You see, I might empty this jug full of water into this bowl, and then find that the bowl was empty *(actions suit the words)* .. .

You see, I might empty this jug full of water into this bowl, and then find that the bowl was empty *(actions suit the words)* .. .

You see, I might empty this jug full of water into this bowl, and then find that the bowl was empty *(actions suit the words again)* .. .

You see, I might empty this jug full of water into this bowl, and then find that the bowl was empty *(actions suit the words)* .. .

You see, I might empty this jug full of water into this bowl, and then find that the bowl was empty *(actions suit the words)* .. .

(etcetera)

All this was very useful for me in technical terms, as I no longer had to learn any complicated sleight of hand to bring about my magical effects, but as the end of the summer season approached I began to feel that the Gods must have given me this power for some more important purpose than just to make bottles or silk handkerchiefs appear out of nowhere. Eventually it dawned on me that I could use my new-found facility to get a glimpse of a

future socialist society, and if I could only use this vision to reassure my audiences that such a future really was there - up ahead, past a few bends and precipices and one or two more sticky patches like the one we're now going through - then the journey wouldn't seem nearly so tiring and tedious.

But again, there was a problem. As I experimented with time travel, I became aware of my limitations. To begin with, I could find no way of actually travelling through time *myself*. My power was limited to merely sending other objects through time. What's more, I could send things from the past to the present, or from the present to the past, but the *future* seemed to be out of bounds. There was some sort of impenetrable wall or barrier constantly moving through time, an infinitesimal instant ahead of the present. Only by breaking through this barrier could I hope to accomplish anything.

I decided that if I couldn't send *myself* through time, I could at least send somebody else. And if I could store my time travelling power in some sort of really big machine, I might be able to send that person past the barrier, and into the future.

Here's what I came up with. It may seem like an empty box to you, but I believed it could give me a glimpse of Utopia. But first I had to talk to Brecht.

BRECHT: So what is it you want me to do?

IAN: I'd like you to get into the box.

BRECHT: Then what?

IAN: Then get out again, and talk to people about the prevailing social system. Then when you get back you can tell me all about it.

BRECHT: Wait a minute. If I get in, then get straight out, what will have changed to make things so different?

IAN: The box will have moved.

BRECHT: Where to? The GDR?

IAN: Not exactly. It will have moved to a Socialist Utopia.

BRECHT: Isn't that what I said?

IAN: No, I'm talking about a completely socialist world, with no armed blocs, or armies, or anything like that. The society of the future.

BRECHT: Is this completely safe?

IAN: Certainly. I think. Anyway, you're already dead, so there's not a lot that can happen to you.

BRECHT: Why don't you go?

IAN: I have just constructed a whole series of convoluted reasons why I can't go, but for your information, the real reason is that I have to stay here and finish the show.

BRECHT: OK I'll go along with your idea. The idea of time-travel does have a certain appeal.

IAN: Good.

(Ian puts Brecht in box. Ian makes noise with whirling tube. Brecht sings. Singing gets quieter when lid is lowered, then louder when lid is raised. Then singing stops altogether.)

Something seemed to have gone wrong with the experiment. The box was still there, as it should have been, because it should have gone into the future, spent some time there, and come back to the exact moment after it left. *(Ian shows box empty)*. But now Brecht was gone from the box. He must have got out while the box was in the future, and not got in again before it came back. So Brecht was now stuck in the future.

I tried to send the box back into the future, but it was no use, there wasn't enough power left in the machine. It bounced against the barrier of present reality, and went shooting off into the past. When it returned, there were some surprises inside.

(Ian takes out roll of wallpaper, inflatable giraffe and dummy of William Morris.)

The wallpaper was very nice, but I didn't see that it would help in my quest for Utopia.

But who was this strange individual, who seemed to be sleeping? Those few of you who haven't guessed will have to wait until after the interval to find out.

(Black out)

INTERVAL

GETTING NOWHERE - AGAIN

ACT TWO

(Ian appears, and gets dummy of William Morris out of box.)

IAN: ...and so the sleeping man in the box began to wake up.

MORRIS: Mmmph. Hrrm...

IAN: Wake up!

MORRIS: Wha..!?

IAN: Wakey, wakey!

MORRIS: No. Go away Rosseti. Can't you see I'm sleeping?

IAN: Come on! We haven't got all day here.

(William Morris opens his eyes and looks around.)

MORRIS: Where am I? And why am I speaking with this slight German accent? *(Notices Ian)* And who are you? And why do you keep moving your lips when I'm speaking?

IAN: Look, these are all unimportant technical questions.

MORRIS: They may be unimportant to you, but they're very important to me. My whole personality is at stake. When I fell asleep I had an English accent, and now I've woken up with a German accent. It doesn't make sense.

IAN: You see, there's a limit to the number of different voices I can do.

MORRIS: But this voice is entirely inappropriate.

IAN: Well how about this one?

MORRIS: *(In Karl Marx's cockney voice:)* Which one?

IAN: The one you're using now.

MORRIS: Oh, this one?

IAN: Yes.

MORRIS: That's a bit better. More English I suppose. But it's still not right.

IAN: Can you give me an idea of the sort of voice you'd like, then?

MORRIS: Well, I'm a visionary.

IAN: A visionary?

MORRIS: A visionary. So I need a sort of visionary voice.

IAN: What about this, then?

MORRIS: *(Declamatory:)* I have awoken in a strange and unfamiliar place. *(Cockney:)* That's better. A bit over the top, though.

IAN: Well, it'll have to do. Who are you anyway?

MORRIS: I am William Morris!

IAN: William Morris, William Morris. You don't mean Bill Morris of the Transport and General Workers Union do you?

MORRIS: No, William Morris.

IAN: Oh! I know! William Morris. The inventor of wallpaper.

MORRIS: William Morris! Poet, designer, craftsman, pattern maker, printer, writer, political activist, revolutionary, visionary.. .

IAN: That's the one. Do you mind me asking - how did you get here?

MORRIS: I don't know. I was working late in my workshop, and I must have fallen asleep. And then I woke up.. . (*cockney*) Here just a minute - what year is this?

IAN: 1987. (To audience) Yarmouth, 1987. Remember?

MORRIS: Did you say 1987?

IAN: Yes.

MORRIS: 1987. Nineteen hundred and eighty-seven. One thousand, nine hundred and eighty-seven. That explains it.

IAN: What?

MORRIS: When I fell asleep, it was *1887*. Now I have awoken a century later. But to say I have awoken would be a mistake. For this is clearly another vision. A vision of the future.

IAN: Do you have a lot of visions, then?

MORRIS: (*Cockney:*) Oh yes. Visions of mediaeval England, mostly. But also Icelandic visions, and visions of beautiful patterns. But not, so far, a vision of the future.

IAN: Did you say you hadn't had a vision of the future?

MORRIS: Yes.

IAN: That's funny. I was sure you had. Didn't you write a Marxist Utopia called *News from Nowhere*?

MORRIS: No.

IAN: Wait a minute. Where's that book? Here you are. *News from Nowhere* by William Morris.

MORRIS: I don't remember writing that.

IAN: Just a minute. Let's have a look at the introduction.. .. It was published in 1888. No wonder. You haven't written it yet.

MORRIS: Of course I haven't written it. I'm only just having the vision.

IAN: No, this isn't a vision. This really is the future.

MORRIS: Of course, you're bound to say that, otherwise it wouldn't be a very convincing vision.

IAN: No. What must have happened is that you got scooped up by my time machine when it went haywire, and deposited here. In fact, I wouldn't be at all surprised if the Gods have contrived this meeting to help me. William Morris - you're the man we need. Your hope! Your vision!

MORRIS: But it is *I* who can learn from you! Is this *really* 1987?

IAN: Yes.

MORRIS: Then, tell me about the Socialist world of 1987.

IAN: So, as gently as I could, I explained to Morris that we hadn't yet established a socialist world. That there had been socialist revolutions, but that capitalism was still dominant. So that he might understand my work, I explained all these things with magic tricks.

(Ian does four magic tricks to illustrate this:

1: A ring, representing "a wheel on the road to socialism" suddenly becomes square.

2: A card with arrows pointing in different directions on each side illustrates the history of the left, with them starting off pointing in the same direction, changing directions on each side, changing colour, and finally all pointing at one another to show the state of the left today.

3: A red box represents to role of socialist leaders. Inside the red box is a smaller blue box, and inside that nothing. Eventually, the small blue box which was on the inside swallows up the red box, which is not seen again.

4: A Coca Cola bottle illustrates the role of American imperialism. It operates through undercover mechanisms and causes all sorts of havoc. Ian hopes that one day it will disappear - as his bottle does - but this has not yet been achieved.)

I also explained about mass unemployment, poverty in the third world, the arms race, the Tory government, the ozone layer and Television (dwelling particularly on the role of Paul Daniels.) By the end of all this, William Morris was rather depressed.

MORRIS: This is terrible. I fell asleep thinking that before too long people would find a way of living in peace, fulfilling their needs without destruction, then I wake up a hundred years later in a world that's even worse than the one I left. This isn't a *vision* of the future, it's a *warning*. I must go back to my time and make sure that this world doesn't come about.

IAN: That's no use to me. Anyway, you can't interfere with the course of history like that.

MORRIS: Why not?

IAN: If you go back, and make sure this world doesn't come about (which I very much doubt you could, anyway, but never mind) then I won't exist, at least not in my present form, right?

MORRIS: I suppose so.

IAN: So I won't be able to have pulled you through time to the present day, and you won't have been able to see this world.

MORRIS: Yes.

IAN: So how will you have come here to warn people that all this was going to happen?

MORRIS: I never thought of that.

IAN: I must send you back to your own time, so that you can write News from Nowhere.

MORRIS: But you've got me so depressed with your world that I can't summon up a vision of a better one. What if I just took the book back and got it published?

IAN: That's no good. That would be cheating. Anyway, look, the print in this copy of *News from Nowhere* has disappeared. And now the book itself has disappeared. It's as though you'd never written it. A classic of socialist literature is being lost to the world, and your vision of a new society is vanishing with it. And we need your vision now more than ever. Right now the best victory a lot of people can imagine is a Labour Government, which in my experience is just another form of defeat. And now the Labour party is carrying out a policy review in which it's not only throwing out the baby and the bath-water, it's also hitting itself over the head with the bath.

MORRIS: So what should I do?

IAN: We'll have to find that vision of a perfect world together. Anyway, you're the visionary. You should be able to tell me what to do.

MORRIS: Oh yes. Well I suppose we'll have to go in for a bit of dreaming.

IAN: Dreaming?

MORRIS: That's right. Sometimes it is necessary to dream, in order to find new ways of looking at reality. So, we will set out on a dream-journey.

(The shadow-puppet stage lights up, and Ian and Morris go behind. Their shapes can be seen, and Ian's voice is heard)

IAN: And so we set off on our journey. Morris explained that the dream world we were entering was only half real - the insubstantial longings of men and women through the millennia.

MORRIS: Listen Ian, the dream world we are now entering is only half real. It is the insubstantial longings of men and women through the millennia.

IAN: Is that so?

MORRIS: Absolutely.

We entered a land where anything was possible, where thoughts immediately became objects, and desires were immediately gratified.

IAN: You know, this reminds me of the adverts for Milton Keynes. (*shape of Acropolis appears*) What's that?

MORRIS: We have arrived in ancient Greece.

IAN: Why? I thought that to find the perfect world we'd need to travel into the future.

MORRIS: The search for the best possible way of organising the world extends back to the very beginning of time. This is the future, perfect world dreamed of by Socrates, written down by Plato - *The Republic*.

IAN: Very nice. What's in it?

MORRIS: No private property or free-market economy, but a rigid structure of classes. Everyone in their proper place, as decided by the ruling philosopher kings. But nevertheless, a society devoted to the pursuit of justice.

(Slaves appear)

IAN: What's that?

MORRIS: Oh, yes. I'd forgotten. The whole thing is based on slavery.

IAN: That's not very perfect.

MORRIS: No, well. Socrates was a product of his own time and class. He just couldn't envisage a civilised society without slavery.

IAN: This isn't what we're looking for then. Let's go on.

We journeyed on through more magical worlds. There was a man who had lost his head, dreaming of that first nowhere of all, Utopia itself:

IAN: Who are you?

MORE: I'm Thomas More

IAN: Why are you speaking like that?

MORE: I've got a bit of a sore throat.

(More's head floats up from his body and back down again)

IAN: What's your Utopia like, then?

MORE: There's no private property, but everyone has food, clothing, medicine and shelter. The working day lasts only six hours, but this is long enough to produce all that is required for a comfortable life. There are few laws, for it would be unjust to have a legal code that an ordinary person can't understand or read through.

IAN: Who's in charge, then?

MORE: We elect our supervisors. But of course, anybody who expresses a desire to hold public office is banned from standing for election.

IAN: Sounds like perfect communism to me. Equality for all.

MORE: Well, not *all*.

IAN: Why not?

MORE: Of course, you wouldn't expect equality for some people. Like atheists, or adulterers. Or, of course, women.

IAN: Time to move on, I think. Where's Morris gone?

MORRIS: Here I am. Try to keep up with the tour, will you. Over there to the left, that's Christianopolis, a sixteenth century Utopia by Andreae.

IAN: I don't suppose there's much there for me, a Jewish Atheist.

MORRIS: No, well there's no admittance there to beggars, quacks or stage players anyway.

BRECHT: Is that so?

IAN: What are you doing here? I thought you'd got stuck in the future?

BRECHT: I have, I have! I'm just having a little holiday.

IAN: Well you can't have it here! It makes a nonsense of the whole plot.

BRECHT: Why? It's supposed to be a dream sequence, isn't it?

IAN: Yes, but you're not in it.

BRECHT: Pardon me. (Goes)

MORRIS: Now here's Edward Bellamy's regimented society from his book "Looking Backwards". Nothing can change, no-one can rebel. Everything is paid for by special credit cards. And the greatest boon that Bellamy can imagine is piped music.

IAN: And what does he call that system?

MORRIS: Socialism.

IAN: That can't be right. Listen, I haven't seen much equality in any of these Utopias. Especially for women.

MORRIS: You must understand, a vision always builds on the ideas of its own time. There will be worlds of equality between men and women, but from where I stand, they're a long way off.

IAN: Well, I can see a few. There's Marge Piercy's future world, where childcare is the responsibility of all society, and all children have three mothers, who can be male or female. There's Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Herland, where there are no men - and no wars or competitiveness either. But I also see other twentieth Century Utopias. There's a monetarist Utopia. And there's Disneyland. There are too many dreams. They're crowding in on me. I can't make sense of them.

MORRIS: I think we've spent enough time here.

(Lights go haywire, ending up with Ian centre stage, with alter-ego - a cut-out, moving mouth picture of himself - behind his back)

IAN: All the time, as we had travelled through this land of visions, there had been a voice in the back of my head.

ALTER-EGO: What's all this about, then?

IAN: I'm trying to dream up a vision of a perfect world.

ALTER-EGO: Perfect world? Cloud-cuckoo land, more like.

IAN: What do you mean?

ALTER-EGO: You can't have a perfect world, as long as you've got *people*. Human nature is nasty and aggressive.

IAN: No, people are nasty and aggressive because they live in a nasty aggressive society. If you change the conditions, people will change.

ALTER-EGO: I can't see it myself. Anyway, you wouldn't want to live in a perfect world.

IAN: Why wouldn't I?

ALTER-EGO: It'd be boring. Can you imagine what sort of plays you'd have in a perfect world? You wouldn't even be able to have a decent soap-opera. Can you see it? "Hello dear, what sort of day have you had?" "I've had a perfect day, of course, just like yesterday, and the day before, and tomorrow and the next day.. ."

IAN: No, there would still be changing relations between people. People would still have crises and doubts, out of which are made drama. There just wouldn't be exploitation and oppression. And people would be able to fulfil their creative potential.

ALTER-EGO: What about politics?

IAN: What about it?

ALTER-EGO: What would it be like in this Utopia?

IAN: There wouldn't be any politics, because there wouldn't be classes or groups competing for power. Everyone would *have* power.

ALTER-EGO: But you like politics. You're a political person.

IAN: No I don't. I like working with other people, and hearing different views, but I'd be quite happy not to have to go on marches and demonstrations. I do those things to bring nearer an end to politics.

ALTER-EGO: Well, if you ask me, this is all a load of rubbish. You'd better hurry up and get back to reality.

IAN: I thought about what my cynical self had said, and maybe it made sense. What was the use in struggling for something that probably wouldn't come about in my lifetime anyway? All that work that Marx did, and Brecht, and Morris - it

didn't bring them the Socialist society they wanted, so was it really worth bothering? If I'm going to live the rest of my life under capitalism, isn't it better to accept that, and get what I can from it? What's the point in always being morally right, if you're always the loser? Yes, I'll get a job in the city. Or maybe I should do magic tricks on Sky Television. Or dream up an advertising campaign for privatising the air supplies - yes, I can see the adverts now. Lots of milk floats, with bottles of air being delivered. Of course, poor people don't need so much air. But if people want air, they should pay for it, so that someone can make a profit.....

.. . 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 song 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 I'd show them this trick. Our rulers say that there's no such thing as society, that we're all just separate individuals who have to look after ourselves, like these eight rings, and they rule over us by jangling us together, and sometimes hitting us one against the other. But occasionally, when we're hit together, we actually link up, and become much stronger.. .

(Rings link and unlink, ending with one long chain, which Ian holds aloft.)

IAN: .. . And I shared my vision with William Morris, who agreed that this could be the basis for a different world.. If only we could bring it about with mass action for a radical transformation of society from a society based primarily on profit to a society based on human need.

(Lights change to "Gods" lighting)

GODS: Ian Saville?

IAN: Yes. What do you want?

GODS: The summer season is over.

IAN: Is it?

GODS: We must have your report.

IAN: What report?

GODS: Have you accomplished anything?

IAN: Not yet. That's to say, Yarmouth is not yet in a revolutionary or immediate pre-Revolutionary state, but I'm still keeping my fingers crossed.

GODS: So the experiment has failed.

IAN: Maybe so in the short-term. But in the long term there is at least some hope.

GODS: I am afraid we must take back your time-travel facility.

IAN: Ah, but that's a bit of a problem. You see, somehow I've got William Morris stuck in the present day, and Bertolt Brecht stuck in the future.

GODS: All right. You can have five more minutes to put things back how they were. After that, I'm afraid we can have nothing more to do with you. You're on your own. Farewell ...

(lights change)

IAN: Right. Ta-ta then William Morris. It's been nice knowing you. Good luck with the wallpaper. And don't worry about the new book on the Socialist society of the future - I'm sure it'll be a classic.

MORRIS: Yes, after what you said, I had a lot of ideas. I thought I could wake up in my own house in Hammersmith, in the future.. .

IAN: Yes, very good, but I've only got five minutes.. .

MORRIS: What do you think of this idea - I thought Parliament could have been made into a dung-store.. .

IAN: A dung-store?

MORRIS: That's right. What do you think?

IAN: Very good. Just get going. You can write the book on the way.

MORRIS: And I would try to pay for something, say a pipe, with money, and they wouldn't understand.. .

IAN: Just get in the box!

(Morris goes in box. Whirly tube. Lights. Ian opens box again, and Morris has vanished. Box is closed. Brecht's voice is heard, singing. Ian gets Brecht out of box, along with copy of News from Nowhere.)

BRECHT: So, here I am in the future. Now what do you want me to do?

IAN: What do you mean, the future? This isn't the future, this is just the end of the show. Or possibly the middle.

BRECHT: Well, it's the future as far as I'm concerned. Look, I brought you this book. I got it from some hairy geezer who was wandering around the space-time continuum. I think he'd got lost. Anyway, he wanted you to read out some passage at the end that he'd marked.

IAN: It's News from Nowhere. The print has returned. And look, Morris has put a pencil line in the margin by these last words:

(Read final lines of book)

“Go back again, now you have seen us, and your outward eyes have learned that in spite of all the infallible maxims of your day there is yet a time of rest in store for the world, when mastery has change into fellowship - but not before. Go back again, then, and while you live you will see all round you people engaged in making others live lives which are not their own, while they themselves care nothing for their own real lives - men *(and then he's pencilled in 'and women')* who hate life, though they fear death. Go back and be the happier for having seen us, for having added a little hope to your struggle. Go on living while you may, striving with whatsoever pain and labour needs must be, to build up little by little the new day of fellowship, and rest, and happiness.” Yes, surely! and if others can see it as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream. “Best wishes to Ian Saville, from William Morris.”

.. . And so, I continued to practise the art of Socialist Magic.

(Black out)

THE END