

All that revolution in Paris in '68? I honestly thought it would spread.

MICHAEL DONOVAN, LIMERICK CITIZEN AND RESIDENT OF NOTTING HILL, 1969.

Drawing various strands together, in Limerick an understated historical attitude of cultural resistance along European lines did emerge in the era 1968–1973. It continues to influence succeeding generations of youth as a type of resistance described by the French theorist Michael de Certeau in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life* as a 'silent production.' Here, this type of production encourages users to adapt the dominant cultural economy for their own 'rules' and create 'the network of the anti-discipline' (year p.).

For Limerick, networks of anti-discipline remain in disparate links between actions unique to the city, particularly as its youth sought to process the accelerated possibilities of the counterculture. For its revolutionary potential this foregrounds the necessity for silent production in any understated incident circa 1968–1973. An example that illustrates the importance of silent production in this context is one that considers a psychogeographical reading of Jean Luc Goddard's 1969 film *Sympathy for the Devil* (also known as *One on One*). The showing was an event organised by the Limerick Art College then situated in George's Quay. For the invites, care was taken in how they were disseminated, as participation in this event was framed as a significant happening instead of a conventional 'pop' cinematic experience. Underlining Goddard's revolutionary intention, this was a call to 'those in the know' (year p.). In *One on One/Sympathy for the Devil* incidents of dramatic tableau featuring preaching revolutionaries were set against the documentary recording of The Rolling Stones in the studio crafting their song, *Sympathy of the Devil*.⁵¹ *One on One* was not a commercial success on release but it and another film that featured London as an alternative backdrop, *Performance* directed by Nicholas Roeg (1968), was of interest as psychographic points for an underground map of Limerick representing points on a map referencing a translation of a changing counterculture before 1973.

The fractured narratives contained in both these films partly acted as testimony for the Irish who used the conduit between the English capital and Limerick to develop 'hippie modernism' in a local context. *Performance* in particular was an alternative home movie for those who had not been. As the complexity of the counterculture, in regard to its increasing co-optioning for commercial ends, became difficult to translate, a film like *Performance* suggested how journeys through certain urban spaces become journeys of psychic space. This resonated in respect to the film's setting in the rebel enclave of Notting Hill. An act of resistance by the counterculture to co-modification remained the act of dressing up, of morphing identity in costume. Dressing up was seen as 'a form of self-performance available to all' (Author, 2005 p.109).

Both of these films starred Mick Jagger then transforming from entertainer to (sometimes unwilling) cultural spokesperson. In an interview at the time with a Danish counter cultural paper, *Politiken*, Jagger promoted the film in rebel persona and outlined plans by The Rolling Stones to donate some of the profits from an upcoming tour to fund revolutionary movements such as the Black Panthers.⁵² For the mainstream media

⁵¹ An earlier film by Goddard *La Chinoise* (1967) had at its centre a young Parisian Maoist sect and had dramatised the French intelligentsia's modish adoption of the rhetorical appeal of Mao's language of violence as a revolutionary tool for western rebellion.

⁵² In Goddard's *Sympathy for the Devil* the actor Frankie Dymon plays a character blatantly called 'Black Power' and is seen reading an issue of the *International Times*.

he represented both a convenient countercultural cypher and traditional pop star, but for the youth he epitomised and continued to represent the outsider. So much so, that the occasional Limerick Youth who overtly mimicked his changing attire acquired the nickname 'Jagger.'

The film *Performance* arrived in Limerick with impeccable revolutionary credentials wrapped in an 'acid' wrapper and supporting a narrative based on 'the symbolic domains of psychic formation... the realms that the counterculture declares its presence' (Nannette, 2005 p.99). *The International Times* had glowingly reviewed *Performance* as 'an evil movie' and reported that its corporate film distributors, Warner Brothers, had issued a warning for people not to see it while under the influence of LSD (year, p.).

For Ireland, new perspectives resonated here for a cinema audience who came to performance in this instance on the strength of Jagger. Those who had appreciated the early rebellious noise of The Rolling Stones as a generational counterblast in Limerick and who remained made up one side, and those who left and returned after experiencing the London of the Rolling Stones in the mid to late sixties, made up the other side. Together, both groups watched the psychic space of London deconstructed in front of them on a Limerick screen. The latter used these occasions to discuss the ethos of Notting Hill. The psychic space of Notting Hill as depicted in *Performance* was by then, according to Gordon Carr, 'the centre for radical student drop outs and for anyone who wants to go to the extremes in social and political life without too much attention from his neighbours or the authorities... Living evidence of capitalist decay' (year). It was something they felt compelled to explain to those Limerick Youth who had yet socially to shape their own cut particularly in the seventies where generational complexity benefited from the London conduit. By 1969 the act of fragmented editing in films such as *Performance* hinted at psychedelic experiences but they also sought to portray the limitations of cinematic form when it came to conceptually recording what could be construed as psychic environments. Outcomes that questions the limitations blended a mix of fact and fiction in an attempt to disrupt or subvert conventional narratives. As a film *Performance* was a drama but on its original showing in an Irish context it had strong alternative documentary overtones. Significantly, the version shown in Limerick contained some cuts required by the Irish censor. 'You could tell,' remarked Joe Deegan, a Limerick musician who saw the film in the Savoy cinema at the time, 'Even though the style of the film was fragmented you could still see where the censor cut particularly if any sort of nudity appeared. This made a film steeped in London's counterculture even more relevant to us then' (2016).

Conceptually, the setting of the site where *Sympathy for The Devil* was shown in George's Quay is significant as it was close to the premises of what was briefly Limerick's first and only Maoist bookshop. Goddard features an absurd scene set in such a Maoist bookshop in his film and this mirrors the audacity of the group who set up the shop. Their leader was a 21 year old called Arthur Allen from Drogheda and they functioned under the name the Revolutionary Youth.

In 1969, Allen and two other youths arrived in Limerick as a vanguard to spread

Figure 23

Maoist Bookshop on
Nicholas St 1970.



the message of Maoism. In an uncalculated and unintentional inflammatory affront to sensitive authorities, they based themselves in a small premises in Saint Mary's Parish, Nicholas Street, which was situated directly across from King John's castle. From this base, they followed the standard path instigated by European Maoists in delivering revolutionary tracts to citizens working in the industrial parks that surrounded the city. The Maoists took jobs in the Shannon Industrial Estate and began to write on the industrial conditions they experienced there from a workers' perspective for the workers. The un-jargonistic writing discussed the poor working conditions as well as issues relating to the town's medical dispensaries. This was a recognised anti-capitalist action practiced in France and Italy. Robert Lumley's study of the interaction of radical youth and the industrial class records the utopian possibilities of intergeneration action. 'We students refuse to be either tomorrow's agents of exploitation in the hands of the bosses, or to be exploiters ourselves... In the struggle against exploitation the most important role will be played by the working class... we want to know and discuss your problems so as to learn how to struggle against capitalism and to teach the lessons to the younger students' (Eco and Violi, 1976).⁵³

Students had been the first to insist on grass-roots democracy based on general meetings, and on the effectiveness of direct action. Student activists perceived themselves in a variety of ways – as detonators, ideologues, leaders and even guerrillas, but never less than ever students. After the dramatic events at fiat during the industrial dispute of June/July 1989 when mass meetings involved thousands of workers and students, it seemed the overthrow of capitalism was a real possibility' (Lumley, 1990 p.133-135).

The Irish version of this international anti-capitalist mission was immediately associated with a variety of non-conformist danger. This subsequently infamous site in Nicholas Street became a beacon for Catholic protest led vigorously by the then Mayor, Alderman Stevie Coughlan.

⁵³ The complexities of Maoism as an extension of Marxist directions and as processed by European revolutionary groups does not feature here. Writing in 1964, Isaac Deutscher in *Maoism – Its Origins and Outlook*, he says, 'Maoism was from the outset Bolshevism's equal in revolutionary vitality and dynamism, but differed from it in a relative narrowness of horizon and a lack of any direct contact with critical

developments in contemporary Marxism. One hesitates to say it, yet it is true that the Chinese revolution, which in its scope is the greatest of all revolutions in history, was led by the most provincial-minded and "insular" of revolutionary parties. This paradox throws into all the sharper relief the inherent power of the revolution itself' (Marxist Internet Archive, 2012).

Figure 24

La Chinoise.

Jean Luc Goddard 1967.

(Image from en.unifrance.org).



Figure 25

Nicholas Street 2013,

near the site of the

Maoist bookshop.



Coughlan had strong ties to an influential conservative Catholic organisation in Limerick called the Arch-Confraternity. Run by the Redemptorist order they maintained their conservatism in light of Vatican II's efforts to modernise the order and acted, with Coughlan, as moral guardians for the city who attempted to have a monopoly on social and cultural activities. The complexities of Maoism and its type of Marxist ideology and European translation did not feature for Coughlan who regarded the threat of its atheism and youth vanguard as a threat to the structures ruled in the main in the city by a Catholic hegemony.

For years the figure of Mao as head of state remained as shorthand for the complete

opposite of a Catholic state. A well-known history book on the official syllabus called *The Modern World* (1975) was often the first time Irish youth encountered the chairman; his smiling image below the sober one of John F Kennedy.

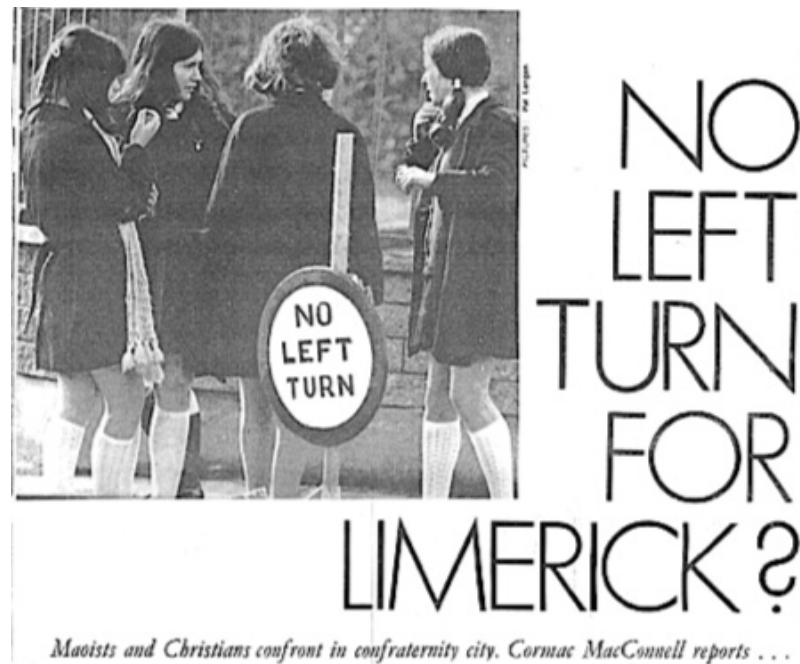
Figure 26

'Find out more about the three famous statesmen shown here. How many of them are still alive? Each is connected with a powerful nation. Can you name each of these countries? Which sides did each take during the Cold War?' (1975 p.167)



Figure 27

Report in (Insert Newspaper) year Source.



In a contemporary report on the Maoist presence, Deirdra O'Regan described an official environment concerned with youth and difference.

Limerick has frequently suffered anti-immorality campaigns, when the blackthorn stick was vigorously utilised by priests to root out courting couples. In the 1950s vigilante groups were organised for cinemas by the Arch-Confraternity. These men lurked at the back of cinemas and pounced on necking couples. (One of these stalwarts was the renowned Sean South of Garryowen.) Four years ago when a discotheque was opened in the city the Teaching Orders, afraid that drugs were being passed at dances, ordered all pupils to publicly burn their membership cards. Those who refused were threatened with expulsion' (O'Regan, year p.).

The Mayor saw the very idea of the presence of an outpost for Maoism as encapsulating an international threat embodied in godless Marxism, Eastern religion, and gender politics. He publicly encouraged Limerick citizens to shun these corrupted youth and in this was assisted by the conservative local press. Both the Limerick Leader and the Limerick Chronicle began to publish a series of anti- communist articles epitomising, 'The local middle class which is deeply religious and conscious of its moral duty to act as a watchdog for the local working class' (O'Regan, year p.).

Figure 28

1968 communist poster.

Found in Ballyclough,

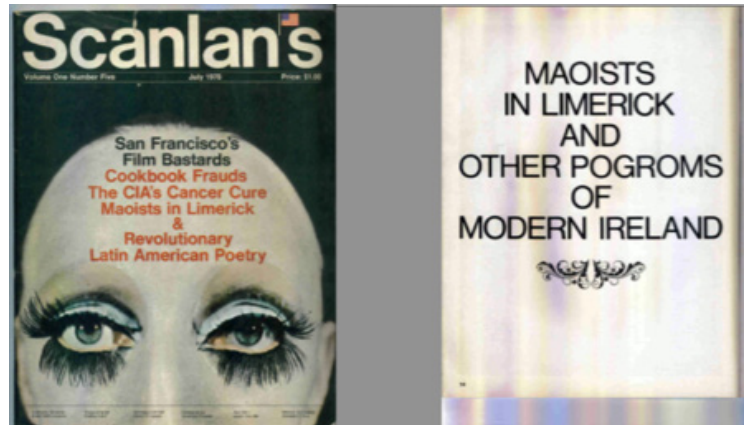
Limerick, 2011.



'The Maoist's, according to the Mayor, are looking way ahead. They are seeking to indoctrinate the 17–22 age group into a fairy-tale world, which they could create by tearing down the entire Irish cultural structure' (Curtin, 2013). Coughlan also accused a Labour Movement member, Mr. Tony Pratschke, who was a vocational school headmaster, of distributing Maoist propaganda in his school and saw to it that parents should be made aware of the evil that threatened their children (the Maoists had been attending Labour meetings). Employers in the Shannon estate were then contacted to fire the Maoists.

Figure 29

Scanlan's Magazine.
USA July 1970.



Fear of 'Red' propaganda infiltrating Limerick schools prompted a meeting of the city's Catholic administrators who publicly announced that they would implement a 'secret plan' should their fears be realised. An editorial in the *Limerick Leader* publicly dammed the Red threat, 'The people of Limerick must wake up to the threat that is facing them and they must unite to run all those connected with such a (Maoist) movement before serious damage is done to the community as a whole' (*Limerick Leader*, 1970 p.).

An anti-apartheid clash on the occasion of the visit of the South African rugby team, the Springboks, led a Jesuit priest to inform his class in school that he had been attacked and injured at the incident where the 'Maoists' threatened to 'destroy the Arch Confraternity' (Source). This led to an editorial in the *Limerick Chronicle* (January 3rd, 1970) castigating the 'tin gods' of Maoism and stating that, 'Those in authority must not shirk in their duties now. Perhaps the greatest danger of all is the public display of Communist propaganda in a shop which the Maoists have opened in the city.' The pressure increased after a sermon in the Augustinian church specifically called for the removal of the Maoists and a group of Catholic women canvassed for a march to forcibly evict them. While the clergy did not openly support this move, Coughlan encouraged it by sending a letter to publicans in the city urging them to ban the, 'soft-talking pseudo intellectuals, in some cases strangers to our city, (who) should now cash in on the work of so many citizens, and use your premises to try and hoodwink and delude members of the general public' (Reference). He was then made aware that there was a young Maoist

in the Leaving Cert class in the Crescent College and demanded his expulsion. This was contested by the school prefects although it is said that the school rector, Father Hugues was inclined to acquiesce. Couglan responded by visiting all schools in Limerick and was allowed to deliver a fifteen minute lecture on the dangers of Communism while threatening expulsion to any student with Maoist tendencies who made themselves known to the authorities.

The student in questions signed his name as B (Brendan) Mulcahy and he was 16 years old. In conversation in 2014 Mulcahy says that a short article that he wrote for the school magazine on the topic of the witch hunt of the Maoists was brought to Mayor Couglan's attention when it went to print as a school magazine *The Crescentarian* in the *Limerick Leader*. Mulcahy mentions being influenced by the progressive strand of the Jesuits who practiced liberation theology in working closely with communities who processed socialist ideals. His article was a plea for reason on both sides and titled, *Controversy on Red Patriotism*. He calls for reason before challenging the Mayor's plan to 'run the Maoists out of town.' He wrote, 'Most of this regional "Red Patriot party" are Limerick boys who have not found that the opinions of Chairman Mao Tse Tung coincide with their own opinions of Communism, a right which no one can deny them. Of the small minority who do support the Maoist doctrine I say, congratulations on expressing your beliefs and risking your very position in your schools, maybe with fear of expulsion. However, one last word to the Maoists and the Authorities: respect one another's opinion always and then you may be confident of arriving at a proper compromise.'

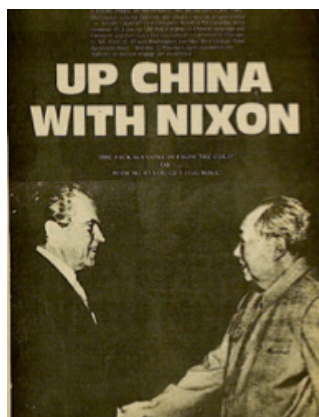
Figure 30

Karl Arpell print from 1968.
Found in Clare Street,
Limerick 2012.



Figure 31

International Times..
Vol 1 issue 128. P 11. 1971.



54 It is said that the bullet was taken from the window and remains in the possession of a Nicholas Street local. (2016)

The Maoist bookshop eventually succumbed to a violent closure that year when a shot by persons unknown was fired through the window.⁵⁴

The Maoist bookshop was one space created and maintained by the youth including a small but dedicated amount of local youth. It epitomised an attitude of international defiance that functioned briefly in tandem with the music-based events that were supported by non-conformist youths marking a transitional time for the mission of the international counterculture. In the context of a Limerick ruled in part by the arch-confraternity, this outpost was a brief but unique base for that mission. This incident is a unique contribution to the era's understated countercultural narrative. It suggests parity with the politicalised countercultural directions at that time and the incident forms part of a report on the Irish situation in the annals of the international free press. It featured in a long article for a 1970 issue of the high-end American counterculture magazine, *Scanlans*, under the headline 'Maoists in Limerick.'