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Theatre as Truth Practice: Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*

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Chapter 3

Using the Past to Intervene in the Present: Spectacular Framing and the Point of Theatre

No kind of literary gratification is so much within the reach of the multitude as that which is derived from theatrical representations. Neither preparation nor study is required to enjoy them: they lay hold on you in the midst of your prejudices and your ignorance.¹⁵⁸

In the following two chapters I will not be concerned with arguing in favour of or against other interpretations of *The Crucible*, such as those proposed by scholars like Robert Warshow, Henry Hewes, Walter Kerr, Joseph T. Shipley, Eric Bentley, Penelope Curtis and others.¹⁵⁹ Nor will I elaborate extensively on the literature available about an unsettling period of American history known as the McCarthy era. Instead, I will look at the different ways in which *The Crucible* intervenes in the political circumstances of its times *as a piece of theatre*. Whereas in the previous two chapters the relation between theatre and the representation of history was the focal point, in the following two chapters I will be looking at the play's relation to its present in terms of theatricality. As a piece of theatre or literature, the text cannot intervene directly in the present. Or, at least, it cannot do so in a way that resembles a political decision – or a subpoena, for that matter. Literature and theatre are part and parcel of the present, but the way in which they work on the present will have to relate it in terms of a time lapse, by means of past and future. Or, to put this differently, in the case of *The Crucible*, theatre intervened slowly in light of the speed of the show.

¹⁵⁸ Alexis De Tocqueville, 'Some Observations on the Drama amongst Democratic Nations', in *Democracy in America*, trans. by Henry Reeve Vol. 3 (London: Saunders and Otley, 1840), p. 163.

¹⁵⁹ Robert Warshow, 'The Liberal Conscience in *The Crucible*', in *The Crucible: Text and Criticism*, ed. by Gerald Weales (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 210-26; Henry Hewes, 'Arthur Miller and How He Went to the Devil', in *The Crucible: Text and Criticism*, ed. by Gerald Weales (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 182-88; Walter Kerr, 'The Crucible', in *The Crucible: Text and Criticism*, ed. by Gerald Weales (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 189-91; Joseph T. Shipley, 'Arthur Miller's New Melodrama is Not What it Seems to Be', in *The Crucible: Text and Criticism*, ed. by Gerald Weales (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 201-03; Eric Bentley, 'The Innocence of Arthur Miller', in *The Crucible: Text and Criticism*, ed. by Gerald Weales (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 204-09; Penelope Curtis, 'The Crucible', in *The Crucible: Text and Criticism*, ed. by Gerald Weales (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 255-71.

In this chapter I will focus on the play's intervention in the present in relation to the immediate past, and in the next chapter on its relation to the future that it appeals to. The pivot between the two will prove to be allegory, either as means to circumvent censorship and use and rework historical rifts, or as a mean to call for a better future. This chapter will address the main problem of how Miller's theatre play intervenes in and subverts the politics of its own times. It concerns, in a sense, a battle between two forms of artifice. Miller, in those days, had the impression of living in an artificial realm, as he indicated in his Massey lecture at Harvard: 'We were living in an art form, a metaphor that had no long history but had suddenly, incredibly enough, gripped the country'.¹⁶⁰ Apparently, the control by the radical Right was reminiscent of the artist's control of language, in its power to juxtapose the real with the unreal.¹⁶¹ The whole national scene was as surreal like a scripted text. Miller described its scenario as follows:

That all relationships had become relationships of advantage or disadvantage. That this was what it all came down to anyway and there was nothing new here. That one stayed as long as it was useful to stay, believed as long as it was not too inconvenient, and that we were fish in a tank cruising with upslanted gaze for the descending crumbs that kept us alive.¹⁶²

The situation that Miller describes here concerned the so-called 'red-baiting' trials, initiated by the House Un-American Activities Committee, also known as the McCarthy hearings. These were all mass media campaigns that required famous public figures to first confess their past or current affiliation with Communism and then recant their former political idealism, shunning it as a product of their youthful naïveté.¹⁶³ Tema Nason put it simply in her fictional biography of Ethel Rosenberg, when she makes Ethel say: 'It is all clear to me

¹⁶⁰ Arthur Miller, 'The Crucible in History', The Massey Lecture, Harvard University, in *Arthur Miller's The Crucible: Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008), p. 86.

¹⁶¹ Jeffrey Clapp, 'From Signing to Strangling: Arthur Miller and the National Security State', *Textual Practice* 28.3 (2013), pp. 366-67.

¹⁶² Miller, *Timebends*, pp. 333-34.

¹⁶³ Jim Finnegan, 'Edwin Rolfe's Historical Witness to the Spectacle of McCarthyism', *College Literature* 33.3 (Summer 2006), p. 138; Walter Kalaidjian, 'Deeds Were Their Last Words: The Return of Edwin Rolfe', *College Literature* 24.3 (Oct. 1997), p. 64.

now, finally at this late hour. They had their script. I had mine. Theirs: “Confess, lie, and you'll live”.¹⁶⁴

Obviously, the tropes of official signatures and public testimonies in the 1950s strongly resemble with the pattern of ‘naming names’ in Salem in 1692. Likewise there was a strong similarity between the arrogance or pride of the prosecutors both in the Salem period and under McCarthyism. About this similitude, Miller says in his autobiography: ‘The same misplaced pride that had for so long prevented the original Salem court from admitting the truth before its eyes was still alive here. And that was good for the play too, it was in the mood’.¹⁶⁵ Miller is hinting here at the play’s opponent: The House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), which had been preceded by a number of sub-committees since the early twentieth century. These were the Overman Committee (1918-19), the Fish Committee (1930-31) and the Dies Committee (1938).¹⁶⁶ As Cate explains, the Dies Committee was refurbished as HCUA in 1945 and voted by 207 to 86 to become a permanent standing committee with unique powers to investigate and subpoena. This committee had powers to investigate:

(1) The extent, character and objects of un-American propaganda activities in the United States, (2) the diffusion within the United States of subversive and un-American propaganda that is instigated from foreign countries or of a domestic origin and attacks the principle of the form of government as guaranteed by our Constitution, and (3) all other questions in relation thereto that would aid Congress in any remedial legislation.¹⁶⁷

On 21 June 1956, three years after the Broadway premiere of *The Crucible*, Arthur Miller was subpoenaed by the HCUA while he was under investigation for an allegedly unauthorized passport.¹⁶⁸ The charges against him were: ‘Signing CRC statements against anti-Communist legislation and against HCUA

¹⁶⁴ Tema Nason, *Ethel: The Fictional Autobiography: A Novel of Ethel Rosenberg* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2002), p. 303.

¹⁶⁵ Miller, *Timebends*, p. 337.

¹⁶⁶ David Cate, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge under Truman and Eisenhower* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), pp. 88-89.

¹⁶⁷ Cate, *The Great Fear*, p. 89.

¹⁶⁸ The sub-committee is often confused with the House Committee on Un-American Activities (better known as HCUA). As a senator, McCarthy was not a member of the House, but the HCUA was deeply involved with the national program of tracing Communists or their sympathizers.

itself; appealing on behalf of Gerhart Eisler and Howard Fast, attending five or six meetings of Communist writers in 1947'.¹⁶⁹

In this case, Miller only had to respond to the last of the charges. The charge document also detailed his support of the world youth festival in Prague, a *Washington Post* advertisement protesting against punitive measures directed against the Communist party of America, a statement by the Veterans against Discrimination advocating the abolition of the House Committee and certain actions of the Civil Rights Congress.¹⁷⁰ Both organizations were part of the so-called Attorney General's List of Subversive Organizations (AGLOSO). It originated through President Harry Truman's executive order 9835 on 21 March 1947.¹⁷¹ During previous nationwide scares, such as the post-World War I First Red Scare (called the first one, obviously, after McCarthyism proved to be the second one) and the World War II internment of Japanese Americans, the federal government had not widely publicized the list of suspicious organizations and individuals.¹⁷² However, early December 1947, as part of Democratic president Truman's Loyalty and Security Program, the federal government publicized the list on a grand scale and used it to threaten, damage and nearly destroy 300 organizations. These organizations were all listed without any notice, evidence or hearing.

I would like to point out that in this case the list was made public on a massive scale, unlike during previous 'scares'. This is an index of the generally public nature of McCarthy's working method. Make no mistake: there were many hidden machinations and secret actions but, strategically speaking, McCarthyism aimed to bring everything into the open in the form of a national spectacle. His policy was based on reducing the national scene to a frame of American democracy versus pro-Soviet Communism. This frame appeared strong enough inasmuch as failure to defend oneself against incrimination was considered as proof of seditious activities against the state.

On account of his past left wing leanings, Miller was implicated in the process. However, his response to being framed by McCarthy and his affiliates

¹⁶⁹ Caute, *The Great Fear*, p. 536.

¹⁷⁰ Allen Drury, 'Arthur Miller Admits Helping Communist-Front Groups in '40's', *New York Times*, Books, 22 June 1956 < <http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/11/12/specials/miller-front.html> > [accessed 15 November 2012].

¹⁷¹ Robert Justin Goldstein, 'The Grapes of McGrath: The Supreme Court and the Attorney General's List of Subversive Organizations in *Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee v. McGrath* (1951)', *Journal of Supreme Court History* 33.1 (2008), p. 68.

¹⁷² Mari J. Matsuda, 'Foreword: McCarthyism, The Internment and the Contradictions of Power', *Boston College Law Review* 40 (1998-99), p. 9.

was to produce his own frame, namely a theatre play in which he dramatized history for his own present. The play was an artistic intervention in the public show on which the hearings relied. Thus, in *The Crucible*, Miller used a famous Salem ritualistic trial from 1692 to expose the ritualistic nature of the 1950s McCarthy hearings. In this chapter I shall explore the socio-political circumstances that paved the way for congressional investigations and persecutions in the 1950s, and that gave rise to McCarthy's right-wing politics and the role of HCUA in investigating artists, academics and federal government servants. I shall proceed to explain how Miller's play intervened in the politics of his times to confront and expose the trial ritual that resurfaces in American culture at times of emergency. The chapter concludes with the radicalization of the notion of frame when I argue that Miller constructs his own theatrical frame to unhinge the frame created by McCarthy through his spectacular display of patriotic and unpatriotic Americans on the national scene during nationwide televised hearings.

3.1 McCarthy's Response to, and Use of, Forms of Anxiety

From 1950 until 1954, a junior Senator from Wisconsin, Joseph McCarthy, disrupted everyday politics in the US in his attempt to purge government institutions, universities, performing arts hubs like Hollywood as well as organizations which had allegedly suffered communist influence from the Soviet Union. Robert Griffith states that the set of judgments, attitudes and assumptions that gave rise to this brand of politics had its roots in American history and was a natural expression of America's political culture.¹⁷³

McCarthy's politics were certainly influenced by American foreign policy, the threat of communism and the Korean War. Yet, as Michael Paul Rogin points out, McCarthyism also 'reflected the specific traumas of conservative Republican activists: internal Communist subversion, the new Deal, centralized government, left-wing intellectuals, and the corrupting influences of a cosmopolitan society',¹⁷⁴ In the context of these experiences in the 1950s, Thomas C. Reeves defines McCarthyism 'as a method, a tactic, an attitude, a tendency, a mood, an hysteria, an ideology, and a philosophy.'¹⁷⁵ Whatever it

¹⁷³ Robert Griffith, *The Politics of Fear: Joseph R. McCarthy and the Senate* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1970), p. 30.

¹⁷⁴ Michael Paul Rogin, *The Intellectuals and McCarthy: The Radical Specter* (Cambridge, MA: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1967), p. 216.

¹⁷⁵ Thomas C. Reeves, 'McCarthyism: Interpretations since Hofstadter', *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 60.1 (Autumn 1976), p. 42.

was, it was not entirely new, but tapped into previous attempts to purge American society.

The American post-World War II political landscape, approximately from the late 1940s until the mid 1950s, offers more than just glimpses of a manifest use of fear, enhanced surveillance, blacklisting and repression, all elements used as part of the right-wing ideologues' tactic against government employees, educators, entertainers and trade union activists with left-wing political affiliations. The Cold War antagonism between the capitalist world and communism hastened the need in America to purge society from leftist entities belonging to the Communist party of America who were allegedly on the Kremlin's payroll with a view to violently disrupting the US democratic government for the sake of a global socialist revolution. In Cold War historiography, this is popularly known as the orthodox or traditional view, held by historians like Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr, Herbert Feis and Louis J. Halle – and this version, according to Edward Crapol, has remained the official view of the US government.¹⁷⁶ According to the traditional view in the late forties and early fifties, there had been an attempt to safeguard America's national security and democracy against the totalitarian threat from Soviet Russia, which led public and private actors to collaborate with each other to conduct inquisitorial loyalty tests on liberals, socialists, free-thinking intellectuals and labour unionists.¹⁷⁷ The 'new Left' revisionist theorists, amongst them William Appleman Williams, challenged this traditional and orthodox view and reassessed American foreign policy from the 1890s well into the twentieth century, as an expansionist policy that was aimed at building an economic empire.¹⁷⁸ In their view the US bore more responsibility for creating the Cold War than Soviet Russia. The 'post-revisionist' scholar John Lewis Gaddis formulated a synthesis of the two preceding schools of thought, presenting a widely accepted view of the events.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Edward Crapol, 'Some Reflections on the Historiography of the Cold War', *The History Teacher* 20.2 (1987), p. 252.

¹⁷⁷ Typical of such approaches are found in Herbert Feis, *Churchill-Roosevelt-Stalin: The War They Waged and the Peace They Sought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957); Feis, *From Trust to Terror: The Onset of the Cold War* (New York: Norton, 1970); and Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr, 'Origins of the Cold War', *Foreign Affairs* 46.1 (October 1967), pp. 22-52.

¹⁷⁸ William Appleman Williams, 'The Frontier Thesis and American Foreign Policy', *The Pacific Historical Review* (1955): pp. 379-80; also see John Lewis Gaddis, 'The Tragedy of Cold War History: Reflections on Revisionism', *Foreign Affairs* (1994), pp. 142-44.

¹⁷⁹ For the Post-Revisionist interpretations of the Cold War, read John Lewis Gaddis, 'The Emerging Post-Revisionist Synthesis on the Origins of the Cold War', *Diplomatic History* 7.3 (1983), pp. 171-90.

On the international scene, Soviet Russia's emergence as a post-war rival of capitalist democracies, the loss of China to Mao's Communist forces in 1949, the end of the American nuclear monopoly following the Soviet nuclear test in 1949 and the start of the Korean War (1950-53) were events that prompted vigilance in American power circles. They became proactive in unravelling elements of the Communist Party of America who were allegedly operating as foreign agents and spies. 'Who lost China' became an instant mantra in the mouth of Republicans.¹⁸⁰ The sweeping and Manichaeian response from the leadership as custodians of global peace, freedom and prosperity against Soviet totalitarianism, also offered an opportunity to the Republicans to pit their politics against the Democrats at home. On the face of it, this strategy provided them an overwhelming support from the American people, who, in a state of nationwide paranoia, relinquished their right of free speech in order to give precedence to national security.¹⁸¹

As may be clear, it is hard to fully separate the domestic from the international agenda. President Truman's Loyalty and Security Program of 1947 was initiated by an urgent need to safeguard national security but, because of the prevailing Red Scare, it was implemented without due regard towards safeguarding individual rights as guaranteed by the American Bill of Rights. The Justice Department collaborated with the state in giving precedence to national security over individual rights. The right of free speech was ignored on the ground that inflammatory speeches could excite violence and potentially trigger an overthrow of the democratic system.¹⁸² The central premise of President Truman's Loyalty and Security Program was to dismiss federal executive agency employees found guilty of involvement in any indigenous or foreign organization designated by the Attorney General as totalitarian, fascist, Communist or subversive.¹⁸³ Yet the arbitrary nature of the Attorney General's list of organizations, the secretive operational process of laying charges of disloyalty, conspiracy, political strikes, sabotage, etc. against a federal employee, and the denial of rights to rebut the charges riddled the process with procedural defects. Moreover, the inclusion of charges based on establishing

¹⁸⁰ Arthur Miller, 'The Crucible in History', p. 84.

¹⁸¹ Robert Griffith, 'American Politics and the Origins of McCarthyism', *The Specter: Original Essays on the Cold War and the Origins of McCarthyism*, ed. by Robert Griffith and Athan G. Theoharis (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974), pp. 8-9.

¹⁸² Ellen W. Schrecker, 'McCarthyism: Political Repression and the Fear of Communism', *Social Research* 71. 4 (2004), pp. 1047-51.

¹⁸³ Louise S. Robbins, 'The Library of Congress and Federal Loyalty Programs, 1947-1956: No "Communists or Cocksuckers"', *The Library Quarterly* 64.4 (1994), p. 367.

‘guilt by association’ with Communist organizations, left little margin of defence for those who belonged to them with genuine ideological zeal and no intent of causing harm to the state.

Thus, state security and state unity were given a holy resonance in the official political discourse, just as Salem’s so-called cunning folks were considered a threat to Puritan community unity. Thomas P. Adler also refers to this connection:

If, in Salem, Miller discerned at work a ‘cleansing’ through a ‘projection of one’s own vileness onto others in order to wipe it out with their blood,’ in 1950s America he sadly found ‘a public rite of contrition . . . an obligatory kowtow before the state, the century’s only credible god.’¹⁸⁴

The quote suggests more than metaphor. If the state has become God, this may indicate how opaque the force of the state was, and how small individuals appeared in front of its committee, and this in turn led to attempts to save one’s life by accusing others. For instance, statesman Alger Hiss was convicted on the basis of former Communist party member Whittaker Chamber’s accusation that Hiss had been a Communist spy. The latter was found guilty of perjury and was jailed for five years.¹⁸⁵ As for opaqueness, the Jewish couple Julius and Ethel Rosenberg was sentenced to death for sharing nuclear secrets with the Soviets, in a far from transparent legal process. They were convicted of conspiring to pass atom secrets to the Soviet Union, but the administration used circular logic to interpret their crime as the cause of death of fifty-thousand American soldiers who laid down their lives in Korea when the US nuclear monopoly ended.¹⁸⁶

The exact cause of the international historical confrontation between the US and Soviet Russia, or the Communist forces globally, is not the primary point of concern here. What had happened to the US in the decades preceding the fifties will be more helpful in uncovering the roots of the unfavourable opinion of Communism in America and how this related to various forms of societal fear. Like Miller, I am more interested in a home-bred cultural dynamic.

¹⁸⁴ Thomas P. Adler, ‘Conscience and Community in *An Enemy of the People* and *The Crucible*’ in *Bloom’s Modern Critical Interpretations: Arthur Miller’s The Crucible*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008), p. 75.

¹⁸⁵ Cate, *The Great Fear*, pp. 58-62.

¹⁸⁶ Atossa M. Alavi, ‘The Government Against Two: Ethel and Julius Rosenberg’s Trial’, *Case Western Reserve Law Review* 53.4 (2003), 1064; see also Cate, *The Great Fear*, pp. 62-9.

McCarthyism proved very effective in a political environment structured by a non-violent and quasi-consensual form of repression, specific to America, which was qualitatively different from the abrupt outlawing and banishments by totalitarian regimes elsewhere. Ellen W. Schrecker sums this two-phase process up when she states that ‘first, the objectionable groups and individuals were identified – during a committee hearing, for example, or an FBI investigation; then, they were punished, usually by being fired’.¹⁸⁷

To be sure, the shift in character of the global Communist movement – from national forms of hostile attack against liberal democratic institutions to apparent cooperation with reform organisations transnationally – made the American political elite sceptical about its own liberal Left. On the domestic scene, the status anxieties of Americans were also exploited by McCarthy, who received support from certain sectors of the population such as Catholics, semi-educated people, Republicans, Irish Americans, lower-class and retired people.¹⁸⁸ The educated elite, university professors, students and professional workers affiliated with managerial and clerical jobs were McCarthy’s vehement opponents, as they feared a curtailment of their freedom and personal rights by the investigating Committees.¹⁸⁹ And, indeed, McCarthy’s principal targets were artists, free thinkers and liberals, including Harvard professors, intellectuals, so-called ‘fellow travellers’, trade unionists, Jews and American elites in the administration. Especially the latter proved eventually to be his nemesis when his own Republican coterie withheld their support for him after the Army - McCarthy hearings in 1954 during the Eisenhower period.¹⁹⁰

American historian Richard Hofstadter observes that in the post-industrial environment in which people’s economic fortunes were in a state of flux and when the pre-World War II middle and lower middle class immigrant groups were replacing the old rich classes of Americans in their social standing, McCarthy’s right-wing campaign against the communists was received like a clarion call by his supporters.¹⁹¹ These people found in McCarthy’s politics an

¹⁸⁷ Ellen W. Schrecker, introduction, ‘McCarthyism: The Anatomy of an Inquisition’, in *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 9.

¹⁸⁸ Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and other Essays*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 69.

¹⁸⁹ Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), p. 286.

¹⁹⁰ Seymour Mandelbaum, *The Social Settings of Intolerance: The Know-Nothings, The Red Scare and McCarthyism* (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1964), p. 165.

¹⁹¹ Richard Hofstadter, ‘Pseudoconservatism Revisited: A Postscript (1962)’, in *The Radical Right*, ed. by Daniel Bell (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday & Company, 1963), p. 100.

expression of their grievances. Robert Griffith characterizes this as the anti-intellectual and anti-establishment mood of McCarthyism, which heavily relied on scorning liberals, diplomats and young men born with good fortunes.¹⁹²

Despite the guarantee of civil liberties and individual rights that the Americans were used to in normal circumstances, in the new political landscape the government deemed that giving free rein to left-wing liberal revolutionaries and their secret associates was a potential threat to security and the very structure of democracy. Civil liberties, although a great American strength and principle in peace time, were now increasingly perceived as a weakness in the system, especially during emergency and war situations – weaknesses that the enemy could exploit for disruptive purposes. As a result, a considerable number of politicians trampled on civil liberties without much hesitation. During the HCUA hearings, the defendants were denied the protection of the First and Fifth Amendment of the American Bill of Rights, which enshrine the right of free speech and protection against self-incrimination respectively. The protection of the First Amendment, guaranteeing the right of freedom of speech, was not granted to the accused because their political ideas were deemed antithetical to the official views on loyal citizenship. Their indictment was often enough to convict them during the hearings. Secondly, those defendants who refused to cooperate with Congress or Senate committees, by invoking the Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination, were still considered guilty as the ‘Fifth Amendment Communists.’ Therefore many absolved themselves by informing the hearing committees of other Communists and former fellow travellers they knew. This is similar to the practice of confessions, accusations and the blaming and naming of others in order to negotiate one’s life, as the Salem accused did in front of Danforth and Hale. It is worth noting, as James L. Gibson points out, that safeguarding democracy by non-democratic means of repression was itself illogical, as was the degree of the communist threat as a non-democratic means to disrupt democracy that had to be weighed against the degree of un-democratic repression that was unleashed by American democracy in the 1950s.¹⁹³ The threat proved to be exaggerated, according to Gibson, and by fighting it through repressive and non-democratic means, American democracy acted against itself.

¹⁹² Robert Griffith, ‘The Political Context of McCarthyism’, *The Review of Politics* 33.01 (1971), p. 24.

¹⁹³ James L. Gibson, ‘Political Intolerance and Political Repression during the McCarthy Red Scare’, *The American Political Science Review* 82.2 (Jun., 1988), p. 516.

Both the Republicans and the conservative Democrats in a virulently anti-Democrat and anti-New Deal congress of 1946 initiated a campaign of far-right Americanism and waged a war of criticism on the Truman administration for being too soft on Communists.¹⁹⁴ Following this uproar, Democrat president Truman's Loyalty and Security Program of 1947 revealed a dual purpose of containing the indigenous left-wing's covert infusion of Soviet-styled revolutionary Socialism and countering criticism of the conservative Republicans for being too lenient on them.¹⁹⁵ According to Robert Griffith, the new political environment offered an opportunity to conservative businessmen, organized veterans and patriotic societies like 'US Chambers of Commerce' and the 'American Legion' to amplify their concerns through the press about the perils of Communism.¹⁹⁶ Various interest groups harped on the string of fear and suspicion at different resonance and pitch, which then spiralled into the phenomenon of McCarthyism. It was not a populist movement, as Schrecker shows: there were different shades of anti-Communism on the American political horizon. Whereas the ultraconservatives were actually against favourable references to internationalism and the UN in textbooks, the liberals supported scrutiny of the Communists if it could be done without rankling non-Communists. Meanwhile, leftist radicals argued against Stalinism on account of the Soviet prime minister's corruption of the global socialist ideal. But, Schrecker continues, the main interest group consisted of conservative Republican men who furthered their political careers by manipulating the national environment of popular myths and stereotypes according to their own partisan concerns. Richard Nixon and Joseph McCarthy are prime examples of this, along with the FBI's J. Edgar Hoover.¹⁹⁷

Liberal political sentiments flourished in America between 1930 and 1945, ignited by an internationally fuelled anti-rightist stance against Fascism and Nazism in Europe. The thirties saw anti-big business and anticonservatism flourish in America under the aegis of various Congressional committees, such as the Nye Committee, against some Wall Street bankers' involvement in plunging America in World War I in order to maintain their investments; the La Follette Committee against large corporations' secret induction of labour spies to inhibit labour union formations; and the Truman Committee against the big

¹⁹⁴ Cauter, *The Great Fear* p. 33; Louise S. Robbins, 'The Library of Congress', p. 366.

¹⁹⁵ Schrecker, 'McCarthyism: Political Repression', p. 1045.

¹⁹⁶ Griffith, 'American Politics and the Origins of McCarthyism', pp. 10-11.

¹⁹⁷ Schrecker, 'McCarthyism: Political Repression', p. 1043.

business profiteering during World War II.¹⁹⁸ The liberal Left's supremacy offered an opportunity to the Communist Party of America to strengthen its various leftist groups and trade unions in the country. The party however followed a secretive path instead of winning electoral mass support in a democratic way. The secretive nature of the Communist Party organization sparked fears about their engagement in so-called un-American activities that in turn might lead to revolutionary defeatism of the democratic set-up. So, the political rhetoric of the thirties that focused on conservatives, isolationists, business leaders, Catholics, Republican senators and business leaders as traitorous semi-fascists, took a sharp turn in the post-war social and political scene when liberals had to be on the defensive against a far-rightist cult of conservatism banking on support from interest groups let down by the New Deal reform process.¹⁹⁹ From the mid-forties onwards, this process suffered severe setbacks and witnessed a virtual demise in the Cold War era due to the conservatives' discontent with and stance against their social reform domestically, and their thrust towards America's non-interventionist pacifist foreign policy. After all, until the Pearl Harbor attack, isolationism had its strains in both the left- and the right-wing political factions in the US. But as Justus D. Doeneke observes, the country's first pacifist national-socialist group, 'The Keep America Out of War Congress' (KAOWC; 1938-41) was created to oppose Roosevelt's overseas commitments.²⁰⁰ So, the Left had actually been anti-war and pacifist in its foreign policy agenda. McCarthy challenged their pacifism in the face of an impending Red Scare in the US.

A collaborative anti-Communist inquisition campaign by federal, state and local politicians, bureaucrats, journalists and the so-called 'professional witnesses' and informers set the tone for an environment of fear, suspicion and secrecy in the country which led the way to neglect of due process in loyalty hearings at most venues. Congressional bodies like the House Un-American Activities Committee, the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee and the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations were assisted by the FBI in identifying Communists at various work venues with the help of ex-Communist witnesses and informers. Small things could bring employers of accused people

¹⁹⁸ Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, *The Politics of Unreason: Right Wing Extremism in America, 1790-1970*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 214.

¹⁹⁹ Lipset and Raab, pp. 214-15; the New Deal was a series of reform processes introduced between 1933-36 during the Roosevelt administration in response to the Great Depression.

²⁰⁰ Justus D. Doenecke, 'Non-Interventionism of the Left: the Keep America Out of the War Congress, 1938-41', *Journal of Contemporary History* 12.2 (1977), p. 221.

to fire them from their jobs.²⁰¹ These punitive measures had didactic, educational and deterrent purposes for the population at large, who thus came to know the economic price of having revolutionary utopian ideas, or ideas bordering on these. The fear of infamy, the publicity value and the spectacle of criminal proceedings, the fact that people's patriotism was publicly doubted or that people were directly branded as unpatriotic, made most liberal employers acquiesce to Congress and dismiss many employees, even without sufficient evidence.²⁰² The hearings functioned like a stage performance, and the entire country watched them, as audience, in a state of paranoia.²⁰³

In Miller's *The Crucible*, Danforth's statement in Act 4 echoes the role played by the Justice Department in the McCarthy era when he says:

Postponement now speaks a floundering on my part; reprieve or pardon must cast doubt upon the guilt of them that died till now. While I speak God's law, I will not crack its voice with whimpering. If retaliation is your fear, know this – I should hang ten thousand that dared to rise against the law, and an ocean of salt tears could not melt the resolution of the statutes.²⁰⁴

As may be clear from Danforth's statement, the judges and the ministers in Salem who persecuted the people were under the impression that they were defending God's holy law against an attack from the Devil's mercenaries in occult forms. They were thus able to execute any deviant people without impunity. Likewise, McCarthy and his associates launched a national purification initiative in 1950s against the Communist spies, which led Miller to say, as we saw earlier, that the state had by now replaced God. The state then, in the embodiment of McCarthy and his associates, could freely suppress people's liberties through stringent congressional statutes and the politics of legislation

²⁰¹ Cate, *The Great Fear*, pp. 85-138.

²⁰² Schrecker, 'McCarthyism: Political Repression', 1056-57. To be sure the deterrence here is only a radicalization of the law's operation in general. American law professor and historian Lawrence M. Friedman explains the logic of the use of coercion and proscription in criminal justice proceedings for didactic purposes as follows: 'The teaching function of criminal justice, its boundary making function, is exceedingly important. Criminal justice is a kind of social drama, a living theater; all of us are the audience; we learn morals and morality, right from wrong, wrong from right, through watching, hearing and absorbing', Lawrence M. Friedman, 'Introduction', *Crime and Punishment in American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), p. 10.

²⁰³ Cate, *The Great Fear*, p. 140; Robert K. Carr, 'The Un-American Activities Committee and the Courts', *Louisiana Law Review* 11 (1951), p. 282.

²⁰⁴ Miller, *The Crucible*, p. 117.

that gave their investigations a constitutional cover.²⁰⁵ The Alien Registration Act or Smith Act (1940), the Magnuson Act (1943), the McCarran Internal Security Act (1950), the McCarran-Walter Act (1952) and The Communist Control Act (1954) were part of the legislation process which contributed to a full-fledged anti-Communist rage in the country.²⁰⁶ The Smith Act made it illegal for any individual or organization to deliberately intend or attempt to disrupt and overthrow the government through violence or force. The McCarran Internal Security Act, which is also known as the Subversive Activities Control Act of 1950, had a clandestine purpose of harassing Communist organizations by making it compulsory for them to register with the U.S Attorney general. The Immigration and Nationality Act or McCarran-Walter Act enabled the government to deport immigrants or naturalized citizens who were found guilty of involvement in revolutionary activities. The Communist Control Act thwarted any claim for legal rights and privileges for Communist organizations. The port security program or Magnuson Act (1950), besides ensuring coastal surveillance of the Navy, gave an opportunity to right-wing labour organizations to settle their scores with the leftist labour unionists who were still strong in that sector.²⁰⁷

Sketched like this, it almost seems inconceivable that any one individual would dare to rise against McCarthyism Miller did not operate as an individual however. He acted as an artist with an important public and collective tool: a play. But again, what could a theatre play achieve against in the face of such a massive spectacle? Let me have a closer look at this battle between different genres, with a different generic logic and force.

3.2 Power and the Frame of Spectacle

Against the backdrop of the right wing's supremacy in the US in the 1950s, *The Crucible* is a conscious and purposeful theatrical response to the seemingly theatrical but in essence *spectacular* operations of McCarthy and his men, i.e. spectacular in the sense of the adjective relating to spectacle. Miller illustrates the parallels between Salem and his own times by saying:

²⁰⁵ Carr, p. 283.

²⁰⁶ Caute, *The Great Fear*, pp. 70-81; Schrecker, 'McCarthyism: Political Repression', pp. 1049-50.

²⁰⁷ William R. Tanner and Robert Griffith, 'Legislative Politics and "McCarthyism": The Internal Security Act of 1950', in *The Specter: Original Essays on the Cold War and the Origins of McCarthyism*, ed. by Robert Griffith and Athan Theoharis (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974), pp. 172-89; Robert Griffith, 'The Political Context of McCarthyism', pp. 26-35.

But gradually, over weeks, a living connection between myself and Salem, and between Salem and Washington, was made in my mind – for whatever else they might be, I saw that the hearings in Washington were profoundly and even avowedly ritualistic. After all, in almost every case the Committee knew in advance what they wanted the witness to give them: the names of his comrades in the Party. The FBI had long since infiltrated the Party, and informers had long ago identified the participants in various meetings. The main point of the hearings, precisely as in seventeenth-century Salem, was that the accused make public confession, damn his confederates as well as his Devil master, and guarantee his sterling new allegiance by breaking disgusting old vows – whereupon he was let loose to rejoin the society of extremely decent people. In other words, the same spiritual nugget lay folded within both procedures – an act of contrition done not in solemn privacy but out in the public air.²⁰⁸

The key issues are the theatrical form of ritual and the element of *public* confession, as opposed for instance to the confessions during the inquisition by the Catholic Church, which were often obtained in isolated chambers of interrogation and torture. For Miller, a work of art could illuminate the dark aspects of reality that the political spectacle had masked. He states: ‘So I suppose that in one sense *The Crucible* was an attempt to make life real again, palpable and structured. One hoped that a work of art might illuminate the tragic absurdities of an interior work of art that was called reality, but was not’.²⁰⁹

Arthur Miller was first inspired by the 1692 Salem episode through Marion Starkey’s *The Devil in Massachusetts* from 1949.²¹⁰ The subject of witchcraft in a pre-modern theocratic society was initially a challenging subject in the context of the twentieth century and Miller adds that, ‘a drama cannot merely describe an emotion, it has to become that emotion’.²¹¹ Miller saw a living connection between the ritualistic scene of the hearings in Washington and the proceedings in Salem. The former were ritualistic in the sense that the Committee had already drawn its conclusions and its sole purpose was to extract confessions from the witnesses according to a pre-formulated verdict. Each

²⁰⁸ Miller, *Timebends*, p. 331.

²⁰⁹ Miller, ‘*The Crucible* in History’, p. 86.

²¹⁰ Miller, *Timebends*, p. 330; Miller, ‘*The Crucible* in History’, p. 98.

²¹¹ Miller, *Timebends*, p. 331.

hearing was characterised by this notion of purge through confession and the naming of fellow partners. He argues: ‘The overwhelmingly significant truth, I thought, as I still do, was the artist-hating brutality of the Committee and its envy of its victims’ power to attract public attention and to make big money at it besides’.²¹² Miller faced this brutality himself on 21 June 1956, when the House Un-American Activities Committee subpoenaed him. This happened two years after March 1954, when Miller had tried to renew his passport in order to travel to Belgium to attend a production of *The Crucible*. He was charged with contempt of Congress and his application was turned down on account of his so-called support of global communist activities which could undermine and endanger US national security.²¹³ Miller was now asked, amongst other things, for the names of the communist writers who were present at the meeting of communist authors held in New York City in 1947. Miller testified that he had never been a communist but that he had been associated with a number of communist-front groups in the past. He was present at five or six meetings of the communist writers but he refused to name those who had attended the meeting. The following excerpts from the questioning by Arens, Jackson and Scherer of the Committee illustrate Miller’s position:

Mr. Arens: Can you tell us who was there when you walked into the room?

Mr. Miller: Mr. Chairman, I understand the philosophy behind this question and I want you to understand mine. When I say this, I want you to understand that I am not protecting the communists or the communist party. I am trying to, and I will, protect my sense of myself. I could not use the name of another person and bring trouble on him. These are writers, poets, as far as I could see, and the life of a writer, despite what it sometimes seems, is pretty tough. I wouldn’t make it any tougher for anybody. I ask you not to ask me that question. . . .

Mr. Jackson: May I say that moral scruples, however laudable, do not constitute legal reason for refusing to answer the question. . . .

²¹² Miller, *Timebends*, p. 242.

²¹³ Joseph Loftus, ‘Arthur Miller and Dr. Nathan Indicted on Contempt Charges’, *New York Times*, 19 February 1957 < <http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/11/12/specials/miller-indicted.html> > [accessed 14 November 2012].

Mr. Scherer: We do not accept the reason you gave for refusing to answer the question, and . . . if you do not answer . . . you are placing yourself in contempt.

Mr. Miller: All I can say, sir, is that my conscience will not permit me to use the name of another person.²¹⁴

The last sentence is clear in its defiance. I should hasten to add that Miller did not recant from his past affiliations but he did express regret about having been a communist sympathizer in the past, after having witnessed the Soviet leadership's persecutions of their own citizens and intellectuals.²¹⁵ Nevertheless, he refused to betray others. His defiance was such that he was charged with contempt of congress for refusing to incriminate his past associates. He had to pay \$40,000 in lawyer's fees as well as a \$500 fine and received a one year suspended sentence for Contempt of Congress. It was a year of creative inanition in his life.²¹⁶

Thus the theatrical aspect of the hearings, with 'theatrical' being used here in its common-sense, derogatory meaning, lay in the fact that the accused were supposed to produce confessions, name their past affiliates and vow to have renewed pacts of allegiance to the state and its official ideas through a public expression of remorse. Those who did so were amicably granted the status of decent citizen whereas the dissidents, in line with the nature of the trials in both historical episodes, were subjected to persecution and public vilification. Yet, although the accused were brought into a situation with theatrical elements and aspects that also play an important role in any legal arena such as a court, the theatricality of the situation was governed by, or better *framed* by, the generic form of the *spectacle*, the modern manifestation of which was addressed by Guy Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle* in 1967.

Admittedly Debord was not primarily concerned with McCarthyism. He defined the modern spectacle in a broader sense as 'the reigning social organization of a paralyzed history, of a paralyzed memory, of an abandonment of any history founded in historical time, is in effect a *false consciousness of time*'.²¹⁷ In Debord's reading, any society where modern conditions of production prevail, in people's lives, which were once lived directly, are now

²¹⁴ James F. Childress, 'Appeals to Conscience', *Ethics* 89.4 (1979), pp. 316-17.

²¹⁵ Miller, 'The Crucible in History', p. 80.

²¹⁶ Miller, 'The Crucible in History', p. 94.

²¹⁷ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995), p. 114.

represented through an immense accumulation of various *spectacles*.²¹⁸ Debord considers that modern spectacle in its essence is the autocratic reign of the market economy that had acceded to an irresponsible sovereignty and totality of new techniques of government which constitute social relationship between people through mediation of images.²¹⁹ Debord's analysis is however helpful in shedding light on the spectacle of McCarthyism, as an analogy of the guise of power, which is the topic of the Situationists' radical critique of not only modernist art practice, but also the politics of everyday life under modern capitalism.²²⁰ *The Crucible* in a sense is a precautionary tale of the role of media-power in modern society, that Guy Debord would analyse more than a decade later.

However, the formulation 'society of the spectacle' might be too general a qualification. In this respect, the art critic Jonathan Crary points out:

One can still well ask if the notion of spectacle is the imposition of an illusory unity onto a more heterogeneous field. Is it a totalizing and monolithic concept that inadequately represents a plurality of incommensurable institutions and events? For some, a troubling aspect about the term *spectacle* is the almost ubiquitous presence of the definite article in front of it, suggesting a single and seamless global system of relations. For others, it is a mystification of the functioning of power, a new opiate-of-the-masses type of explanation, a vague cultural-institutional formation with a suspicious structural autonomy. Or is a concept such as spectacle a necessary tool for the figuration of a radical systemic shift in the way power functions noncoercively within twentieth-century modernity? Is it an indispensable means of revealing as related what would otherwise appear as disparate and unconnected phenomena? Does it not show that a patchwork or mosaic of techniques can still constitute a homogenous effect of power?²²¹

²¹⁸ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p. 12.

²¹⁹ Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Malcolm Imrie (London: Verso, 1998), p. 2.

²²⁰ The Situationist International was a radical international organization operating from 1957 until 1972. It was comprised of avant-garde artists, intellectuals and political theorists who were inspired by anti-authoritarian Marxism and twentieth-century avant-garde art movements such as Dadaism and Surrealism.

²²¹ Jonathan Crary, 'Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory', *October* 50 (Autumn 1989), p. 96.

The questions are as relevant as they are revealing in terms of what Crary considers to be the key characteristics of the notion of spectacle. To a certain extent Crary is responding to Debord, here, regarding the emphasis on the representation of things in a monolithic and totalized form, when spectacle is used as a generic form by means of which a ‘plurality of incommensurable institutions and events’ is restricted to singular scope and interpretation. Debord himself says:

The spectacle appears at once as society itself, as a part of society and as a means of unification. As a part of society, it is that sector where all attention, all consciousness, converges. Being isolated – and precisely for that reason – this sector is the locus of illusion and false consciousness; the unity it imposes is merely the official language of generalized separation.²²²

The key sentence is the first one. Spectacle is both the generic form that defines a society, it is a part of that society as something to be watched and enjoyed, and it is a unifying force. Debord observes and predicts that in the modern spectacle society, just about everything we consume – and most of what we do – embodies a mixture of distraction and reinforcement that serves to reproduce the mode of society and economy that has taken the idea of spectacle to its radical extreme. Following a Marxist analysis, Debord states that the sheer production and consumption of commodities in neoliberal economy has divested people of the essence of their labour and brought about alienation and separation. Labour has become abstract. Diverging from the orthodox Marxist analysis, however, Debord proceeds to explain that the spectacle in this scenario is not just a collection of images, rather that it constitutes a social relation between people that is mediated by images. He writes: ‘It is the very heart of society’s real unreality. In all its aspects, manifestations – news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment – the spectacle epitomizes the prevailing model of social life’.²²³ John Harris summarizes Guy Debord’s analysis of contemporary society as follows:

Essentially Debord argues that having recast the idea of ‘being into having’, what he calls ‘the present phase of total occupation of

²²² Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p. 12.

²²³ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, p. 13.

social life by the accumulated results of the economy' has led to 'a generalized sliding from having into *appearing*, from which all actual 'having' must draw its immediate prestige and its ultimate function'.²²⁴

The critical two steps are the one from being to having and the one from having to appearing. Under capitalism being has become a function of what people have and what they have can only become socially functional when they know how to appear.

One can relate this notion of spectacle to the McCarthy hearings, which made not only the entire American society hostage to a Red Scare and where the spectacle was not just a part of society but became something through which society appeared to itself *as* itself. Through public trials, fabricated or enforced confessions and televised displays of people's alleged betrayal of and disloyalty to the official national creeds, a spectacle was constructed aimed at not only scaring an entire society but also at dividing it by means of an 'official language of generalized separation' in order, perhaps paradoxically, to make it whole. McCarthy built the spectacle around the issue of American national security and American purity and purgation. Debord's idea of spectacle is useful precisely in the way society appeared to itself in the form of a spectacle, while spectacle was also a dominant part of that society and as such could be a unifying force. The spectacle was not so much something that appeared within a frame, it was the frame itself. Or, to put this differently, the McCarthy hearings were not just taking place in an historical context. They framed context by using a strategy of framing.²²⁵

Firstly, there was the seemingly undefeatable frame proposed by McCarthy of American democracy against communist totalitarianism. It is in the context of this Manichean frame that McCarthy profiled all communists as traitors and framed them in a nationwide spectacle as the enemies within. This is why, to my mind, Crary's analysis is relevant when he considers the effect of such strategies but I also would like to add an extra argument. This is what Crary describes:

²²⁴ John Harris, 'Guy Debord Predicted Our Distracted Society', *The Guardian on the Web*, 30 March 2004, < <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/mar/30/guy-debord-society-spectacle> > [accessed 4 December 2012].

²²⁵ For a detailed analysis of the notion of framing, see Jonathan D. Culler, *Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions*, Oklahoma Project for Discourse and Theory (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988).

Thus, as I will argue, spectacular culture is not founded on the necessity of making a subject see, but rather on strategies in which individuals are isolated, separated and inhabit time as disempowered. Likewise, counter-forms of attention are neither exclusively nor essentially visual but rather constituted as other temporalities and cognitive states, such as those in trance or reverie.²²⁶

I agree, again, as long as we consider the society of the spectacle in its general sense. McCarthyism was a distinct form of spectacle, however, in that wanted to make its audience see only one thing, in the context of a strategy that framed time itself, as if time could be reduced to the single opposition between historical counterparts. The result was nevertheless similar in that all those confronted with the spectacle were, indeed, disempowered in the sense that they were subject to the spectacle and not the subject of history.

Miller's response was not one of trance or reverie. His theatrical response was, in a distinct sense, *pointed*, in an attempt to historicize the present and to pierce the frame that was set up. Let me describe this pointed-ness in more detail.

3.3 Theatricality, the Spectacle's Veil and Allegory-in-Reverse

Throughout his literary work Miller's artistic sensibilities portrayed the political events of his age, such as the Great Depression, the Nazi invasion of Europe and the Holocaust, the anti-Communist repression of the 1950s, the anti-Vietnam war movement of 1960s and the demise of the Nixon presidency.²²⁷ *The Crucible* not only represents an intersection of the political with Miller's personal life in a dramatic way, it was a dramatic play in itself, that was meant to be staged in the theatre despite the historical nature of its theme and its pointed allegorical relevance. As E. Miller Budick observes, Miller re-created another subjective reality in the form of a theatre play, by bringing history and literature together to confront the apparent subjective reality and the holy resonance of piety and patriotism created by both the political proponents in the

²²⁶ Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1999), pp. 2-3.

²²⁷ For a detailed overview of Miller's other plays, see Christopher Bigsby (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

1950s and their historical counterparts in seventeenth-century Salem.²²⁸ Miller's play is thus a literary re-articulation of history through the inclusion of memory and imagination to interpret history from the viewpoint of the present, however not only as a play, but as what I would like to call a truth practice. The performance did not just take place in a given present, it was *aimed* at that present, but how can we define this aim?

Before I move to Erin Graff Zivin's contention that *The Crucible* is an example of hauntology, I would like to focus on the play's ability to mark the historicity of its own present.²²⁹ Frederic Jameson defines the relation of historicity to the present in the following terms:

Historicity, is, in fact, neither a representation of the past nor a representation of the future (although its various forms use such representations): it can first and foremost be defined as a perception of the present as history; that is, as a relationship to the present which somehow defamiliarizes it and allows us that distance from immediacy which is at length characterized as a historical perspective. It is appropriate in other words, also to insist on the historicity of the operation itself, which is our way of conceiving of historicity in this particular society and mode of production; appropriate also to observe that what is at stake is essentially a process of reification whereby we draw back from our immersion in the here and now (not yet identified as a 'present') and grasp it as a kind of thing - not merely a 'present' but a present that can be dated and called the eighties or the fifties.²³⁰

The Crucible, as a theatrical representation of a historical subject, is always supposed to be performed in a present, that much is clear. However, something else is at stake. It may be precisely because *The Crucible* deals with a distant historical period at a time that historical novels were not in fashion, that the question arises: Why this play *now*? The consequence of this question is, as

²²⁸ E. Miller Budick, 'History and Other Spectres in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*', *Modern Drama* 28.4 (1985): p. 536.

²²⁹ See the end of this chapter and chapter 5; Graff Zivin, *Figurative Inquisitions: Conversion, Torture and Truth in the Luso Hispanic Atlantic*, p. 58.

²³⁰ Frederic Jameson quoted in Jim Finnegan, 'Edwin Rolfe's Historical Witness to the Spectacle of McCarthyism', *College Literature* 33.3 (Summer 2006), pp. 135-36.

Jameson would argue, that the perceptions of the past in present contexts define historicity in the first place, as a result of which the present comes into the picture as a moment of history. Despite the fact that the representations of the past and the future would use historicity as a concept to understand history, it is in the perception of the present *as history* that one can discern a certain *distance* from the immediate present and establish a historical perspective. So, in the 1950s, *The Crucible* helped the readers and the audience to create a distance from their immediate present and form an historical perspective of their times by viewing the politics of their present as history. *The Crucible* is an artefact that not only frames the past in the present context, i.e. the 1950s, but it does so in a pointed way, through its performance, and puts the perception of the present at a distance as a result of which it can be had as history. By translating its theme from the past to the present, Miller presents a different historical perspective through theatricality, and I use the term *perspective* in a different meaning than *frame*, here. Perspective is ruled by a *point de distance*, or distance point. This is not to put things at a distance, though, but it is to produce the effect of depth by means of a point of organization that both produces an illusion and is a mathematical starting point from which the illusion can be unravelled.

A good example of this is Danforth's argument in Act 3 of the play, which is only *similar* to the logic of the ritualistic hearings by the congressional committees in 1950s when put in perspective. This is what Danforth says:

In an ordinary crime, how does one defend the accused? One calls up witnesses to prove his innocence. But witchcraft is *ipso facto*, on its face and by its nature, an invisible crime, is it not? Therefore, who may possibly be witness to it? The witch and the victim. None other. Now we cannot hope the witch will accuse herself; granted? Therefore, we must rely upon her victims - and they do testify, the children certainly do testify. As for the witches, none will deny that we are most eager for all their confessions. Therefore, what is left for a lawyer to bring out?²³¹

The passage may function as a 'distance point' that provides the congressional hearings in McCarthy era with a historical resonance or depth, as a result of

²³¹ Miller, *The Crucible*, p. 91.

which these hearings themselves become historicized.²³² Miller himself defines this historical resonance or depth as follows:

Three hundred years apart, both prosecutions were alleging membership of a secret disloyal group. Should the accused confess, his honesty could only be proved in precisely the same way – by naming former confederates, nothing less. Thus, the informer became the very axle of the plot's existence and the investigation's necessity.²³³

The way in which things needed to be put in perspective is the more 'pointed' because of the fact that the alleged crimes were *invisible*, be it witchcraft or crimes like espionage and political subversion.

With this in mind, the idea of theatricality is vital to assess the play's disruptive qualities, or its pointed engagement with its times. Thomas Postlewait and Tracy C. Davis dwell upon the comprehensive term of theatricality in the context of its relation to the historical ideas of *mimesis*, *theatrum mundi* and performance. They argue that the idea of *theatricality* has historically been demeaned in religious traditions owing to its mimetic inclinations towards representing the world, which Plato also considered an imitation of the real or ideal. Hence theatre and mimesis of the world through performance were discouraged as being conceived twice removed from the real or ideal. However, in other cultures and traditions, *theatricality* has been recognized in more comprehensive ways:

Although it obviously derives its meanings from the world of theatre, *theatricality* can be abstracted from the theatre itself and then applied to any and all aspects of human life. Even if limited to theatre, its potential meanings are daunting. Thus it can be defined exclusively as a specific type of performance style or inclusively as all the semiotic codes of theatrical representation. Some people claim that it is the definitive condition or attitude for postmodern art and thought; others insist that it already achieved its distinguishing features in the birth of modernism. Within

²³² A good example that supports this arguments can be found at <http://www.salemwitchmuseum.com/education/index.php>

²³³ Miller, 'The Crucible in History', p. 99.

modernism, it is often identified as the opposite of realism, yet realism is also seen as but one type of theatricality. So, it is a mode of representation or a style of behaviour characterized by histrionic actions, manners and devices, and hence a practice; yet it is also an interpretative model for describing psychological identity, social ceremonies, communal festivities, and public spectacles and hence a theoretical concept.²³⁴

Theatricality thus clearly derives its name from the world of theatre and despite its derogatory use in common parlance, it can be used as a comprehensive application to all sorts of aspects of human life. The general characteristic, though, is that it involves a specific type of performance which implies all the signs that feature in the semiotics of theatrical representation. When we deal with the pointed-ness of theatre, however, perhaps the most distinguishing element in Postlewait and Davis's passage is the word 'histrionic'. Its acoustic association with historicity is coincidental, although I find it of relevance here. The term histrionic has a distinct etymology from history, going back to the Latin *histrionicus* (meaning: pertaining to an actor), which is said to be derived from *histrion*, the Etruscan term for actor or player. As Wladimir Kryszynski states, theatricality has, on the one hand, due to its metalanguage and literariness, the status of a literary object. Yet, due to presence of the physical element of performance and acting, it is ludic and histrionic as well.²³⁵ In relation to 'histrionicity' Postlewait and Davis define theatricality as a *practice* because of its affected style of representation in which actions, devices and manners are enacted and performed in such a way that they cannot be ignored, they attract attention, irritate, or fascinate. As concerns *The Crucible*, the theatricality of the play resides in the fact that it is used in an histrionic way, in that it draws attention by its theatrical or dramatic *gesture*, if only through its historical excessiveness. Thus Miller confronts and disrupts the spectacle of McCarthyism by bringing in his own theatrical perspective, with its distance point, which is a point that has to pierce not so much the frame but the veil of illusion that it supports.

²³⁴ Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait, (eds), 'Theatricality: An Introduction', in *Theatricality: Theatre and Performance Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 1.

²³⁵ Wladimir Kryszynski, 'Changed Textual Signs in Modern Theatricality: Gombrowicz and Handke', trans. by Ruby Cohn, *Modern Drama* 25.1 (1982), p. 3.

I would like to reiterate Postlewait and Davis's warning against a too general definition of theatricality in relation to politics. Postlewait and Davis sketch the general use of the term theatricality to politics as follows:

In this spirit, an expensive idea of theatricality has been enlarged and applied to politics, whereby political behaviour and its defining rhetoric are seen as theatrical (especially in the modern age of media and advertising). In addition, the ideas of national identity and imagined history are constructed as modes of performed identity. The public realm is the performative realm. This idea of the performative nation appeals to many observers, not just because in the US the actor Ronald Reagan was elected to the presidency, but also because political events – all the craftiness of state management – seem to be managed by the essential traits of stagecraft. Perhaps, though, the idea explains too much and too conveniently. The temptation needs to be tempered and the claims particularized.²³⁶

When Postlewait and Davis apply the concept of theatricality to the political realm in modern contexts, it is ostensibly in line with the origins of politics in the Greek, theatrical city state. They are correct in stating that the political behaviour and the rhetoric of politicians can be called theatrical. Moreover, the realm of politics is similar to the stage where the performative skills of the political actors are on display. Politics exists because of a breach in representation, as Frank Ankersmit called it, as a result of which the political manoeuvring space consists in the fact that there can and must be a difference between what the represented want and what the political actor deems possible or wise.²³⁷ Here, 'the public realm is the performative realm'.

Yet, this is all different from the appeal of the term theatricality that may result in a use that is too general, as a result of which it loses its scholarly and analytic function and power. This happens when 'the craftiness of state management' is also called a form of theatricality, as it is made possible through stagecraft in a so-called political theatre.²³⁸ One could of course argue that 'spinning' uses elements of theatricality. Yet it is not a form of theatricality *per*

²³⁶ Davis and Postlewait, p. 29.

²³⁷ Frank Ankersmit, 'Political Representation: The Aesthetic State', in *Aesthetic Politics: Political Philosophy Beyond Fact and Value* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 45.

²³⁸ Davis and Postlewait, p. 29.

se.²³⁹ Likewise, advertisements may use elements of theatricality, but this is not to say that advertisement is equivalent to theatricality. It is necessary to *particularize* or specify the claims to theatricality when examining the political acts of some era, or the agential force of theatre plays. The reason is that there are important political implications at stake, as well as different forms of responsibility, when distinguishing, for instance, between the spectacle and the theatrical.

Miller's refusal to testify against his associates as well as his defence of the artists' exemption from the excesses of the Smith Act were a public defence, not so much a theatrical one but one in the context of a spectacle that was performed in the name of preserving national security. As a result, *The Crucible* enforces and embodies a different sort of theatricality from the conventional average political ones in the sense that Miller chose a historical subject and infused it into the practices of HCUA by both linking it to and contrasting it with their own performance techniques. The Salem confessions and court proceedings were *dramatized* as a parallel image of the congressional spectacle of 1950s America. Theatre is presented as an instrument of social change in this way, which is also apparent when Miller expresses his commitment to the task of making societal life 'real,' in opposition to the spectacular political work of manipulation and fabrication, fuelled by the mistrust of the state in its own people.²⁴⁰ The spectacle could be pierced, however. As Miller states: 'Paranoia breeds paranoia, but below paranoia there lies a bristling, unwelcome truth, so repugnant as to produce fantasies of persecution to conceal its existence.'²⁴¹ In order to get to this unwelcome truth, he had to make his point theatrically, and theatrically pointed, to bring the unwelcome truth into the full light of existence.

The theatrical point was made allegorically and the question is how allegory relates to the issue of historicity in the sense of offering a perspective on one's own time in terms of historicity.²⁴² An obvious criticism from modern viewers and readers about the parallel between witches and communists was that communism and its sympathizers were a palpable presence in America,

²³⁹ Jon Erickson, 'Defining Political Performance with Foucault and Habermas : Strategic and Communicative Action', in *Theatricality: Theatre and Performance Theory*, ed. by Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 162.

²⁴⁰ Miller, 'The Crucible in History', p. 86.

²⁴¹ Arthur Miller, 'Are you now or were you ever ...', *The Guardian*, 17 June 2000. Online at <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/jun/17/books.guardianreview>> [accessed 18 August, 2014]. n.p.

²⁴² Miller, 'Are you now or were you ever ...?'; Miller Budick, 'History and Other Spectres in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*', p. 536.

whereas witches and witchcraft were a cognitive error and an optical illusion.²⁴³ Historically speaking, this is a mistake, as we have seen in chapter 1. Given the number of people executed for alleged occult practices in Europe and America in the Middle Ages and afterwards, there is no reason to doubt that the belief in the existence of witches was real. The church and the Bible sanctioned belief in witchcraft and the Bible backed them up: ‘Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live (Exodus 22:17)’.²⁴⁴ Therefore, in a theocratic society such as Salem, denying the existence of witches could by implication be a denial of the Biblical words. In post-Reformation Europe too, when the Bible became the sole source of religious truth, most people in the European Christian community interpreted the scriptures and the passages pertaining to witchcraft literally.²⁴⁵ Likewise, being suspected of being disloyal, a traitor or a communist in the 1950s was tantamount to endangering one’s life but it was equally dangerous to deny the threat itself.

Put like this, *The Crucible* hardly seems an allegory but rather a simple analogy. This becomes even more apparent when we consider the way Craig Owens sketches allegory’s function in relation to history, or the relation between past and present:

Allegory first emerged in response to a similar sense of estrangement from tradition; throughout its history it has functioned in the gap between a present and a past which, without allegorical reinterpretation, might have remained foreclosed. A conviction of the remoteness of the past, and a desire to redeem it for the present – these are its two most fundamental impulses.²⁴⁶

Thus, as Owens states, allegory is a reinterpretation of a past that helps to redeem a remote past, but also a strange past, for the present. The allegorist’s main interest is to fill the vacuum between the present and the past, to fill a gap that results from the past’s distance, its ‘remoteness’, and to make a tradition appear as such. Miller did the same, albeit with an interesting twist. His main aim was not to historicize the Salem process so that it could become part of a

²⁴³ Henry Popkin, ‘Arthur Miller’s “The Crucible”’, *College English* 26.2 (1964), p. 140.

²⁴⁴ Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd edn (London: Longman, 1995), p. 113.

²⁴⁵ Levack, p. 113.

²⁴⁶ Craig Owens, ‘The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism’, *October* 12 (Spring 1980), p. 68.

particular tradition again. Instead, he sought to historicize McCarthyism, to put it at a distance and bring it on a par with what had happened in a far-away past. In this sense his use of allegory is an example of an allegory-in-reverse.

Allegory is pivotal as ‘an attitude as well as a technique, a perception as well as a procedure’.²⁴⁷ All four aspects relate to the distance point of theatre as opposed to the frame of the spectacle. With regard to the frame, *The Crucible* is *procedural* in that it asks people to follow a procedure in translating not so much the situation of Salem to their own time, but rather the other way around. This procedure is facilitated because of a *perception*, namely that the power structures in the McCarthy era were similar to those of the Puritan society in Salem.²⁴⁸ Miller intended to allegorically juxtapose, as a *technique*, issues of character but, again, in reverse. Proctor’s character is not highlighted in an allegorical fashion. Allegorically speaking, the question is which character, in the 1950s, appears before Proctor, as the one who comes to speak out against deliberate villainy and the authorities’ institutionalized hysteria. Here, the allegorical *technique* of juxtaposing characters is the consequence of an *attitude*, the attitude of allegoresis, as a mode of reading the times. The allegorical dynamic of the play, taken together as a perception, a procedure, a technique and an attitude, provides it with a theatrical point that consists of the distance point where two historically different times not only converge, but from which both are organized by means of illusion, while, as I showed, making clear what the mathematical point is from which the illusion starts, as a result of which it can also be unravelled. This distance point is needed both to pierce the *frame* of spectacle and the veil that it supported. The point of theatre, made allegorically, also concerns the similarity between the two periods with regard to the unexpectedness of the turn of events, and the way a society based on principles of justice can suddenly turn against itself. The House Committee on Un-American activities, for instance, had been in existence since 1938. It had received no objections against the social economic reforms of the New Deal. Suddenly, however, the post-Second World War scenario prompted an American attitude of empathy with the former German enemy and distinct feelings of antipathy towards the Russians, despite the fact that they had been allies in the war only two years earlier; they were now communist enemies. Miller laments the uncanny speed of this change when he says:

²⁴⁷ Owens, ‘The Allegorical Impulse’, p. 68.

²⁴⁸ Stephen Fender, ‘Precision and Pseudo Precision in “The Crucible”’, *Journal of American Studies* 1.1 (1967), p. 89.

But as in Salem, a point arrived, in the late forties, when the rules of social intercourse quite suddenly changed, or were changed, and attitudes that had merely been anti-capitalist-anti-establishment were now made unholy, morally repulsive, and if not actually treasonous then implicitly so. America had always been a religious country.²⁴⁹

In effect, the so-called free, vibrant and open society that was America faced a strife, backed by the authorities, to achieve monolithic public morality. As a result, America's policies became no different from the practices of the totalitarian regimes which they were discrediting in their public addresses as typically Soviet. Arthur Miller saw a strong similarity between the enforcement of certain political values and the Salem theocracy. Yet, as he points out, there was much more than a *similarity* at stake: 'America had always been a religious country'. In this respect, the allegorical point made by the play could become pointless since there was no real allegory involved, only similarity and continuity. Miller was up against much more than a politically motivated spectacle of fabrication and framing and the play had to be *more*, consequently, than a simple allegory, in order to intervene in its present on a deeper level, not only in relation to a similar past but also to an alternative future. I will return to this in chapter 4. For now I would like to conclude this chapter with the question why the point had to be *theatrical* as opposed to other generic possibilities.

3.4. An In-Between State of the Spectacle and Clairvoyance

I would like to come back to my take on McCarthyism as it ties in to the powerful analysis proposed in first instance by Guy Debord, and subsequently by Jonathan Crary, of modern society as a society of spectacle. There is a marked difference with regard to the media during the specific periods that we are dealing with. Crary's position, for instance, is summarized as follows by Leslie Kan:

Addressing Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* in a more modern context, Jonathan Crary examines the 'totality' or dominance of the television as a spectacular commodity in the 'Eclipse of the Spectacle'. He argues that starting with the mid-1970s, the television ceases to be a medium of representation and undergoes a

²⁴⁹ Miller, *Timebends*, pp. 341-42.

structural change in which the television becomes the ‘heart of another network,’ or a system of mass distribution and regulation (Crary 1984, 284). The ‘totalizing response to television’ or the pervasiveness of television in the modern everyday lives of people (i.e.: in broadcast news, shows, surveillance) becomes what Crary calls ‘the eclipse of spectacle’.²⁵⁰

The important point here is that, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, that is during McCarthyism, television was on the threshold of becoming an enormous power to be reckoned with. Yet the so-called eclipse of the spectacle was not yet operative in a society that relied on newspapers, the radio and the cinema as the main instruments of distribution and manipulation and for which nationwide television broadcast was something relatively new. If, for Crary, spectacle as such becomes almost untraceable as spectacle in the era of television, then spectacle was very much traceable and alive in the fifties.

The media spectacle of the hearings was basically a systematic method for injecting organized yet distorted communication nation-wide. The ultimate purpose of the spectacle was to disseminate fear, as Miller points out: ‘I said that it was not the Reds who were dispensing our fears now, but the other side, and it could not go on indefinitely, it would someday wear down the national nerve’.²⁵¹ The theatricality of the witnesses’ performance during the hearings intensified the effect of the nationwide broadcast spectacle and this would ultimately be the measure of their supposed or enforced loyal citizenship.²⁵² It is also telling that McCarthy’s spectacle had its denouement on television, when he picked a fight with the Army and found himself facing lawyer Joseph Welch as his opponent – the same Joseph Welch who eventually caused McCarthy’s downfall after saying in a live broadcast: ‘Until this moment, Senator, I think I never really gauged your cruelty or your recklessness [...]. You have done enough. Have you no sense of decency?’²⁵³ Surprisingly, this scene is distinctly *theatrical* in terms of what Arendt defines as action and, consequently, actualization. It was an unexpected moment in which the former tyrant was suddenly exposed in a theatrical way for what he was: a petty slanderer.

²⁵⁰ Leslie Kan, ‘Spectacle’, 2004, The University of Chicago: Theories of Media: Keywords Glossary, n.p. < <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/spectacle.htm> > [accessed 5 November 2012].

²⁵¹ Miller, *The Timebends*, p. 334.

²⁵² Tony Perucci, ‘The Red Mask of Sanity: Paul Robeson, HUAC, and the Sound of Cold War Performance’, *TDR/The Drama Review* 53.4 (2009), p. 22.

²⁵³ Timothy Hoff, ‘Anatomy of a Murder’, *Legal Studies Forum* 24 (2000), p. 664.

Precisely, Joseph McCarthy's focus had shifted from investigating fraud and waste in the executive branch of government to wholeheartedly prosecuting the communists. The impulse to harass political opponents became totalitarian and legal procedural defects abounded. The website of the US Senate reflects on it as follows:

A dispute over his hiring of staff without consulting other committee members prompted the panel's three Democrats to resign in mid 1953. Republican senators also stopped attending, in part because so many of the hearings were called on short notice or held away from the nation's capital. As a result, McCarthy and his chief counsel Roy Cohn largely ran the show by themselves, relentlessly grilling and insulting witnesses. Harvard law dean Ervin Griswold described McCarthy's role as 'judge, jury, prosecutor, castigator, and press agent, all in one'.²⁵⁴

In Ervin Griswold's qualification, the nature of procedural defects, to put it mildly, may be evident, but there is also a curious ambiguity at play as to how we should read the roles that are brought together *generically*. As the phrase 'running the show' suggests, there was indeed a show. Yet the roles of judge, jury and prosecutor belong to the theatrical setting of the court room. The castigator belongs to the confined spaces of interrogation and punishment, the press agent to public space. All in all, however, the theatrical aspects weigh heavier and form the core of who McCarthy was, publicly. This may explain why he had to be attacked by means of theatre as well.

It is clear that McCarthy could only become who he was through the media. It was only after the end of the hearings that people realized what had happened. Cate argues that 'McCarthy's role was historically healthy because he dramatized intolerance, lent it crude, villainous features, personalized it, stole it away from the low-profiled bureaucrats.'²⁵⁵ Yet Cate's study is called *The Great Fear* for a reason. During his moment of glory, McCarthy was far from being 'healthy' as defined by Cate. The effect of fear and paranoia that helped to cover the truth and hold an entire nation hostage to a new wave of patriotism

²⁵⁴ 'Have you no Sense of Decency?', 9 June 9 1954, *United States Senate*, <http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/Have_you_no_sense_of_decency.htm> [accessed 17 April 2014].

²⁵⁵ Cate, *The Great Fear*, p. 541.

was part and parcel of what Richard Hofstadter calls, following Adorno, pseudo-conservatism. Let me quote him at some length:

Unlike most of the liberal dissent of the past, the new dissent not only has no respect for non-conformism, but is based upon a relentless demand for conformity. It can most accurately be called pseudo-conservative – I borrow the term from the study of *The Authoritarian Personality* published five years ago by Theodore W. Adorno and his associates – because its exponents, although they believe themselves to be conservatives and usually employ the rhetoric of conservatism, show signs of a serious and restless dissatisfaction with American life, traditions and institutions. They have little in common with the temperate and compromising spirit of true conservatism in the classical sense of the word, and they are far from pleased with the dominant practical conservatism of the moment as it is represented by the Eisenhower Administration. Their political reactions express rather a profound if largely unconscious hatred of our society and its ways – a hatred which one would hesitate to impute to them if one did not have suggestive clinical evidence.²⁵⁶

Hofstadter's analysis is accurate with regard to his own times, and may still be today. It testifies to an inability to deal with what Arendt calls democracy's inherent, principal plurality, the plurality of public, unpredictable action. The issue that I would like to emphasize is the fact that this pseudo-conservatism is linked to what the title of Adorno's study hints at: an 'authoritarian personality'. It was this form of personality that was able to deploy its full force by means of spectacle, and it is also this form that distinguishes the McCarthy type of spectacle from the way the society of the spectacle would develop a little later. As Leslie Kan explains:

For theorists such as Foucault, Crary, Debord, and Baudrillard, the spectacular shifts from its theatrical origins and now carries with it issues of class ideology and modern subjectivity. With the shift into modernity, the traditional notion of spectacle as a visual and

²⁵⁶ Richard Hofstadter, 'The Pseudo-Conservative Revolt', in *The Radical Right*, ed. by Daniel Bell (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1963), p. 76.

affective medium begins to delineate a more complex understanding of the spectacle and its relationship to the spectator.²⁵⁷

Apparently, in earlier times the spectacle was considered in terms of its theatrical origins but it changed in essence because of modern media technologies which were starting to shape the modern subjectivity of a mass audience. With McCarthyism, I suggest, we are at an in-between point. The theatrical origins were not entirely lost yet and it is significant that Miller explicitly responded to the McCarthyism's modern media spectacle through a theatre play.

As already indicated, the questions raised by Crary earlier in this chapter make it difficult to affix Debord's notion of the spectacle seamlessly to McCarthyism. One reason is that McCarthy's spectacle was so ostensibly used in terms of framing. Framing refers not merely to the unavoidable act of framing that is required in a semiotic sense, but to the conscious social construction of an attack on opponents by mass media, political or social actors, political leaders, or any other powerful public actors or organizations. One can hardly say that this is an example of 'the way power functions noncoercively within twentieth-century modernity'. In fact coercion was evident. In the McCarthy hearings, the monolithic scope of the red scare was used to yoke artists, academics, writers, activists, dissidents etc. together and coerce them into testifying in public hearings in order to subject them. Likewise, it may be equally difficult to see how McCarthy's spectacle functioned as an opiate for the masses that was deliberately constructed to create a false image to beguile the masses and prod their consent for the fulfilment of the ulterior motives that power hides in its wings.²⁵⁸ Obviously the hearings did not function as an opiate that would be analogous to opiates as provided by, say, the musical industry. They were meant to rouse the audience.

In this environment, Miller's play was an experiment or a wager aimed at destabilizing something that is, as yet, a mixture of generic modes. The obvious historical allegory could not only intervene in the present by piercing through the veil of the spectacle, but also by hinting at the theatrical, fragile origins of the spectacle which could establish that McCarthy was outdated, located 'back in time'. Here again, the allegory used can be seen as an allegory-in-reverse. Let me recall an earlier quote from Avelar in which he asserts that in totalitarian

²⁵⁷ Kan, 'Spectacle'.

²⁵⁸ Jonathan Crary, 'Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory', *October* 50 (Autumn 1989), p. 96.

systems allegory may be used 'because the petrified images of ruins, in their immanence, bear the only possibility of narrating the defeat'.²⁵⁹ It has perhaps not been sufficiently emphasized that *The Crucible*, in terms of a truth practice, has an air of clairvoyance about it. Written and published in 1952, and performed in 1953, it was ahead of McCarthy's demise in 1954. At the time of its publication, few thought that McCarthy was heading for his downfall. Yet he went down, and Miller's history of Salem predicted it. In this respect the play helped to create, performatively, the possibility of an alternative future. This we will explore now.

²⁵⁹ Idelber Avelar, *The Untimely Present: Post-Dictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 69.

