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1857. [Penguin pp. 161-2]

1 Introduction

The difficult thing to explain about how middle class kids get middle class jobs is why others let them. The difficult thing to explain about how working class kids get working class jobs is why they let themselves.

It is much too facile simply to say that they have no choice. The way in which manual labour is applied to production can range in different societies from the coercion of machine guns, bullets and trucks to the mass ideological conviction of the voluntary industrial army. Our own liberal democratic society is somewhere in between. There is no obvious physical coercion and a degree of self direction. This is despite the inferior rewards for, undesirable social definition, and increasing intrinsic meaninglessness, of manual work: in a word its location at the bottom of a class society.[1] The primary aim of this book is to cast some light on this surprising process.

Too often occupational and educational talents are thought of as on a shallowing line of shrinking capacity with working class people at its lower reaches unquestioningly taking on the worst jobs thinking somehow, 'I accept that I'm so stupid that it's fair and proper that I should spend the rest of my life screwing nuts onto wheels in a car factory'. This gradient model must, of course, assume a zero or near zero reading at its base. The real individuals at the bottom end would scarcely rate a score for being alive, never mind for being human. Since these individuals are currently far from walking corpses but are actually bringing the whole system into crisis this model is clearly in need of revision. The market economy of jobs in a capitalist society emphatically does not extend to a market economy of satisfactions.

I want to suggest that 'failed' working class kids do not simply take up the falling curve of work where the least successful middle class, or the most successful working class kids, leave off. Instead of assuming a continuous shallowing line of ability in the occupational/class structure we must conceive of radical breaks represented by the interface of cultural forms. We shall be looking at the way in which the working class cultural pattern of 'failure' is quite different and discontinuous from the other patterns. Though in a determined context it has its own processes, its own definitions, its own account of those other groups conventionally registered as more successful. And this class culture is not a neutral pattern, a *mental* category, a set of variables impinging on the school from the outside. It comprises experiences, relationships, and ensembles of systematic types of relationship which not only set particular 'choices' and 'decisions' at particular times, but also structure, really and experientially, how these 'choices' come about and are defined in the first place.

A linked and subsidiary aim of the book is to examine important and central

aspects of working class culture through the concrete study of one of its most revealing manifestations. My original research interest was, indeed, in working class culture in general and I was led to look at young non-academic disaffected males and their adaption to work as a crucial and privileged moment in the continuous regeneration of working class cultural forms in relation to the most essential structure of society - its working relations.

Both sets of concerns in fact turn on the important concept of labour power and how it is prepared in our society for application to manual work. Labour power is the human capacity to work on nature with the use of tools to produce things for the satisfaction of needs and the reproduction of life. Labouring is not a universal transhistorical changeless human activity. It takes on specific forms and meanings in different kinds of societies. The processes through which labour power comes to be subjectively understood and objectively applied and their interrelationships is of profound significance for the type of society which is produced and the particular nature and formation of its classes. These processes help to construct both the identities of particular subjects and also distinctive class forms at the cultural and symbolic level as well as at the economic and structural level.

Class identity is not truly reproduced until it has properly passed through the individual and the group, until it has been recreated in the context of what appears to be personal and collective volition. The point at which people live, not borrow, their class destiny is when what is given is re-formed, strengthened and applied to new purposes. Labour power is an important pivot of all this because it is the main mode of *active* connection with the world: the way *par excellence* of articulating the innermost self with external reality. It is in fact the dialectic of the self to the self through the concrete world. Once this basic compact with the future has been made everything else can pass for common sense.

The specific milieu, I argue, in which a certain subjective sense of manual labour power, and an objective decision to apply it to manual work, is produced is the working class counter-school culture. It is here where working class themes are mediated to individuals and groups in their own determinate context and where working class kids creatively develop, transform and finally reproduce aspects of the larger culture in their own praxis in such a way as to finally direct them to certain kinds of work. Part I of the book presents an ethnography of the male white working class counter-school culture. For the sake of clarity and incision, and in no way implying their lack of importance, other ethnic and gender variants are not examined.

We may just note here that the existence of this culture has been picked up conventionally and especially by the media in its sensational mode as violence and indiscipline in the class room.[2] The Raising of the School Leaving Age (RSLA) in England in September 1972 seems to have highlighted and further exposed the most aggressive aspects of the culture.[3] Both the major teachers' unions have commissioned special reports[4] and have formalised arrangements for union support in excluding 'trouble-makers' from class. Over half the local authorities in

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England and Wales have set up special classes in school, and even quite separate
'sanctuaries' in the case of Inner London for such kids. The Secretary of State for
Education has ordered a national investigation into this whole area.[5] Disruption
and truancy in schools is high on the agenda of the 'great debate' which Mr
Callaghan, the current Prime Minister, called for on education.[6]

In the sense, therefore, that I argue that it is their own culture which most
effectively prepares some working class lads for the manual giving of their labour
power we may say that there is an element of self-damnation in the taking on of
subordinate roles in Western capitalism. However, this damnation is experienced,
paradoxically, as true learning, affirmation, appropriation, and as a form of resist-
ance. Furthermore, it will be argued in Part II where I analyse the ethnography
presented in Part I that there is an objective basis for these subjective feelings and
cultural processes. They involve a partial penetration of the really determining
conditions of existence of the working class which are definitely superior to those
official versions of their reality which are proffered through the school and various
state agencies. It is only on the basis of such a real cultural articulation with their
conditions that groups of working class lads come to take a hand in their own
damnation. The tragedy and the contradiction is that these forms of 'penetration'
are limited, distorted and turned back on themselves, often unintentionally, by
complex processes ranging from both general ideological processes and those within
the school and guidance agencies to the widespread influence of a form of patri-
archal male domination and sexism within working class culture itself.

I shall argue finally in Part II that the processes of self-induction into the labour
process constitute an aspect of the regeneration of working class culture in general,
and an important example of how this culture is related in complex ways to regu-
lative state institutions. They have an important function in the overall repro-
duction of the social totality and especially in relation to reproducing the social
conditions for a certain kind of production.

This is the spine of the book. In pursuit of these aims the book makes a contri-
bution in a number of other areas. It explores the educational paradigm at the heart
of the teaching relationship in our schools, makes a critique of vocational guidance
and suggests some explanations for the persistent failure of state education to
radically improve the chances in life of working class kids.[7] There is also in Part
II an intervention into the discussion of sexual stereotyping in relation to patri-
archy and capitalism, and some notes towards an argument within theory about the
respective status, and form of relationship between culture and ideology.

The qualitative methods, and Participant Observation used in the research, and
the ethnographic format of the presentation were dictated by the nature of my
interest in 'the cultural'. These techniques are suited to record this level and have
a sensitivity to meanings and values as well as an ability to represent and interpret
symbolic articulations, practices and forms of cultural production. In particular the
ethnographic account, without always knowing how, can allow a degree of the
activity, creativity and human agency within the object of study to come through
into the analysis and the reader's experience. This is vital to my purposes where

I view the cultural, not simply as a set of transferred internal structures (as in the usual notions of socialisation) nor as the passive result of the action of dominant ideology downwards (as in certain kinds of marxism), but at least in part as the product of collective human praxis.

The Hammertown case study

One main case study and five comparative studies were made in the research reported in this book. The main study was of a group of twelve non-academic working class lads from a town we shall call Hammertown and attending a school we shall call Hammertown Boys. They were selected on the basis of friendship links and membership of some kind of an oppositional culture in a working class school. The school was built in the inter-war years and lay at the heart of a closely packed inter-war council estate composed of standard, often terraced, reasonably well maintained houses interlinked with a maze of roads, crescents and alleys and served by numerous large pubs and clusters of shops and small supermarkets.

During the period of the research this school was a boys only, non-selective secondary modern school twinned with a girls' school of the same status. After the research finished it was redesignated a single sex comprehensive school as part of the general reorganisation of secondary education in the borough. In view of this expected change and under the pressure of events and in preparation for RSLA the school was expanding in terms of buildings and introducing or experimenting with some new techniques during the period of the research. Streaming was replaced by mixed ability groupings, a resources centre was introduced, experiments were made in team teaching and curriculum development programmes, and a whole range of new 'option' courses were developed for the 'RSLA year'. I made contact with the group at the beginning of the second term of their penultimate year and followed them right through into six months of their working lives (their final year was to be the first year of RSLA). The school population was about 600 and contained substantial West Indian and Asian minorities. Basically this school was selected because it was in the heart of, and drew from, an absolutely characteristic working class inter-war council estate, itself at the heart of Hammertown. The school was exclusively working class in intake, but had the reputation of being a 'good' school. This seemed to mean, in essence, that it had 'reasonable standards' of recognised behaviour and dress enforced by an interested and competent senior staff. I wanted to be as certain as possible that the group selected was typical of the working class in an industrial area, and that the educational provision it enjoyed was as good as, if not slightly better than, any available in similar British contexts. An added advantage of the particular school chosen was that it had a new and well equipped youth wing which was well attended by the pupils and gave the opportunity of a very open and informal initial entry into the school.

Comparative case studies were made over the same period. These were of a group of conformist lads in the same year of Hammertown Boys; a group of

red internal structures (as in the result of the action of dominantism), but at least in part as the

is were made in the research in a group of twelve non-academic working class boys in Hammertown and attending a school where the selection was on the basis of friendship links. The school was a culture in a working class school, at the heart of a closely packed area, often terraced, reasonably well served by crescents and alleys and served by small supermarkets.

It was a boys only, non-selective school of the same status. After the comprehensive school as part of the borough. In view of this and in preparation for RSLA the school was reducing or experimenting with streaming. Streaming was replaced by mixed groups, experiments were made with grammar, and a whole range of subjects. I made contact with the group in the penultimate year and followed their lives (their final year was to be about 600 and contained a lot of boys). This school was selected as a typical characteristic working class school in Hammertown. The school was a 'good' school, with high standards of recognised competence, competent senior staff. I wanted to see what was typical of the working class school. It enjoyed was as good as, if not better, than in other contexts. An added advantage was a new and well equipped youth centre and the opportunity of a very

same period. These were of Hammertown Boys; a group of

working class conformist lads in a nearby Hammertown mixed secondary modern, informally known as a somewhat 'rougher' school; a group of working class non-conformist lads in the single sex Hammertown grammar school; a similar group in a comprehensive near the middle of the larger conurbation of which Hammertown was part; and a mixed class male non-conformist group in a high status grammar school in the most exclusive residential area of the same larger conurbation. As far as possible, all groups were in the same school year, were friendship groups, and were selected for their likelihood of leaving school at the statutory minimum leaving age of sixteen. In the case of the high status grammar school this latter condition totally determined the membership of the group and its mixed class nature - they were the only boys intending to leave at sixteen in the fourth year (when I first contacted them), and indeed subsequently only two of them actually left at this point. These groups were selected to give a comparative dimension to the study along the parameters of class, ability, school regime, and orientation to the school.

The main group was studied intensively by means of observation and participant observation in class, around the school and during leisure activities; regular recorded group discussions; informal interviews and diaries. I attended all of the different subject classes and options (not as a teacher but as a member of the class) attended by the group at various times, and the complete run of careers classes which were taught by a dedicated and experienced teacher recently returned from secondment to a well-respected careers and counselling course. I also taped long conversations with all the parents of the main group, and with all senior masters of the school, main junior teachers in contact with members of the group, and with the careers officers coming into the school.

I followed all twelve boys from the main group, as well as three selected boys from the comparative groups, into work. Fifteen short periods of participant observation were devoted to actually working alongside each lad in his job, and were concluded with taped interviews with the individual and selected interviews with foremen, managers and shop stewards.

Hammertown is first recorded in the Domesday Book as a tiny hamlet. It is in the centre of England as part of a much larger conurbation. Like many other small towns around there, its population size and importance exploded during the Industrial Revolution. The coming of canals and the building of a foundry by Boulton and Watt for the construction of metal castings for other manufacturers in the middle of the eighteenth century transformed its nature. It was among the first of the industrial towns, and its population one of the first industrial proletariats. By 1800 it had extensive iron-smelting works and iron foundries as well as soap, lead and glass works. More recently it has become an important centre for bearing engineering, and the production of springs, cycle components, glass, screws, and nuts and bolts. It is indeed a Midlands nuts and bolts town, which was in its time one of the cradles of the Industrial Revolution.

It is now part of a huge industrial conurbation in the Midlands. People still think of it as rough and dirty, even though its civic record in public services and housing

provision is better than most in the region. Tumbledown cottages and Victorian slum terraces have now been largely cleared away and replaced by modern council houses and highrise flats. But when boys from Hammertown meet girls away from home they still like to say that they are from the adjacent big city which, conveniently, supplies their postal code.

The population of the town reached its peak in the early 1950s and has been falling since, despite the arrival of substantial numbers of black immigrants. The population is now about 60,000 and, interestingly, has one of the highest 'activity rates'[8] - especially for women - in the country. The age/sex structure of Hammertown is similar to that for the rest of England and Wales, but its class structure is notably different. It is essentially a working class town. Only 8 per cent of its residents are in professional and managerial occupations (half the national rate) and the overwhelming majority of the population are in some form of manual work. There is a startling daily inflow of around 3,000 middle class people from the south and west who will work but not live in Hammertown. The dearth of the middle classes is reflected in the fact that under 2 per cent of adults are in full-time education (again half the national rate).

The structure of employment demonstrates the distinctively industrial nature of the working class community. There is a total labour force of about 36,000 of which fully 79 per cent is involved in manufacturing of some kind compared with 35 per cent nationally and 55 per cent for the conurbation. Metal and metal goods manufacturing accounts for over half of such employment. The other major sources of employment are in food, drinks and tobacco industries, mechanical engineering, vehicles, bricks, pottery and glass, and distribution. Employment prospects are generally good in Hammertown and even during recession its unemployment rate has stayed about 1 per cent under the national average.

Although the town was industrialised over 200 years ago, and has kept many of the same basic industries - especially metal and metal working - it does not have the small firm/family firm infrastructure of many similar towns. In fact its industrial organisational structure is strikingly modern. Much of the employment in Hammertown is in large factories which are often themselves a branch of national or multinational companies. Sixty per cent of the total workforce works in firms employing over 1,000 people. Under 5 per cent of those in manufacturing work in firms employing less than 25 people. Fifty-eight per cent of the total industrial floorspace is concentrated in thirty-eight factories exceeding 100,000 sq. ft. in size. Over 20 per cent of the total area of the town is in industrial use.

Hammertown is altogether something of an archetypal industrial town. It has all the classic industrial hallmarks as well as those of modern monopoly capitalism in conjunction with a proletariat which is just about the oldest in the world.

Notes

- [1] There are masses of statistics demonstrating systematic differences between

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the working and middle class in Britain. There is little disagreement about the reliability of these statistics and the latest volume of *Social Trends* (no. 6, 1975, HMSO) brings together most of the official data. Sixty-three per cent of the heads of households are in manual work of some kind. The lower the social class the lower the income, the greater the likelihood of unemployment, the greater the likelihood of poor conditions of work, the greater the likelihood of being off work through sickness. See also for distributions of wealth and income: A. Atkinson, *Unequal Shares*, Penguin, 1974; F. Field, *Unequal Britain*, Arrow, 1974.

[2] See, for instance, 'Control experiment', *The Guardian*, 18 March 1975; 'They turn our schools into a jungle of violence', *Sunday Express*, 9 June 1974 (by Angus Maude MP); and 'Discipline or terror' and 'In our schools . . . defiance, gang war and mugging', *Sunday People*, 16 June 1974; and the film by Angela Pope on BBC Panorama, 'The Best Years?', broadcast 23 March 1977.

[3] Even the official government report on the first year of RSLA, mainly notable for its optimism in contrast to all other commentaries, accepted that there was a 'core of dissidents' and recorded 'a strong impression that misbehaviour had increased'. DES Reports on Education, *The First Year After RSLA*, April 1975.

[4] See National Association of School Masters, 'Discipline in Schools', 1975; NAS, 'The Retreat from Authority', 1976; National Union of Teachers, Executive Report, 'Discipline in Schools', in 1976 Conference Report.

[5] Reported in *The Guardian*, 27 June 1976. See also J. Mack, 'Disruptive pupils', *New Society*, 5 August 1976.

[6] In an important speech at Ruskin College, Oxford, in October 1976, Mr Callaghan, the prime minister, called for a 'great debate' on education to examine some of the new teaching techniques, parental 'unease', the possibility of a 'core curriculum' and '(educational) priorities (. . .) to secure high efficiency (. . .) by the skilful use of the £6 billion of existing resources'.

[7] A. H. Halsley stated recently, even after the help of an OECD seminar on 'Education, Inequality and Life Chance', that 'we are still far from a complete understanding . . . [of why educational] achievement is so stubbornly correlated with social origin' ('Would chance still be a fine thing', *The Guardian*, 11 February 1975).

[8] The activity rate is the proportion of the population, aged fifteen or over, which is economically active. This and most of the following information is taken from the structure plan of the local borough. Statistics relate usually to 1970.

PART I
ETHNOGRAPHY

2 Elements of a culture

Opposition to authority and rejection of the conformist

The most basic, obvious and explicit dimension of counter-school culture is entrenched general and personalised opposition to 'authority'. This feeling is easily verbalised by 'the lads' (the self-elected title of those in the counter-school culture).

[In a group discussion on teachers]

Joey (...) they're able to punish us. They're bigger than us, they stand for a bigger establishment than we do, like, we're just little and they stand for bigger things, and you try to get your own back. It's, uh, resenting authority I suppose.

Eddie The teachers think they're high and mighty 'cos they're teachers, but they're nobody really, they're just ordinary people ain't they?

Bill Teachers think they're everybody. They are more, they're higher than us, but they think they're a lot higher and they're not.

Spanksy Wish we could call them first names and that ... think they're God.

Pete That would be a lot better.

PW I mean you say they're higher. Do you accept at all that they know better about things?

Joey Yes, but that doesn't rank them above us, just because they are slightly more intelligent.

Bill They ought to treat us how they'd like us to treat them.

(...)

Joey (...) the way we're subject to their every whim like. They want something doing and we have to sort of do it, 'cos, er, er, we're just, we're under them like. We were with a woman teacher in here, and 'cos we all wear rings and one or two of them bangles, like he's got one on, and bout of the blue, like, for no special reason, she says, 'take all that off'.

PW Really?

Joey Yeah, we says, 'One won't come off', she says, 'Take yours off as well'. I said, 'You'll have to chop my finger off first'.

PW Why did she want you to take your rings off?

Joey Just a sort of show like. Teachers do this, like, all of a sudden they'll make you do your ties up and things like this. You're

subject to their every whim like. If they want something done, if you don't think it's right, and you object against it, you get down to Simmondsy [the head], or you get the cane, you get some extra work tonight.

PW You think of most staff as kind of enemies (...)?

- Yeah.

- Yeah.

- Most of them.

Joey It adds a bit of spice to yer life, if you're trying to get him for something he's done to you.

This opposition involves an apparent inversion of the usual values held up by authority. Diligence, deference, respect - these become things which can be read quite another way.

[In a group discussion]

PW Evans [the Careers Master] said you were all being very rude (...) you didn't have the politeness to listen to the speaker [during a careers session]. He said why didn't you realise that you were just making the world very rude for when you grow up and God help you when you have kids 'cos they're going to be worse. What did you think of that?

Joey They wouldn't. They'll be outspoken. They wouldn't be submissive fucking twits. They'll be outspoken, upstanding sort of people.

Spanksy If any of my kids are like this, here, I'll be pleased.

This opposition is expressed mainly as a style. It is lived out in countless small ways which are special to the school institution, instantly recognised by the teachers, and an almost ritualistic part of the daily fabric of life for the kids. Teachers are adept conspiracy theorists. They have to be. It partly explains their devotion to finding out 'the truth' from suspected culprits. They live surrounded by conspiracy in its most obvious - though often verbally unexpressed - forms. It can easily become a paranoic conviction of enormous proportions.[1]

As 'the lads' enter the classroom or assembly, there are conspiratorial nods to each other saying, 'Come and sit here with us for a laff', sidelong glances to check where the teacher is and smirking smiles. Frozen for a moment by a direct command or look, seething movement easily resumes with the kids moving about with that 'I'm just passing through, sir' sort of look to get closer to their mates. Stopped again, there is always a ready excuse, 'I've got to take my coat off sir', 'So and So told me to see him sir'. After assembly has started, the kid still marooned from his mates crawls along the backs of the chairs or behind a curtain down the side of the hall, kicking other kids, or trying to dismantle a chair with somebody on it as he passes.

'The lads' specialise in a caged resentment which always stops just short of

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ved out in countless small ways recognised by the teachers, and for the kids. Teachers are adept at finding their devotion to finding surrounded by conspiracy in its forms. It can easily become

ere are conspiratorial nods to 'laff', sidelong glances to check for a moment by a direct comment the kids moving about with closer to their mates. Stopped like my coat off sir', 'So and So the kid still marooned from his a curtain down the side of the air with somebody on it as he

ich always stops just short of

outright confrontation. Settled in class, as near a group as they can manage, there is a continuous scraping of chairs, a bad tempered 'tut-tutting' at the simplest request, and a continuous fidgeting about which explores every permutation of sitting or lying on a chair. During private study, some openly show disdain by apparently trying to go to sleep with their head sideways down on the desk, some have their backs to the desk gazing out of the window, or even vacantly at the wall. There is an aimless air of insubordination ready with spurious justification and impossible to nail down. If someone is sitting on the radiator it is because his trousers are wet from the rain, if someone is drifting across the classroom he is going to get some paper for written work, or if someone is leaving class he is going to empty the rubbish 'like he usually does'. Comics, newspapers and nudes under half-lifted desks melt into elusive textbooks. A continuous hum of talk flows around injunctions not to, like the inevitable tide over barely dried sand and everywhere there are rolled-back eyeballs and exaggerated mouthings of conspiratorial secrets.

During class teaching a mouthed imaginary dialogue counterpoints the formal instruction: 'No, I don't understand, you cunt'; 'What you on about, twit?'; 'Not fucking likely.'; 'Can I go home now please?' At the vaguest sexual double meaning giggles and 'whoas' come from the back accompanied perhaps by someone masturbating a gigantic penis with rounded hands above his head in compressed lipped lechery. If the secret of the conspiracy is challenged, there are V signs behind the teacher's back, the gunfire of cracked knuckles from the side, and evasive innocence at the front. Attention is focused on ties, rings, shoes, fingers, blots on the desk - anything rather than the teacher's eyes.

In the corridors there is a foot-dragging walk, an overfriendly 'hello' or sudden silence as the deputy passes. Derisive or insane laughter erupts which might or might not be about someone who has just passed. It is as demeaning to stop as it is to carry on. There is a way of standing collectively down the sides of the corridor to form an Indian gauntlet run - though this can never be proved: 'We're just waiting for Spanksy, sir'.

Of course individual situations differ, and different kinds of teaching style are more or less able to control or suppress this expressive opposition. But the school conformists - or the 'ear'oles' for the lads - have a visibly different orientation. It is not so much that they support teachers, rather they support *the idea* of teachers. Having invested something of their own identities in the formal aims of education and support of the school institution - in a certain sense having foregone their own right to have a 'laff' - they demand that teachers should at least respect the same authority. There are none like the faithful for reminding the shepherd of his duty.

[In a group discussion with conformists at Hammertown Boys]

Gary

Well, I don't think they're strict enough now (...) I mean like Mr Gracey, and some of the other teachers, I mean with Groucho, even the first years play him up (...) they [the lads] should be punished like, so they grow up not to be cheeky (...) Some of

the others, you can get on with them all right. I mean from the very beginning with Mr Peters everybody was quiet and if you ain't done the work, you had to come back and do it. I mean some of the other teachers, say from the first years, they give you homework, say you didn't do it, they never asked for it, they didn't bother.

It is essentially what appears to be their enthusiasm for, and complicity with immediate authority which makes the school conformists - or 'ear'oles' or 'lobes' the second great target for 'the lads'. The term 'ear'ole' itself connotes the passivity and absurdity of the school conformists for 'the lads'. It seems that they are always listening, never *doing*: never animated with their own internal life, but formless and rigid reception. The ear is one of the least expressive organs of the human body; it responds to the expressivity of others. It is pasty and easy to render obscene. This is how 'the lads' liked to picture those who conformed to the official idea of schooling.

Crucially, 'the lads' not only reject but feel *superior* to the 'ear'oles'. The obvious medium for the enactment of this superiority is that which the 'ear'oles apparently yield - fun, independence and excitement: having a 'laff'.

[In a group discussion]

- PW (...) why not be like the ear'oles, why not try and get CSE?
- They don't get any fun, do they?
- Derek Cos they'm prats like, one kid he's got on his report now, he's got five As and one B.
- Who's that?
- Derek Birchall.
- Spanksy I mean, what will they remember of their school life? What will they have to look back on? Sitting in a classroom, sweating their bollocks off, you know, while we've been ... I mean look at the things we can look back on, fighting on the Pakis, fighting on the JAs [i.e. Jamaicans]. Some of the things we've done on teachers, it'll be a laff when we look back on it.
- (...)
- Perce Like you know, he don't get much fun, well say Spanksy play about all day, he gets fun. Bannister's there sweating, sweating his bollocks off all day while Spanksy's doing fuck all, and he's enjoying it.
- Spanksy In the first and second years I used to be brilliant really. I was in 2A, 3A you know and when I used to get home, I used to lie in bed thinking, 'Ah, school tomorrow', you know, I hadn't done that homework, you know ... 'Got to do it'.
- Yeah, that's right, that is.
- Spanksy But now when I go home, it's quiet, I ain't got nothing to think

hem all right. I mean from the
everybody was quiet and if you
come back and do it. I mean
in the first years, they give you
they never asked for it, they

iasm for, and complicity with
mistakes - or 'ear'oles' or 'lobes'.
le' itself connotes the passivity
, It seems that they are always
in internal life, but formless in
the organs of the human body: it
d easy to render obscene. That
formed to the official idea of

superior to the 'ear'oles'. The
ity is that which the 'ear'oles'
: having a 'laff'.

, why not try and get CSE?
got on his report now, he's got

of their school life? What will
in a classroom, sweating their
e been . . . I mean look at the
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hings we've done on teachers
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to be brilliant really. I was in
to get home, I used to lie in
's, you know, I hadn't done
o do it'.

, I ain't got nothing to think

Will
Spanksy
Will
[Laughter]

(...)

Fred

Fred

about, I say, 'Oh great, school tomorrow, it'll be a laff', you
know.
You still never fucking come!
Who?
You.

You can't imagine . . .
You can't imagine [inaudible] going into the Plough and saying,
'A pint of lager please'.
You can't imagine Bookley goin' home like with the missus,
either, and having a good maul on her.
I can, I've seen him!
He's got a bird, Bookley!
He has.
I can't see him getting to grips with her, though, like we do you
know.

It was in the sexual realm especially that 'the lads' felt their superiority over the
'ear'oles'. 'Coming out of your shell', 'losing your timidity' was part of becoming
'one of the lads', but it was also the way to 'chat up birds' successfully. In an odd
way there was a distorted reflection here of the teachers' relationships to the 'ear-
oles'. 'The lads' felt that they occupied a similar structural role of superiority and
experience, but in a different and more antisocial mode.

[In an individual interview]

Joey

PW

Joey

We've [the lads] all bin with women and all that (...) we
counted it up the other day, how many kids had actually been
with women like, how many kids we know been and actually had
a shag, and I think it only come to, I think we got up to twenty-
four (...) in the fifth year out of a hundred kids, that's a quarter.
Would you always know though?
Yes I would (...) It gets around you know, the group within
ourselves, the kids who we know who are sort of semi-ear'oles like
. . . they're a separate group from us and the ear'oles. Kids like
Dover, Simms and Willis, and one or two others like. They all
mess about with their own realm, but they're still fucking child-
ish, the way they talk, the way they act like. They can't mek us
laff, we can mek them laff, they can fucking get in tears when
they watch us sometimes, but it's beyond their powers to mek
one of us laff, and then there's us (...) some of them [the semi-
ear'oles] have been with women and we know about it like. The
ear'oles (...) they've got it all to come. I mean look at Tom
Bradley, have you ever noticed him. I've always looked at him

and I've thought, Well . . . we've been through all life's pleasures and all its fucking displeasures, we've been drinking, we've been fighting, we've known frustration, sex, fucking hatred, love, all this lark, yet he's known none of it. He's never been with a woman, he's never been in a pub. We don't know it, we assume it - I dare say he'd come and tell us if he had - but he's never been with a woman, he's never been drinking, I've never known him in a fight. He's not known so many of the emotions as we've had to experience, and he's got it all to come yet.

Joey was an acknowledged group leader, and inclined at times to act the experienced man of the world. As is clear here, and elsewhere, he is also a lad of considerable insight and expressive power. In one way this might seem to disqualify him as typical of school non-conformist working class lads. However, although Joey may not be *typical* of working class lads, he is certainly representative of them. He lives in a working class neighbourhood, is from a large family known as a fighting family whose head is a foundryman. He is to leave school without qualification and is universally identified by teachers as a troublemaker - the more so that 'he has something about him'. Though perhaps exaggerated, and though powerfully expressed, the experiences he reports can only come from what he has experienced in the counter-culture. The cultural system he reports on is representative and central, even if he is related to it in a special way.

It is worth noting that, in his own terms and through the mediations of the group, Joey assumes both complete mastery and understanding of the school year and its social landscape. He assumes that information will find its way to 'the lads' as the focal point of that landscape. A clear hallmark of 'coming out' is the development of this kind of social perspective and evaluative framework. It should also be noted that the alternative standards constructed by 'the lads' are recognised by the teachers in a shadowy sort of way - at least in private. There were often admiring comments in the staff room about the apparent sexual prowess of particular individuals from younger teachers, 'he's had more than me I can tell you'.

Members of the group more conformist to school values do not have the same kind of social map, and nor do they develop an argot for describing other groups. Their response to 'the lads' is mostly one of occasional fear, uneasy jealousy and general anxiety lest they be caught in the same disciplinarian net, and frustration that 'the lads' prevent the smooth flow of education. Their investment in the formal system and sacrifice of what others enjoy (as well as the degree of fear present) means that the school conformists look to the system's acknowledged leaders, the staff, to deal with transgression rather than attempt to suppress themselves.

[In a group discussion with conformists at Hammertown Boys]

Barry

. . . he [one of the teachers] goes on about 'Everybody . . .', you know. I don't like things like that, when they say, 'Everybody . . . none of you like this, none of you like this, none of you like this'.

been through all life's pleasure
we've been drinking, we've been
in, sex, fucking hatred, love and
one of it. He's never been with
us. We don't know it, we assume
tell us if he had - but he's never
been drinking, I've never known
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own Boys]

on about 'Everybody...'. You
, when they say, 'Everybody'
'you like this, none of you like

that. You're all in trouble'. They should say, 'A few of yer...'.
Like Mr Peters, he does that, he don't say, 'Everybody', just the
odd few. That's better, cos some of us are interested (...)

Nigel

The trouble is when they start getting, you know, playing the
teachers up (...) it means that you're losing time, valuable time,
teaching time, and that, so its spoiling it for your, you know,
sometimes, I wish they'd just pack up and leave (...)

Barry

It's better the way they've done it now (...) they've put them all
together [CSE groups were not mixed ability groups]. It don't
really matter whether they do any work or not ... You just get
on, get on well now [in the CSE groups], cos if anybody's talking,
he tells you to shut up, you know, get on with the work.

PW

Barry

(...) have you ever felt that you should try and stop them? (...)
I've just never bothered with them (...) now, in the fifth, they
should ... you know, you don't just go around shouting at
people in the classroom, you know, you just talk sensibly. [The
teachers] should be more stricter.

Opposition to staff and exclusive distinction from the 'ear'oles' is continuously
expressed amongst 'the lads' in the whole ambience of their behaviour, but it is also
made concrete in what we may think of as certain stylistic/symbolic discourses
centring on the three great consumer goods supplied by capitalism and seized upon
in different ways by the working class for its own purposes: clothes, cigarettes and
alcohol. As the most visible, personalised and instantly understood element of
resistance to staff and ascendancy over 'ear'oles' clothes have great importance to
'the lads'. The first signs of a lad 'coming out' is a fairly rapid change in his clothes
and hairstyle. The particular form of this alternative dress is determined by outside
influences, especially fashions current in the wider symbolic system of youth
culture. At the moment the 'lads' look' includes longish well-groomed hair, plat-
form-type shoes, wide collared shirt turned over waisted coat or denim jerkin, plus
the still obligatory flared trousers. Whatever the particular form of dress, it is most
certainly *not* school uniform, rarely includes a tie (the second best for many heads
if uniform cannot be enforced), and exploits colours calculated to give the maxi-
mum distinction from institutional drabness and conformity. There is a clear
stereotypical notion of what constitutes institutional clothes - Spike, for instance,
trying to describe the shape of a collar: 'You know, like a teacher's!'

We might note the importance the wider system of commercial youth culture
has here in supplying a lexicography of style, with already connoted meanings,
which can be adapted by 'the lads' to express their own more located meanings.
Though much of this style, and the music associated with it, might be accurately
described as arising from purely commercial drives and representing no authentic
aspirations of its adherents, it should be recognised that the way in which it is
taken up and used by the young can have an authenticity and directness of personal
expression missing from its original commercial generation.

It is no accident that much of the conflict between staff and students at the moment should take place over dress. To the outsider it might seem fatuous. Concerned staff and involved kids, however, know that it is one of their elected grounds for the struggle over authority. It is one of the current forms of a fight between cultures. It can be resolved, finally, into a question about the legitimacy of school as an institution.

Closely related with the dress style of 'the lads' is, of course, the whole question of their personal attractiveness. Wearing smart and modern clothes gives them the chance, at the same time as 'putting their finger up' at the school and differentiating themselves from the 'ear'oles', to also make themselves more attractive to the opposite sex. It is a matter of objective fact that 'the lads' do go out with girls much more than do any other groups of the same age and that, as we have seen, a good majority of them are sexually experienced. Sexual attractiveness, its association with maturity, and the prohibition on sexual activity in school is what valorises dress and clothes as something more than an artificial code within which to express an institutional/cultural identity. This double articulation is characteristic of the counter-school culture.

If manner of dress is currently the main apparent cause of argument between staff and kids, smoking follows closely. Again we find another distinguishing characteristic of 'the lads' against the 'ear'oles'. The majority of them smoke and, perhaps more importantly, are *seen* to smoke. The essence of schoolboy smoking is school gate smoking. A great deal of time is typically spent by 'the lads' planning their next smoke and 'hopping off' lessons 'for a quick drag'. And if 'the lads' delight in smoking and flaunting their impertinence, senior staff at least cannot ignore it. There are usually strict and frequently publicised rules about smoking. If, for this reason, 'the lads' are spurred, almost as a matter of honour, to continue public smoking, senior staff are incensed by what they take to be the challenge to their authority. This is especially true when allied to that other great challenge: the lie.

[In a group discussion on recent brushes with staff]

- Spike And we went in, I says 'We warn't smoking', he says (. . .) and he went really mad. I thought he was going to punch me or summat.
- Spanksy 'Call me a liar', 'I'm not a liar', 'Get back then', and we admitted it in the end; we was smoking (. . .) He was having a fit, he says 'Callin' me a liar'. We said we warn't smoking, tried to stick to it, but Simmondsy was having a fit.
- Spike He'd actually seen us light up.

Punishment for smoking is automatic as far as senior staff are concerned, and this communicates itself to the kids.

- Spanksy Well, he couldn't do a thing [the deputy head], he had to give me three. I like that bloke, I think he does his job well, you know. But I was at the front entrance smoking and Bert comes right

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behind me. I turns around, been copped, and I went straight to him and had the cane. Monday morning, soon as I got in school, three I had You know he couldn't let me off.

Given this fact of life, and in the context of the continuous guerrilla warfare within the school, one of the most telling ways for 'the lads' to spot sympathisers, more often simply the weak and 'daft', in the enemy camp is to see which teachers, usually the young ones, take no action after an unequivocal sighting of a lighted cigarette.

Fuzz

I mean Archy, he sees me nearly every morning smoking, coming up by the Padlock, 'cos I'm waiting for me missus, sees me every morning. He ain't never said anything.

He said to me in registration -

Will

PW (interrupt-

ing)

Will

Who's this, Archer?

Archy, yeah, he says, 'Don't get going up there dinner-time'. 'What do you mean like, up there?' He says, 'Up there, up that way, the vicinity like'. I says, 'Oh, the Bush', you know, but he's alright, like, we have a laff.

Again, in a very typical conjunction of school-based and outside meanings cigarette smoking for 'the lads' is valorised as an act of insurrection before the school by its association with adult values and practices. The adult world, specifically the adult male working class world, is turned to as a source of material for resistance and exclusion.

As well as inducing a 'nice' effect, drinking is undertaken openly because it is the most decisive signal to staff and 'ear'oles that the individual is separate from the school and has a presence in an alternative, superior and more mature mode of social being. Accounts of staff sighting kids in pubs are excitedly recounted with much more relish than mere smoking incidents, and inaction after being 'clocked boozing' is even more delicious proof of a traitor/sympathiser/weakling in the school camp than is the blind eye to a lighted 'fag'. Their perception of this particular matrix of meanings puts some younger and more progressive members of staff in a severe dilemma. Some of them come up with bizarre solutions which remain incomprehensible to 'the lads': this incident involves a concerned and progressive young teacher.

[In a group discussion about staff]

Derek

And Alf says, er, 'Alright sir' [on meeting a member of staff in a public house] and he dayn't answer, you know, and he says, 'Alright sir?', and he turned around and looked at him like that, see, and er . . . and he dayn't answer and he says, in the next day, and he says, 'I want you Alf', goes to him and he says, 'What was you in there last night for?'. He says, 'I was at a football meeting', he says, 'Well don't you think that was like kicking somebody in the teeth?' 'No', he says. 'What would you feel like

if I kicked you in the teeth?', he says. 'What do you mean?', he says. 'Saying hello like that down there', he says, 'what would you expect me to say?'. He says, 'Well don't speak to me again unless I speak to you first'. He says, 'Right sir, I won't say hello again', he says, 'even if I see you in the drive.'

Certainly 'the lads' self-consciously understand the symbolic importance of drinking as an act of affiliation with adults and opposition to the school. It is most important to them that the last lunchtime of their last term should be spent in a pub, and that the maximum possible alcohol be consumed. This is the moment when they finally break free from school, the moment to be remembered in future years:

[Individual interview at work]

PW

Why was it important to get pissed on the last day?

Spanksy

It's a special thing. It only happens once in your life don't it? I mean, you know, on that day we were at school right, you're school kids, but the next day I was at work, you know what I mean?

PW

Course, you went to work the very next day.

Spanksy

Yeah, I got drunk, had a sleep, and I went to work (...) if we hadn't've done that you know, we wouldn't've remembered it, we'd've stopped at school [i.e. instead of going to the pub], it'd've been just another day. No, when we did that, we've got something to remember the last day by, we've got something to remember school by.

In the pub there is indeed a very special atmosphere amongst the Hammertown 'lads'. Spike is expansively explaining that although he had behaved like a 'right vicious cunt' sometimes, he really likes his mates and will miss them. Eddie is determined to have eight pints and hold the 'record' - and is later 'apprehended drunk', in the words of the head, at the school and ingloriously driven home by him. Fuzz is explaining how he had nearly driven Sampson (a teacher) 'off his rocker' that morning and had been sent to see the head, 'but he wasn't off on anything, he was joking'. Most important, they are accepted by the publican and other adult customers in the pub, who are buying them drinks and asking them about their future work. At closing time they leave, exchanging the adult promises which they have not yet learned to disbelieve, calling to particular people that they will do their plumbing, bricklaying or whatever.

That they have not quite broken loose, and that staff want to underline this, is shown when 'the lads' return to the school late, smelling of alcohol and in some cases quite drunk. In a reminder that the power of the school is backed ultimately by the law and state coercion, the head has called in the police. A policeman is waiting outside the school with the head. This frightens 'the lads' and a bizarre scenario develops as they try to dodge the policeman.

What do you mean?'
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[Later in a group discussion]
Will

I was walking up the drive [to the school], I was pulling Spike and Spanksy (...) I was trying to get these two alright, you know. Joey saw this copper comin' down the drive (...) I went into the bogs [at the bottom of the drive bounded at the back only by a fence]. I seen the copper, 'If he don't see me like, I can jump over the fence and get scot free, like, nobody'll see me, I'll be alright'. Then I thought, 'Look well if he comes in or summat', so I undone my trousers like I was having a piss, as though I was late or summat. Then Bill come running in. I thought, 'Christ', and I climbed over the back fence, went creeping off (...) Simmondsy had seen Bill, he said, 'Ah, I want to see you two', he says, 'You two', and I dayn't think you know, I just went walking down.

Eventually 'the lads' are rounded up and delivered in an excited state to the head's study, where they are told off roughly by the policeman: 'He picked me up and bounced me against the wall' - Spike (I did not see this incident myself). The head subsequently writes to all of their parents threatening to withhold their final testimonials until an apology is received: in the case of Spike he wrote:

... your son had obviously been drinking, and his subsequent behaviour was generally uncooperative, insolent, and almost belligerent. He seemed bent on justifying his behaviour and went as far as describing the school as being like Colditz ... as is my practice, I wish to give the parents of the boys an opportunity to come and see me before I finally decide what action to take.[2]

Even sympathetic young staff find the incident 'surprising', and wondered why 'the lads' had not waited until the evening, and then 'really done it properly'. The point is, of course, that the drinking has to be done at lunchtime, and in defiance of the school. It is not done simply to mark a neutral transition - a mere ritual. It is a decisive rejection and closing off. They have, in some way, finally beaten the school in a way which is beyond the 'ear'oles' and nearly unanswerable by staff. It is the transcendence of what they take to be the mature life, the *real* life, over the oppressive adolescence of the school - represented by the behaviour both of the 'ear'oles' and of the teachers.

Some of the parents of 'the lads' share their sons' view of the situation. Certainly none of them take up the head's offer to go and see him.

[In a group discussion]
Will

Our mum's kept all the letters, you know, about like the letters Simmondsy's sent [about the drinking]. I says, 'What you keeping them for?' She says, 'Well, it'll be nice to look back on to, won't it', you know, 'show your kids like you know, what a terror you was'. I'm keeping 'em, I am.

[Individual interview at work]

PW

Did your old man understand about having a drink the last day of term?

Spanksy

Oh ah (...) he laughed, he said, 'Fancy them sending a letter to you know. Joey's father come and had a little laugh about it you know.'

No matter what the threats, and the fear of the law, the whole episode is 'work it' to 'the lads'. It is the most frequently recounted, embellished and exaggerated school episode in the future working situation. It soon becomes part of a personalised folklore. As school uniform and smoking cease to be the most obvious causes of conflict in schools as more liberal regimes develop, we may expect drinking to become the next major area where the battle lines are drawn.

The informal group

On a night we go out on
the street
Troubling other people,
I suppose we're anti-social,
But we enjoy it.

The older generation
They don't like our hair,
Or the clothes we wear
They seem to love running
us down,
I don't know what I would
do if I didn't have the gang.

(Extract from a poem by Derek written in an English class.)

In many respects the opposition we have been looking at can be understood as a classic example of the opposition between the formal and the informal. The school is the zone of the formal. It has a clear structure: the school building, school rules, pedagogic practice, a staff hierarchy with powers ultimately sanctioned - as we have seen in small way - by the state, the pomp and majesty of the law, and the repressive arm of state apparatus, the police. The 'ear'oles invest in this formal structure and in exchange for some loss in autonomy expect the official guardians to keep the holy rules - often above and beyond their actual call to duty. What is freely sacrificed by the faithful must be taken from the unfaithful.

Counter-school culture is the zone of the informal. It is where the incursive demands of the formal are denied - even if the price is the expression of opposition in style, micro-interactions and non-public discourses. In working class culture

generally opposition is frequently marked by a withdrawal into the informal and expressed in its characteristic modes just beyond the reach of 'the rule'.

Even though there are no public rules, physical structures, recognised hierarchies or institutionalised sanctions in the counter-school culture, it cannot run on air. It must have its own material base, its own infrastructure. This is, of course, the social group. The informal group is the basic unit of this culture, the fundamental and elemental source of its resistance. It locates and makes possible all other elements of the culture, and its presence decisively distinguishes 'the lads' from the 'ear'oles'. The importance of the group is very clear to members of the counter-school culture. The most obvious culture.

may expect drinking [In a group discussion]

Will (...) we see each other every day, don't we, at school (...)
Joey That's it, we've developed certain ways of talking, certain ways of acting, and we developed disregards for Pakis, Jamaicans and all different ... for all the scrubs and the fucking ear'oles and all that (...) We're getting to know it now, like we're getting to know all the cracks, like, how to get out of lessons and things, and we know where to have a crafty smoke. You can come over here to the youth wing and do summat, and er'm ... all your friends are here, you know, it's sort of what's there, what's always going to be there for the next year, like, and you know you have to come to school today, if you're feeling bad, your mate'll soon cheer yer up like, 'cos you couldn't go without ten minutes in this school, without having a laff at something or other.

PW Are your mates a really big important thing at school now?

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Joey They're about the best thing actually.

The essence of being 'one of the lads' lies within the group. It is impossible to form a distinctive culture by yourself. You cannot generate fun, atmosphere and a social identity by yourself. Joining the counter-school culture means joining a group, and enjoying it means being with the group:

[In a group discussion on being 'one of the lads']

Joey (...) when you'm dossing on your own, it's no good, but when you'm dossing with your mates, then you're all together, you're having a laff and it's a doss.

Bill If you don't do what the others do, you feel out.

Fred You feel out, yeah, yeah. They sort of, you feel, like, thinking the others are ...

Will In the second years ...

Spanksy

I can imagine . . . you know, when I have a day off school, when you come back the next day, and something happened like in the day you've been off, you feel, 'Why did I have that day off?' You know, 'I could have been enjoying myself'. You know, 'Why? I mean? You come back and they're saying, 'Oorh, you should have been here yesterday', you know.

Will

(...) like in the first and second years, you can say er'm, you're a bit of an ear'ole right. Then you want to try what it's like to be er'm . . . say, one of the boys like, you want to have a taste of that, not an ear'ole, and so you like the taste of that.

Though informal, such groups nevertheless have rules of a kind which can be described - though they are characteristically framed in contrast to what 'rules' are normally taken to mean.

PW

(...) Are there any rules between you lot?

Pete

We just break the other rules.

Fuzz

We ain't got no rules between us though, have we?

(...)

Pete

Changed 'em round.

Will

We ain't got rules but we do things between us, but we do things that y'know, like er . . . say, I wouldn't knock off anybody's missus or Joey's missus, and they wouldn't do it to me, y'know what I mean? Things like that or, er . . . yer give 'im a fag, you expect one back, like, or summat like that.

Fred

T'ain't rules, it's just an understanding really.

Will

That's it, yes.

PW

(...) What would these understandings be?

Will

Er . . . I think, not to . . . meself, I think there ain't many of us that play up the first or second years, it really is that, but y'know, say if Fred had cum to me and sez, 'er . . . I just got two bob off that second year over there', I'd think, 'What a cunt', you know.

(...)

Fred

We're as thick as thieves, that's what they say, stick together.

There is a universal [3] taboo amongst informal groups on the yielding of incriminating information about others to those with formal power. Informing contravenes the essence of the informal group's nature: the maintenance of oppositional meanings against the penetration of 'the rule'. The Hammertown lads call it 'grassing'. Staff call it telling the truth. 'Truth' is the formal complement of 'grassing'. It is only by getting someone to 'grass' - forcing them to break the solemnest taboo - that the primacy of the formal organisation can be maintained. No wonder then, that a whole school can be shaken with paroxysms over a major incident and the purge which follows it. It is an atavistic struggle about authority and the legitimacy

en I have a day off school, when something happened like in the 'why did I have that day off', you're saying, 'Oorh, you should have a day off'.

d years, you can say er'm. Then you want to try what the boys like, you want to have a day off so you like the taste of that. rules of a kind which can be used in contrast to what 'rules' are.

ou lot? ough, have we?

between us, but we do things. Couldn't knock off anybody's. Couldn't do it to me, y'know. er... yer give 'im a fag, you see that. ing really.

gs be? think there ain't many of us. it really is that, but y'know. 'er... I just got two bob off. ak, 'What a cunt', you know.

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s on the yielding of incrimination. Informing contravenes the maintenance of oppositional meaning. rtown lads call it 'grassing'. nplement of 'grassing'. It is to break the solemnest taboo - maintained. No wonder then. r a major incident and the authority and the legitimacy

of authority. The school has to win, and someone, finally, has to 'grass': this is one of the ways in which the school itself is reproduced and the faith of the 'ear-oles' restored. But whoever has done the 'grassing' becomes special, weak and marked. There is a massive retrospective and ongoing re-appraisal amongst 'the lads' of the fatal flaw in his personality which had always been immanent but not fully disclosed till now:

[In a group discussion of the infamous 'fire extinguisher incident' in which 'the lads' took a hydrant out of school and let it off in the local park]

PW It's been the biggest incident of the year as it's turned out, hasn't it?

Joey It's been blown up into something fucking terrific. It was just like that [snapping his fingers], a gob in the ocean as far as I'm concerned when we did it, just like smoking round the corner, or going down the shop for some crisps.

PW What happened (...)?

Joey Webby [on the fringes of the counter-school culture] grassed. Simmondsy had me on me own and he said, 'One of the group owned up and tried to put all the blame on Fuzz'. But he'd only had Webby in there.

Spanksy We was smoking out here.

Spike He's like that, you'd got a fag, hadn't you [to Fuzz].

Spanksy And Webby asks for a drag, so he give Webby the fag. Rogers [a teacher] walked through the door, and he went like that [demonstrating] and he says, 'It ain't mine sir, I'm just holding it for Fuzz'.

Will Down the park before, (...) this loose thing, me and Eddie pulled it off, didn't we, me and Eddie, and the parky was coming round like, he was running round, wor'he, so me and Eddie we went round the other side, and just sat there, like you know, two monkeys. And Webby was standing there, and the parky come up to him and says, 'Come on, get out. Get out of this park. You'm banned'. And he says, he walks past us, me and Eddie, and he says, 'I know you warn't there, you was sitting here'. And Webby went, 'It warn't me, it was ...', and he was just about to say summat, warn't he?

Eddie That's it, and I said, 'Shhh', and he just about remembered not to grass us.

Membership of the informal group sensitises the individual to the unseen informal dimension of life in general. Whole hinterlands open up of what lies behind the official definition of things. A kind of double capacity develops to register public descriptions and objectives on the one hand, and to look behind them, consider their implications, and work out what will actually happen, on the other. This interpretative ability is felt very often as a kind of maturation, a feeling of becoming

'worldliwise', of knowing 'how things really work when it comes to it'. It supplies the real 'insider' knowledge which actually helps you get through the day.

PW Do you think you've learnt anything at school, has it changed or moulded your values?

Joey I don't think school does fucking anything to you (. . .) It never has had much effect on anybody I don't think [after] you've learnt the basics. I mean school, it's fucking four hours a day. But it ain't the teachers who mould you, it's the fucking school you meet. You're only with the teachers 30 per cent of the time in school, the other fucking two-thirds are just talking, fucking pickin' an argument, messing about.

The group also supplies those contacts which allow the individual to build up alternative maps of social reality, it gives the bits and pieces of information for the individual to work out himself what makes things tick. It is basically only through the group that other groups are met, and through them successions of other groups. School groups coalesce and further link up with neighbourhood groups, forming a network for the passing on of distinctive kinds of knowledge and perspectives that progressively place school at a tangent to the overall experience of being a working class teenager in an industrial city. It is the infrastructure of the informal group which makes at all possible a distinctive kind of *class* contact, or class culture, a distinct from the dominant one.

Counter-school culture already has a developed form of unofficial bartering and exchange based on 'nicking', 'fiddles', and 'the foreigner' - a pattern which, of course, emerges much more fully in the adult working class world:

Fuzz If, say, somebody was to say something like, 'I'm looking, I want a cassette on the cheap like'. Right, talk about it, one of us hears about a cassette on the cheap, y'know, kind of do the deal for 'em and then say, 'Ah, I'll get you the cassette'.

Cultural values and interpretations circulate 'illicitly' and informally just as do commodities.

Dossing, blagging and wagging

Opposition to the school is principally manifested in the struggle to win symbolic and physical space from the institution and its rules and to defeat its main perceived purpose: to make you 'work'. Both the winning and the prize - a form of self-direction - profoundly develop informal cultural meanings and practices. The dynamic aspects of the staff/pupil relationship will be examined later on. By the time a counter-school culture is fully developed its members have become adept at managing the formal system, and limiting its demands to the absolute minimum. Exploiting the complexity of modern regimes of mixed ability groupings, blocked

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timetabling and multiple RSLA options, in many cases this minimum is simply the act of registration.[4]

[In a group discussion on the school curriculum]

Joey

(...) of a Monday afternoon, we'd have nothing right? Nothing hardly relating to school work, Tuesday afternoon we have swimming and they stick you in a classroom for the rest of the afternoon, Wednesday afternoon you have games and there's only Thursday and Friday afternoon that you work, if you call that work. The last lesson Friday afternoon we used to go and doss, half of us waggged out o' lessons and the other half go into the classroom, sit down and just go to sleep (...)

Spanksy

(...) Skive this lesson, go up on the bank, have a smoke, and the next lesson go to a teacher who, you know, 'll call the register (...)

Bill

It's easy to go home as well, like him [Eddie] ... last Wednesday afternoon, he got his mark and went home (...)

Eddie

I ain't supposed to be in school this afternoon, I'm supposed to be at college [on a link course where students spend one day a week at college for vocational instruction]

PW

What's the last time you've done some writing?

Will

When we done some writing?

Fuzz

Oh are, last time was in careers, 'cos I writ 'yes' on a piece of paper, that broke me heart.

PW

Why did it break your heart?

Fuzz

I mean to write, 'cos I was going to try and go through the term without writing anything. 'Cos since we've cum back, I ain't dun nothing [it was half way through term].

Truancy is only a very imprecise - even meaningless - measure of rejection of school. This is not only because of the practice of stopping in school for registration before 'wagging off' (developed to a fine art amongst 'the lads'), but also because it only measures one aspect of what we might more accurately describe as informal student mobility. Some of 'the lads' develop the ability of moving about the school at their own will to a remarkable degree. They construct virtually their own day from what is offered by the school. Truancy is only one relatively unimportant and crude variant of this principle of self-direction which ranges across vast chunks of the syllabus and covers many diverse activities: being free out of class, being in class and doing no work, being in the wrong class, roaming the corridors looking for excitement, being asleep in private. The core skill which articulates these possibilities is being able to get out of any given class: the preservation of personal mobility.

[In a group discussion]

- PW But doesn't anybody worry about your not being in their class?
- Fuzz I get a note off the cooks saying I'm helping them (. . .)
- John You just go up to him [a teacher] and say, 'Can I go and do a job'. He'll say, 'Certainly, by all means', 'cos they want to get rid of you like.
- Fuzz Specially when I ask 'em.

- Pete You know the holes in the corridor, I didn't want to go to games, he told me to fetch his keys, so I dropped them down the hole in the corridor, and had to go and get a torch and find them.

For the successful, there can be an embarrassment of riches. It can become difficult to choose between self-organised routes through the day.

- Will (. . .) what we been doing, playing cards in this room 'cos we can lock the door.
- PW Which room's this now?
- Will Resources centre, where we're making the frames [a new stage for the deputy head], s'posed to be.
- PW Oh! You're still making the frames!
- Will We should have had it finished, we just lie there on top of the frame, playing cards, or trying to get to sleep (. . .) Well, it gets a bit boring, I'd rather go and sit in the classroom, you know.
- PW What sort of lessons would you think of going into?
- Will Uh, science, I think, 'cos you can have a laff in there sometime.

This self-direction and thwarting of formal organisational aims is also an assault on official notions of time. The most arduous task of the deputy head is the construction of the timetables. In large schools, with several options open to the fifth year, everything has to be fitted in with the greatest of care. The first weeks of term are spent in continuous revision, as junior members of staff complain, and particular combinations are shown to be unworkable. Time, like money, is valuable and not to be squandered. Everything has to be ordered into a kind of massive critical path of the school's purpose. Subjects become measured blocks of time in careful relation to each other. Quite as much as the school buildings the institution over time is the syllabus. The complex charts on the deputy's wall shows how it works. In theory it is possible to check where every individual is at every moment of the day. But for 'the lads' this never seems to work. If one wishes to contact them, it is much more important to know and understand their own rhythms and patterns of movement. These rhythms reject the obvious purposes of the timetable and their implicit notions of time. The common complaint about 'the lads' from staff and the 'earholes' is that they 'waste valuable time'. Time for 'the lads' is not something you carefully husband and thoughtfully spend on the achievement of desired objective.

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in the future. For 'the lads' time is something they want to claim for themselves
now as an aspect of their immediate identity and self-direction. Time is used for the
preservation of a state - being with 'the lads' - not for the achievement of a goal -
qualifications.

Of course there is a sense of urgency sometimes, and individuals can see the end
of term approaching and the need to get a job. But as far as their culture is con-
cerned time is importantly simply the state of being free from institutional time. Its
own time all passes as essentially the same thing, in the same units. It is not planned,
and is not counted in loss, or expected exchange.

'Having a laff'

'Even communists laff' (Joey)

The space won from the school and its rules by the informal group is used for the
shaping and development of particular cultural skills principally devoted to 'having
a laff'. The 'laff' is a multi-faceted implement of extraordinary importance in the
counter-school culture. As we saw before, the ability to produce it is one of the
defining characteristics of being one of 'the lads' - 'We can make them laff, they
can't make us laff'. But it is also used in many other contexts: to defeat boredom
and fear, to overcome hardship and problems - as a way out of almost anything.
In many respects the 'laff' is the privileged instrument of the informal, as the
command is of the formal. Certainly 'the lads' understand the special importance
of the 'laff':

[In an individual discussion]

Joey

I think fuckin' laffin' is the most important thing in fuckin'
everything. Nothing ever stops me laffing (. . .) I remember once,
there was me, John, and this other kid, right, and these two kids
cum up and bashed me for some fuckin' reason or another. John
and this other kid were away, off (. . .) I tried to give 'em one,
but I kept fuckin' coppin' it . . . so I ran off, and as I ran off,
I scooped a handful of fuckin' snow up, and put it right over me
face, and I was laffing me bollocks off. They kept saying, 'You
can't fuckin' laff'. I should have been scared but I was fuckin'
laffing (. . .)

PW

Joey

What is it about having a laugh, (. . .) why is it so important?
(. . .) I don't know why I want to laff, I dunno why it's so fuckin'
important. It just is (. . .) I think it's just a good gift, that's all,
because you can get out of any situation. If you can laff, if you
can make yourself laff, I mean really convincingly, it can get you
out of millions of things (. . .) You'd go fuckin' berserk if you
didn't have a laff occasionally.

The school is generally a fertile ground for the 'laff'. The school important develops and shapes the particular ambience of 'the lads' distinctive humour. We will look at particular pedagogic styles as material for comic and cultural development in a later chapter. For the moment, however, we can note the ways in which specific themes of authority are explored, played with and used in their humour. Many of their pranks and jokes would not mean the same thing or even be funny anywhere else. When a teacher comes into a classroom he is told, 'It's alright, the deputy's taking us, you can go. He said you could have the period off'. 'The lads' stop second and third years around the school and say, 'Mr Argyle wants to see you, you're in trouble I think'. Mr Argyle's room is soon choked with worried kids. A new teacher is stopped and told, 'I'm new in the school, the head says could you show me around please'. The new teacher starts to do just that before the turned away laughs give the game away. As a rumour circulates that the head is checking everyone's handwriting to discover who has defaced plaster in the new block, Fuzz boasts, 'The fucker can't check mine, I ain't done none'. In a humorous exploration of the crucial point where authority connects with the informal code through the sacred taboo on informing, there is a stream of telltale stories half goading the teacher into playing his formal role more effectively: 'Please sir, Joey's talking/pinching some compasses/picking his nose/killing Percival having a wank/let your car tyres down'.

In a more general sense, the 'laff' is part of an irreverent marauding misbehaviour. Like an army of occupation of the unseen, informal dimension 'the lads' pour over the countryside in a search for incidents to amuse, subvert and incite. Even strict and well-patrolled formal areas like assembly yield many possibilities in this other mode. During assembly Spanksy empties the side jacket pocket of someone sitting in front of him, and asks ostentatiously 'Whose these belong to', Joey is clipping jackets to seats, and the others ruin the collective singing:

Joey The chief occupation when we'm all in the hall is playing with the little clips what holds the chairs together. You take them off and you clip someone's coat to his chair and just wait until he gets up ... and you never really listen ... you have to be really discreet like, so as the Clark [the deputy head] won't see you call you out, the other teachers don't matter.

(...)

Joey Even on the hymn ... when they mek you sing -
PW But do they make you sing? I didn't notice many of you singing -
- I was just standing there, moving my mouth.
- We've only got one of them books between all our class. We've got one between twenty-five -
- When we do sing we make a joke of it.
Fuzz Sing the wrong verses ... So if you're supposed to be singing verse one, you're singing verse three.

[Laughter]

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During films in the hall they tie the projector leads into impossible knots, make animal figures or obscene shapes on the screen with their fingers, and gratuitously dig and jab the backs of 'ear'oles' in front of them.

As they wander through the park next to the school at lunchtime they switch on the dynamo on the park-keeper's bike, 'That'll slow the cunt down a bit'. They push and pull everything loose or transportable, empty litterbins and deface signs. Where it looks defenceless private property is also a target:

[In a group discussion on vandalism]

Pete Gates!
 Joey Gates are the latest crack. Swopping gates over. Get a gate, lift it off, put it on somebody else's.
 Bill That's what we done. We was going to the ten pin bowling, you know, up by the Brompton Road, there was an 'ouse there for sale. We took the 'For Sale' sign out of the one, put it in the next door, then we took the milk carrier from the one, put it next door (. . .) we took a sort of window box on legs from the porch and stuck that next door. We swapped stacks of things.
 Spanksy And dustbins! [Laughter] . . . every night, go in to one garden, tek a dwarf out, and in the end there was a dwarf, a sundial, a bridge, a dwarf fishing, all in this one garden, and there's a big sundial up the road. He got one end of it, I got the other, and carried it all the way and put it in (. . .)

Outside school visits are a nightmare for staff. For instance, the museum trip. The back seats of the coach are left ominously empty for 'the lads' as they arrive late. There is soon a pall of blue smoke at the back of the coach though no red ends are ever visible. When the coach is returned the manager finds all the back seats disfigured with names and doodlings in indelible ink. The head sends the culprits to the garage the next day to clean the coach 'for the sake of the reputation of the school'.

In the museum 'the lads' are a plague of locusts feeding off and blackening out pomp and dignity. In a mock-up Victorian chemist's shop with the clear and prominent injunction 'Please do not touch', 'the lads' are handling, pushing, pulling, trying, testing and mauling everything in sight. Handfuls of old fashioned cough sweets are removed from the tall jars on the counter, and the high-backed chairs are sat upon and balanced back on their legs 'to see how strong they are'.

A model village is surrounded and obscured by fifteen backs from a now and for once attentive attendant. Spanksy says with mock alarm, 'Oh, look, a tram's crashed' as he gives it a good flick with his finger, and Joey takes one of the carefully prepared and stationed little men, 'I've kidnapped one of the citizens'.

They get out into the street for a smoke once they can dodge the teacher. Joey is dissecting his little man 'to see what's inside' and Spanksy is worrying in case the cough sweets have killed him. They all gather around and point to the sky, 'There it is, just above the building', or stare fixedly at the floor, and crack up into laughter

when a little crowd gathers. They stop outside a TV shop, and stare at the woman dressing the window, 'Let's all stare at that lady and embarrass her'. They succeed and leave. Finally those with some money detach themselves from the rest and go into the pub for a drink where they talk in overloud voices about school, and snigger a bit uncertainly when someone looks at them. When they get back on the coach, late again, the back seats still empty, they are half 'grassing each other up to the young teacher: 'There's something wrong with Spanksy, sir, his breath smells', 'Eddie's mouth's on fire sir, would you put it out'.

Next day, back in school, they are called to the headmaster's study because the coach firm has just rung up, but outside the headmaster's door they cannot decide which offence they are going to 'catch it for this time': 'Perhaps it's the cough sweets', 'Perhaps it's the singing on the coach', 'Perhaps it's the boozing', 'Perhaps it's for setting fire to the grass in the park', 'Perhaps it's for telling the park to fuck off', 'Perhaps it's what we did to the village'. They were surprised and relieved to find it was the ink on the seats. Whenever one of 'the lads' is called to see the head, his first problem is to mentally list the many things he might be interrogated about, and his second problem to construct a likely tale for all of them. When the formal and the informal intersect the guilt and confusion in his mind is much greater than the sharper sense of culpability in the head's mind. There is often real surprise at the trivial and marginal nature of the misdemeanour that has 'caused all the fuss' - especially in view of the hidden country which could have been uncovered.

Of course 'the lads' do not always look to external stimulants or victims for the 'laff'. Interaction and conversation in the group frequently take the form of 'piss-taking'. They are very physical and rough with each other, with kicks, punches, karate blows, arm-twisting, kicking, pushing and tripping going on for long periods and directed against particular individuals often almost to the point of tears. The ribbing or 'pisstaking' is similarly rough and often directed at the same individuals for the same things. Often this is someone's imagined stupidity. This is ironic in view of 'the lads' general rejection of school work, and shows a ghost of conventional values which they would be quick to deny. Though 'the lads' usually resist conventional ways of showing their abilities, certainly the ablest like to be thought of as 'quick'. Certain cultural values, like fast talking and humour, do anyway register in some academic subjects. Joey, for instance, walks a very careful tightrope in English between 'lauffing' with 'the lads' and doing the occasional 'brilliant' essay. In certain respects obvious stupidity is penalised more heavily amongst 'the lads' than by staff, who 'expected nothing better'. Very often the topic for the 'pisstake' is sexual, though it can be anything - the more personal, sharper and apposite the better. The soul of wit for them is disparaging relevance: the persistent searching out of weakness. It takes some skill and cultural know-how to mount such attacks, and more to resist them:

[A group of 'lads' during break-time]

Eddie

X gets his missus to hold his prick, while he has a piss. [Laughter]

stare at the woman
her'. They succeed
from the rest and go
about school, and
they get back on the
ing each other up
y, sir, his breath

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s. [Laughter]

Will
Spike
Spanksy
[X arrives]

Spanksy
Bill
Spanksy
Bill

X
Will (inter-
rupting)
Bill
X
-
X
-
X
Spike

Ask him who wipes his arse. [Laughter]
The dirty bastard ... I bet he changes her fucking rags for her.
With his teeth! [More laughter]

Did you have a piss dinnertime?
Or a shit?
You disgusting little boy ... I couldn't do that.
Hold on a minute, I want you to hold my cock while I have a piss.
[Laughter]
Why am I ...

He don't even know.
Does your missus hold your cock for you when you go for a piss?
Who does? [Laughter and interruptions]
You do
Who?
You
When?
You did, you told Joey, Joey told me. *

Plans are continually made to play jokes on individuals who are not there: 'Let's send him to Coventry when he comes', 'Let's laugh at everything he says', 'Let's pretend we can't understand and say, 'How do you mean' all the time'. Particular individuals can get a reputation and attract constant ribbing for being 'dirty', or 'as thick as two short planks', or even for always wearing the 'same tatty jacket'. The language used in the group, especially in the context of derision and the 'pissstake', is much rougher than that used by the 'ear'oles', full of spat-out swearwords, vigorous use of local dialect and special argot. Talking, at least on their own patch and in their own way, comes very naturally to 'the lads':

[In a group discussion on skiving]

Joey (...) You'm always looking out on somebody [when skiving]
and you've always got something to talk about ... something.
PW So what stops you being bored?
Joey Talking, we could talk forever, when we get together, it's talk,
talk, talk.

Boredom and excitement

PW What's the opposite of boredom?
Joey Excitement.
PW But what's excitement?
Joey Defying the law, breaking the law like, drinking like.
Spike Thieving.

Spanksy
Joey

Goin' down the streets.
Vandalising (...) that's the opposite of boredom - excitement
defying the law and when you're down The Plough, and you talk
to the gaffer, standing by the gaffer, buying drinks and that,
knowing that you're 14 and 15 and you're supposed to be 18.

The 'laff', talking and marauding misbehaviour are fairly effective but not wholly so in defeating boredom - a boredom increased by their very success at 'playing the system'.

The particular excitement and kudos of belonging to 'the lads', comes from more antisocial practices than these. It is these more extreme activities which mark them off most completely, both from the 'ear'oles', and from the school. There is a positive joy in fighting, in causing fights through intimidation, in talking about fighting and about the tactics of the whole fight situation. Many important cultural values are expressed through fighting. Masculine hubris, dramatic display, the solidarity of the group, the importance of quick, clear and not over-moral thought, comes out time and again. Attitudes to 'ear'oles' are also expressed clearly and with a surprising degree of precision through physical aggression. Violence and the judgement of violence is the most basic axis of 'the lads' ascendance over the conformists, almost in the way that knowledge is for teachers.

In violence there is the fullest if unspecified commitment to a blind or distorted form of revolt. It breaks the conventional tyranny of 'the rule'. It opposes it with machismo. It is the ultimate way of breaking a flow of meanings which are unsatisfactory, imposed from above, or limited by circumstances. It is one way to make the mundane suddenly *matter*. The usual assumption of the flow of the self from the past to the future is stopped: the dialectic of time is broken. Fights, as accidents and other crises, strand you painfully in 'the now'. Boredom and petty detail disappear. It really does matter how the next seconds pass. And once experienced, the fear of the fight and the ensuing high as the self safely resumes its journey are addictive. They become permanent possibilities for the alleviation of boredom, and pervasive elements of a masculine style and presence.

Joey

There's no chivalry or nothing, none of this cobbles you know, it's just ... if you'm gonna fight, it's savage fighting anyway, so you might as well go all the way and win it completely by having someone else help ya or by winning by the dirtiest methods you can think of, like poking his eyes out or biting his ear and things like this.

(...)

PW

What do you think, are there kids in the school here that just wouldn't fight?

Spike

It gets you mad, like, if you hit somebody and they won't hit you back.

PW

Why?

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Spanksy
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Joey

I hate kids like that.

Yeah, 'I'm not going to hit you, you'm me friend'.

Well, what do you think of that attitude?

It's all accordin' what you got against him, if it's just a trivial thing, like he give you a kick and he wouldn't fight you when it come to a head, but if he's . . . really something mean towards you, like, whether he fights back or not, you still pail him.

What do you feel when you're fighting?

(...) it's exhilarating, it's like being scared . . . it's the feeling you get afterwards . . . I know what I feel when I'm fighting . . . it's that I've got to kill him, do your utmost best to kill him. Do you actually feel frightened when you're fighting though? Yeah, I shake before I start fighting, I'm really scared, but once you're actually in there, then you start to co-ordinate your thoughts like, it gets better and better and then, if you'm good enough, you beat the geezer. You get him down on the floor and just jump all over his head.

It should be noted that despite its destructiveness, anti-social nature and apparent irrationality violence is not completely random, or in any sense the absolute overthrow of social order. Even when directed at outside groups (and thereby, of course, helping to define an 'in-group') one of the most important aspects of violence is precisely its social meaning within 'the lads' own culture. It marks the last move in, and final validation of, the informal status system. It regulates a kind of 'honour' - displaced, distorted or whatever. The fight is the moment when you are fully tested in the alternative culture. It is disastrous for your informal standing and masculine reputation if you refuse to fight, or perform very amateurishly. Though one of 'the lads' is not necessarily expected to pick fights - it is the 'hard knock' who does this, a respected though often not much liked figure unlikely to be much of a 'laff' - he is certainly expected to fight when insulted or intimidated: to be able to 'look after himself', to be 'no slouch', to stop people 'pushing him about'.

Amongst the leaders and the most influential - not usually the 'hard knocks' - it is the capacity to fight which settles the final pecking order. It is the not often tested ability to fight which valorises status based usually and interestingly on other grounds: masculine presence, being from a 'famous' family, being funny, being good at 'blagging', extensiveness of informal contacts.

Violence is recognised, however, as a dangerous and unpredictable final adjudication which must not be allowed to get out of hand between peers. Verbal or symbolic violence is to be preferred, and if a real fight becomes unavoidable the normal social controls and settled system of status and reputation is to be restored as soon as possible:

PW
Joey

(. . .) When was the last fight you had Joey?

Two weeks ago . . . about a week ago, on Monday night, this silly

rumour got around. It was daft actually, it shouldn't have got around to this geezer that I was going to bash him like and it hadn't come from me, so him not wanting to back down from it, put the word out he was going to have me, we had a fight and we was stopped. I marked him up. He give me a bit of a fat lip, and he dropped the nut on me nose, hurt me nose, hurt me nose here. But I gouged his eye out with my thumb, split his head open, then after they pulled us off, I grabbed him and took him in the corner and I told him there that he knows I wasn't scared of him and that I know I wasn't scared of him, he warn't scared of me, that's the end of it. It was a sort of an ... uh ... he was from a family, a big family like us, they're nutters, they're fighters the Jones, and ... uh ... didn't want to start anything between 'em, so I just grabbed him and told him what the strength is like.

In a more general way the ambience of violence with its connotations of masculinity spread through the whole culture. The physicality of all interactions, the mock pushing and fighting, the showing off in front of girls, the demonstrations of superiority and put-downs of the conformists, all borrow from the grammar of the real fight situation. It is difficult to simulate this style unless one has experienced real violence. The theme of fighting frequently surfaces in official school work - especially now in the era of progressivism and relevance. One of Bill's English essays starts, 'We couldn't go Paki bashing with only four', and goes through, 'I saw his foot sink into his groin' and 'kicking the bloke's head in', to 'it all went dark' (when the author himself 'gets done in'). In the RSLA film option where pupils can make their own short films 'the lads' always make stories about bank robberies, muggings and violent chases. Joey gets more worked up than at any time in class during the whole year when he is directing a fight sequence and Spanksy will not challenge his assailant realistically, 'Call him out properly, call him out properly, you'd say, "I'll have you, you fucking bastard" not "Right, let's fight".' Later on he is disgusted when Eddie dives on top of somebody to finish a fight, 'You wouldn't do that, you'd just kick him, save you getting your clothes dirty'.

The perennial themes of symbolic and physical violence, rough presence, and the pressure of a certain kind of masculinity expand and are more clearly expressed amongst 'the lads' at night on the street, and particularly at the commercial dance. Even though they are relatively expensive and not so very different from what is supplied at a tenth of the cost at the Youth Club, commercial dances are the preferred leisure pursuit of 'the lads'. This is basically because there is an edge of danger and competition in the atmosphere and social relations not present at the Youth Club. Commercial provision can be criticised at many levels, not least because of its expense and instrumentalism towards those it caters for. However, it at least responds to its customers' desires, as they are felt, without putting a moral constraint on the way they are expressed. In a sense 'the lads' do have a kind of freedom at the commercial dance. Its alienated and exploited form at least leaves

them free from the claustrophobia and constriction of irrelevant or oppressive moral imperatives in official leisure organisations. It is possible for indigenous cultural forms to surface and interact without direction from above:

Spike
Will

If there's a bar there, at a dance, it's good.

Yeah, I think if there's a bar there you have to be more . . . watch what you're doing, not prat about so much, because some people what's got a bit of ale inside 'em (. . .) they see like a lot of birds there, and they think, 'I'll do a bit of showin' off', and they'll go walkin' round, like hard knocks you know (. . .) They just pick a fight anywhere.

Spike

Billy Everett, kids like 'im, he'll go around somebody'll look at 'im and he'll fucking belt 'im one (. . .)

PW

How do you start a fight, look at somebody?

Spike

No, somebody looks at you.

Will

That's it, just walk around so somebody would look at you.

Spike

Or if you walk past somebody, you deliberately bump into 'em and you swear blind that they nudged you.

PW

So if you're at a dance and you want to avoid a fight, you have to look at your feet all the time do you?

-

No.

Spike

Not really.

Fuzz

(. . .) Look at 'em, and fucking back away.

Will

If you know a lot of people there, you're talkin' to them, you feel safer as well, if you know a lot of people.

Spike

It's OK if you know a lot of people there.

(. . .)

If you go to a dance where you don't know anybody it's rough.

Spike

The atmosphere ain't there [in the school youth wing] there ain't a bar for one. You drink fuckin' fizzy pop, and eat Mars bars all night.

Will

I think . . . this club might, if they'd got some new kids we'd never seen before.

Spike

It'd be good then.

Will

It'd be good then, 'cos there'd be some atmosphere and you know, you'd be lookin' at each other, then you'd go back and say, 'I don't like that prat, look at the way he's lookin' at us'. And there might be something goin' on outside after . . . but now you're always gettin' Jules [the youth leader] walkin' out or summat, you know.

Evening and weekend activities hold all the divisions of the school plus others - sometimes more shadowy, especially if they involve class differences - further projected onto clothes, music and physical style. Being a 'lad' in school is also

associated with 'being out' at night and developing a social understanding not only of the school but also of the neighbourhood, town and streets:

Will

Classin' it like the modern kids, right, the kids who dress modern right. There's the hard knocks, then there are those who are quiet (...) but can look after themselves, like, dress modern and hang about with the hard knocks or summat. Then there's the money givers, kids who you can blag money off, who'll buy friendship. Then you get into the class of the poufs, the nancies

PW
Will

(...)
Pouf doesn't mean queer.

No, it means like ear'oles, do-gooders, hear no evil, see no evil (...) I think the hard knocks and that like reggae, d'you know what I mean, reggae and soul, they don't listen to this freaky stuff, then the poufs, the nancies, they like ... the Osmonds, y'know, Gary Glitter.

PW

(...) weirdos, freaks, hippy types (...) how do they fit into that?

Will

Yeah, well, I dunno (...) you find a lot of these freaks are brainy an'all.

Spike
Fuzz

T'aint our scene like (...)
I mean take for instance you go down The Plough when the disco's on (...) when there's all the heavy music, and you see the kids with their hair long, scruffy clothes (...) jeans and everything, and you go down on a soul night, and you see kids with baggy trousers, you know, spread collar shirts, you can tell the difference.

(...)

Will

I think you can feel out of it as well, 'cos I've been up the Junction, up town, it's a heavy place, got all the drugs and everything, and everybody was dressed really weirdo (...) and I felt I was out, well, I felt, well, out of it, you know what I mean. I felt smarter than the rest, as though I was going to a wedding, or I was at a wedding, and they was working on a farm.

It is the wider scope, extra freedom, and greater opportunities for excitement which make the evening infinitely preferable to the day (in school). In some respects the school is a blank between opportunities for excitement on the street or at a dance with your mates, or trying to 'make it' with a girl. In the diaries kept by 'the lads', meant to record 'the main things that happen in your day', only 'went to school' (or in Will's case gigantic brackets) record school, whilst half a side details events after school, including the all important 'Got home, got changed, went out'. However, although school may be bracketed out of many of these kids' lives, this

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'invisibility' should not lead us to believe that school is unimportant in the form of what they do experience (see next chapter).

The pressure to go out at night, to go to a commercial dance rather than a youth club, to go to pubs rather than stop in, to buy modern clothes, smoke, and take girls out - all these things which were felt to constitute 'what life is really about' - put enormous financial pressure on 'the lads'. Shortage of cash is the single biggest pressure, perhaps at any rate after school, in their life:

[In an individual discussion]

Joey

(...) after all, you can't live without bread, let's face it, fucking money is the spice of life, money is life. Without money, you'd fucking die. I mean there's nothing fucking round here to eat, you couldn't fucking eat trees, you couldn't eat bark.

All possible contacts in the family and amongst friends and casual acquaintances are exploited and the neighbourhood scoured for jobs in small businesses, shops, on milk rounds, as cleaners, key cutters, ice-cream salesmen, and as stackers in supermarkets. Sometimes more than one job is held. Over ten hours work a week is not uncommon. From the fourth form onwards, Spike thinks his work at a linen wholesaler's is more important than school. He gladly takes days and weeks off school to work. He is proud of the money he earns and spends: he even contributes to his parents' gas bill when they've had 'a bad week'. Joey works with his brother as a painter and decorator during the summer. He regards that as 'real' work, and school as some kind of enforced holiday. There is no doubt that this ability to 'make out' in the 'real world', to handle sometimes quite large cash flows (Spike regularly earns over twenty pounds a week, though the average for the others is something under five pounds) and to deal with adults nearly on their own terms strengthens 'the lads' self-confidence and their feeling, at this point anyway, that they 'know better' than the school.

There is even a felt sense of superiority to the teachers. They do not know 'the way of the world', because they have been in schools or colleges all their lives - 'What do they know, telling us ...?' As the next chapter will show, there are also many profound similarities between school counter-culture and shopfloor culture. The emerging school culture is both strengthened and directly fed material from what 'the lads' take to be the only truly worldwise source: the working class world of work.

This contact with the world of work, however, is not made for the purposes of cultural edification. It is made within the specific nexus of the need for cash, and responded to and exploited within that nexus. The very manner of approaching the world of work at this stage reproduces one of its characteristic features - the reign of cash. The near universal practice of 'fiddling' and 'doing foreigners', for instance, comes to 'the lads' not as a neutral heritage but as a felt necessity: they need the cash. As Spanksy says, 'If you go out even with just enough money in your pocket for a pint like, you feel different', and it is only the part-time job, and particularly its 'fiddles', which offers the extra variable capacity in their world to supply this

free cash. This particular form of early exposure to work helps to set the parameters for their later understanding of labour and reward, authority and balances, and for a particular kind of contained resentment towards those who manage and direct them:

[In a group discussion on part-time work]

Spike (...) it was about eight o'clock in the morning, this was, [a butcher] got a telephone, he's got a big bag of ten bobs, and he'd left the two strings over the telephone so that if I touched it, the strings'd come, you know. I opened the bag, got a handful of ten bobs out, zipped it up and just left it. He says, 'You've touched this fucking bag, the strings was over the telephone.' Well I couldn't say much (...) so he told me to fuck off (...)

Will (...) like there was an outside toilet [at a greengrocers where he used to work] but it was all blocked with stinking vegetables and all this, and I used to put 'em [cauliflowers] on top of the cistern, you know (...) he says, I seen 'im counting 'em, and he says, 'Uh ... there's one missing here'. I said 'I dunno' (...). He says, 'There's one missing here'. I says, 'There ain't'. He says, 'There is'. I says, 'I must have put it in that one, 'ere' have one of 'em', and he dayn't count them, so I was alright. I thought he was laying a trap for me, like, I think it was a Friday night when that happened. The next day (...) I had to have a big fire up the back to burn all the rubbish and that, and I set fire to everything like and all the canal bank. It was like the railway bank like, round the back, it was all dry, bone dry, so I got this cardboard, this piece of cardboard box like that, and I threw it over there and set all the bank on fire to get him back like. And I went walking in, I says, 'Is the bank s'posed to be on fire?' [Laughter] He went mad he did. He says, 'Was it you?' I says, 'No, it must have been the butcher, 'cos they was having a fire.' And the fire engines come and everything.

There is some scope for getting money by saving it from dinner money, as well as some possibility for limited extortion from 'ear'oles' and younger boys - though 'blagging off' first and second formers is not highly regarded. Often the last - and sometimes earlier - resort for getting 'money in your pocket' is stealing. Shortage of cash should not be underestimated as the compelling material base for theft. In a very typical articulation of mixed motives, however, 'thieving' is also a source of excitement rather like fighting. It puts you at risk, and breaks up the parochialism of the self. 'The rule', the daily domination of trivia and the entrapment of the formal are broken for a time. In some way a successful theft challenges and beats authority. A strange sort of freedom - even though it is only a private knowledge - comes from defying the conventions and being rewarded for it. If you are 'copped', particular skills in 'blagging your way out of it' can be brought to bear, and

y exposure to work helps to set the excitement and satisfaction is obtained if you 'get away with it'. Some of course, you do not 'get away with it'. Two of the Hammertown lads are on probation for stealing car radios during the research. This is disastrous. The formal is brought into it, official reports written up, and all kinds of unspecified worries about the procedures of the court and the interminable proceedings of bureaucracy turn the original excitement to sickness. This is a moment, again, when the formal wins a decisive and irrevocable victory over the informal. The informal meanings do not survive a direct confrontation. Still, given the near universality of theft amongst 'the lads', there are very few convictions for theft. There are many more close scrapes and the dread of 'being done' adds extra excitement and an enhanced feeling of sharpness and adroitness when you do 'get away with it'.

[group discussion]

It's just hopeless round here, there's nothing to do. When you've got money, you know, you can go to a pub and have a drink, but, you know, when you ain't got money, you've either got to stop in or just walk round the streets and none of them are any good really. So you walk around and have a laff.

It ain't only that it's enjoyable, it's that it's there and you think you can get away with it . . . you never think of the risks. You just do it. If there's an opportunity, if the door's open to the warehouse, you'm in there, seeing what you can thief and then, when you come out like, if you don't get caught immediately, when you come out you'm really happy like.

'Cos you've showed the others you can do it, that's one reason. 'Cos you're defying the law again. The law's a big tough authority like and we're just little individuals yet we're getting away with it like.

(. . .) we all went up the copper station [for stealing from a sport-shop], he had all our parents in first. Then he had us lot in with our parents and he says, this copper, we was all standing up straight, you know, looks round, he says, 'You! How much pocket money do you get?' he says, 'would you like someone to pinch that'. He says 'NO'. He says, 'Have any of you got anything to say?' 'Yes, cunt, let me go' [under his breath]. 'You should say, "Sorry"', he said, 'If anything hadn't've been returned, if a dart had been missing, you'd 'ave 'ad it'. Benny Bones had got two air rifles at his house, Steve had got a catapult and a knife, and I'd got two knives at home, and he said, 'If anything'd been missing!'.
ney by saving it from dinner money, and from 'ear'oles' and younger boys - it is not highly regarded. Often the last money in your pocket is stealing. So as the compelling material base for the motives, however, 'thieving' is also a source of risk, and breaks up the parochial inattention of trivia and the entrapment of a way a successful theft challenges and even though it is only a private knowledge of being rewarded for it. If you are 'caught out of it' can be brought to bear

Joey

I'd been doing it all night [stealing from handbags], and I was getting drunk and spending the money, and instead of sitting there, doin' it properly, putting your hand down the back of the seat, I lifted the seat up and was kneeling down underneath, getting it out that way, and this bird comes back and says, 'What are you doing under there?'. I says, 'Oh, I just dropped two bob' and then her went on about it, so I just run off like, over the other side of the dance. Her went and told the coppers, and the police sat outside by the bogs. When I went out they just got me into this little cleaning room, and they got me in there and had all me money out. And she'd had four pound pinched, it was a lie really 'cos I'd only pinched three pound, and I'd spent nearly half of it, had a pound on me. If I'd've had four quid or me like, even if it hadn't been hers, I think they'd've done me. I didn't have enough money on me, so they couldn't do me.

Where the target is the school there is a particular heightening of excitement, of challenge to authority, of verve in taking well-calculated risks – and making money as well. Besides being a direct insult to staff, it also puts you absolutely beyond the 'ear'oles'. They have neither the need for the extra cash, nor the imagination to overcome conventional morality, nor the quickness and smartness to carry through the deed. The school break-in sums up many crucial themes: opposition, excitement, exclusivity, and the drive for cash:

X I couldn't see how we was going to get copped [when they broke into the school some time previously]. If, you know, I could see how them others [the school had recently been broken into] was going to get copped, he was, just bust a door down and walked in. There was footmarks all over the place, smashed a window and shit all over the place, and pulling books off

Y I mean we had gloves on and before we left his house we even emptied our pockets out to make sure there was nothing identifying. I left all my stuff at his house and he did, we just went then and I had a brown polo neck on, me jeans, gloves, you know, and he had all black things on.

X All black, polish on my face. [Laughter]

Y No. We was going to. Weren't we? We got the polish at your house, we was going to, but we thought, no.

PW Were you nervous when you were doing it?

Y Yeah.

X Oh ar. Like this you know [trembling]. 'Cos it's . . . uh . . . I've always you know, I've pinched out of people's pockets you know. I've seen two bobs lying about and I've gone, but I've never done anything like that before. I enjoyed it!

Y And I did, really enjoyed it!

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Sexism

Two other groups against whom 'the lads' exclusivity is defined, and through which their own sense of superiority is enacted, are girls and ethnic minority groups.

Their most nuanced and complex attitudes are reserved for the opposite sex. There is a traditional conflict in their view of women: they are both sexual objects and domestic comforters. In essence this means that whilst women must be sexually attractive, they cannot be sexually experienced.

Certainly desire is clear on the part of 'the lads'. Lascivious tales of conquest or jokes turning on the passivity of women or on the particular sexual nature of men are regular topics of conversation. Always it is their *own* experience, and not that of the girl or of their shared relationship, which is the focus of the stories. The girls are afforded no particular identity save that of their sexual attraction:

X

I was at this party snogging this bird, and I was rubbing her up and suddenly I felt a hand on my prick, racking me off . . . I thought, 'Fucking hell, we're in here', and tried to put my hand down her knickers, but she stopped me . . . I thought, 'That's funny, her's racking me off but won't let me get down her knickers'. Anyway we was walking home and Joe said to me, 'How did you get on with that bird, was she racking you off?'. I said, 'Yeah, how do you know?'. He said, 'It warn't her, it was me behind you, putting my hand up between your legs!' [Laughter]

Y

I can never be bothered [to use contraceptives], I think I must be infertile, the number of times I've fetched inside. I can't be bothered you know . . . I don't want to pull it out, though sometimes I fetch before. You know, you're struggling with her, fighting, to do it, and you've got her knickers down, and you're

just getting it out [giving a demonstration, fumbling at first with feet apart] and pow! [freezes demonstration] you fetch all over the place, that's terrible that is.*

Although they are its object, frank and explicit sexuality is actually denied to women. There is a complex of emotion here. On the one hand, insofar as she is a sex object, a commodity, she is actually diminished by sex; she is literally worthless; she has been romantically and materially partly consumed. To show relish for this diminution is seen as self-destructive. On the other hand, in a half recognition of the human sexuality they have suppressed, there is a fear that once a girl is sexually experienced and has known joy from sex at all, the floodgates of her desire will be opened and she will be completely promiscuous.

Y After you've been with one like, after you've done it like, well they're scrubbers afterwards, they'll go with anyone. I think it's that once they've had it, they want it all the time, no matter who it's with.

Certainly reputations for 'easiness' - deserved or not - spread very quickly. 'The lads' are after the 'easy lay' at dances, though they think twice about being seen to 'go out' with them.

The 'girlfriend' is a very different category from an 'easy lay'. She represents the human value that is squandered by promiscuity. She is the loyal domestic partner. She cannot be held to be sexually experienced - or at least not with others. Circulated stories about the sexual adventures of 'the missus' are a first-rate challenge to masculinity and pride. They have to be answered in the masculine mode:

[In an individual discussion]

X He keeps saying things, he went out with me missus before like, and he keeps saying things what I don't like, and y'know like, it gets around . . . he won't learn his fucking lesson, he does summat, he sez summat, right, I bash him for it, he won't hit me back, he runs off like a little wanker, then he sez something else (. . .) he ain't been to school since Friday (. . .) when I fuckin' cop him I'm gonna kill 'im, if I get 'im on the floor he's fucking dead.

Courtship is a serious affair. The common prolepsis of calling girlfriends 'the missus' is no accident amongst 'the lads'. A whole new range of meanings and connotations come into play during serious courting. Their referent is the home: dependability and domesticity - the opposite of the sexy bird on the scene. If the initial attraction is based on sex, the final settlement is based on a strange denial of sex - a denial principally, of course, of the girl's sexuality for others, but also of sexuality as the dominant feature of their own relationship. Possible promiscuity is held firmly in check by domestic glue:

[In an individual interview]

Spike (. . .) I've got the right bird, I've been goin' with her for eighteen

monstration, fumbling at [filmizes demonstration] you fetch at is.*

sexuality is actually denied to the one hand, insofar as she is sed by sex; she is literally worked by consumed. To show relish for the other hand, in a half recognition there is a fear that once a girl is all, the floodgates of her desire open.

after you've done it like, well, y'll go with anyone. I think I want it all the time, no matter

not - spread very quickly. 'The think twice about being seen to

in 'easy lay'. She represents the e is the loyal domestic partner, at least not with others. Circus' are a first-rate challenge to the masculine mode:

ut with me missus before like, don't like, and y'know like, it's a kicking lesson, he does summat, or it, he won't hit me back, he he sez something else (...) he (...) when I fuckin' cop him on the floor he's fucking dead.

psis of calling girlfriends 'the e new range of meanings and g. Their referent is the home: a sexy bird on the scene. If the is based on a strange denial of sexuality for others, but also of onship. Possible promiscuity is

een goin' with her for eighteen

months now. Her's as good as gold. She wouldn't look at another chap. She's fucking done well, she's clean. She loves doing fucking housework. Trousers I brought yesterday, I took 'em up last night, and her turned 'em up for me (...) She's as good as gold and I wanna get married as soon as I can.

The model for the girlfriend is, of course, the mother and she is fundamentally a model of limitation. Though there is a great deal of affection for 'mum', she is definitely accorded an inferior role: 'She's a bit thick, like, never knows what I'm on about', 'She don't understand this sort of stuff, just me dad'. And within the home there is a clear sense that men have a right to be waited on by the mother:

[In an individual interview]

Spanksy (...) it shouldn't be done, you shouldn't need to help yer mother in the house. You should put your shoes away tidy and hang your coat up, admittedly, but, you know, you shouldn't vacuum and polish and do the beds for her and (...) her housekeeping and that.

The resolution amongst working class girls of the contradiction between being sexually desirable but not sexually experienced leads to behaviour which strengthens 'the lads' sense of superiority. This resolution takes the form of romanticism readily fed by teenage magazines. It turns upon the 'crush', and sublimation of sexual feeling into talk, rumours and message-sending within the protective circle of the informal female group.[5] This is not to say that they never have sex - clearly a good proportion must do - but that the dominant social form of their relationship with boys is to be sexy, but in a girlish, latter day courtly love mould which falls short of actual sexual proposition. The clear sexual stimulus which in the first place attracts the boy can thus be reconverted into the respectable values of the home and monogamous submission. If ever the paranoid thought strikes the boy that, having got the 'come on' himself, why shouldn't others, he can be calmed with the thought, 'she's not like that, she's soft inside'. In this way, still, romanticism brokes the sexual within a patriarchal society. It allows sexual display without sexual promise, being sexy but not sexual.

What 'the lads' see of the romantic behaviour they have partly conditioned in the girls, however, is a simple sheepishness, weakness and a silly indirectness in social relationships: 'saft wenches giggling all the time'. Since the girls have abandoned the assertive and the sexual, they leave that ground open to the boys. It is they who take on the drama and initiative, the machismo, of a sexual drive. They have no reservations about making their intentions clear, or of enjoying a form of their sexuality. However, they take it as an aspect of their inherent superiority that they can be frank and direct and unmystified about their desires. The contortions and strange rituals of the girls are seen as part of their girlishness, of their inherent weakness and confusion. Their romanticism is tolerated with a knowing masculinity, which privately feels it knows much more about the world. This sense of masculine

pride spreads over into the expressive confidence of the rest of 'the lads' culture. It adds a zest to their language, physical and boisterous relations with each other, humiliation of 'ear'oles', and even to a particular display style of violence.

The combination of these various factors gives a special tone to interaction between the sexes. 'The lads' usually take the initiative in conversation and are the ones who make suggestive comments. The girls respond with giggles and talk amongst themselves. Where girls do make comments they are of the serious, caring or human kind. It is left to 'the lads' to make the jokes, the hard comments, the abrasive summations and to create a spectacle to be appreciated by the girls. The girls are clearly dominated, but they collude in their own domination:

[A mixed group talking 'by the sheds' at dinner time]

Joan We'm all gonna start crying this afternoon, it's the last.

Bill You've only got two weeks left ain't yer, we'm gonna laugh when we leave (...)

Joan I like your jumper.

Bill You can come inside if yer like!

Will Ain't it terrible when you see these old women with bandages round their ankles.

Mary I ain't got 'em, and I ain't fat.

Will I dayn't say you had, I said it was terrible.

Bill I'm gonna nick Mary's fags and smoke 'em all. [Giggles]

(...)

Eddie It's time you lot were back in school, go on. [Giggles and whispering about someone who 'fancies' Eddie]. These wenches don't half talk about you behind your back, me ears are burning. [Loud burp from one of 'the lads']

Maggie Oh, you pig, shut up.

Bill [Handing cigarettes around] He're.

Maggie No thanks, I'll have a big one.

Bill She likes big ones! He's got a big one, ask him, he'll let you have a look.

The rest [Singing] He's got a big one, he's got a big one ... [Bill takes his coat off]

Eddie Have it off.

Bill [To Mary] Have you ever had it off?

Will I've had it off twice today already [Laughter] Do you like having it off? [To Maggie]

Maggie You cheeky sod.

Will I mean your coat. *

Interestingly, this kind of banter can be used towards the mother but never the father. It takes on a more kindly tone, responding to the domestic rather than the sexual range, but the initiative, force and the tone remain the same:

[In a group discussion of family]

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PW

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Racism

Head of

Upper School

(. . .) I just play her up like, I'll be lying there, after I'd just woke
 up or summat. Her won't be sayin' a thing, and I'll say, 'Shurrup',
 like, 'Shurrup, stop talking' (. . .) Her says to me once, 'I think
 you're mad as a coot', and like once I lit the oven, a gas oven we
 got. Her was in the kitchen, and I pulled down the oven door like
 you know to make sure the gas wasn't on, her come in and sez,
 'What the bloody hell you doin' ', I says, 'I'm lookin' for me fags'.
 [Laughter] (. . .) well, I'll just be lying there and say, I've got the
 radio on, when a good record comes on I'll start jumping about
 and goin' about makin' mad noises.

What does your mum think?

Her just sits there, I wouldn't do it in front of our dad.

Why not?

He'd just, he wouldn't see no . . . really, he'd think there was
 summat wrong, you know, and uh, when I ain't seen our mum
 like, I'll go home and say, 'Give me a kiss, give me a kiss!' . . . and
 her pushes me off, you know, sayin' 'Get off, you daft idiot'
 (. . .) The thing that gets her really mad, say, you go in to hang
 your coat up, and I'll push her into the corner like, and she'll be
 trying to get out, and I'll move there, and she'll go that way, and
 we'll be like that [dodging sideways] for about two minutes and
 she'll go bloody mad.

Three distinct groups - Caucasians, Asians and West Indians - are clearly visible in
 most school settings. Though individual contacts are made, especially in the youth
 wing, the ethnic groups are clearly separated by the fourth year. Divisions are, if
 anything, more obvious in informal settings. For a period the head of upper school
 allows fifth years to use form rooms for 'friendship groups' during break time.
 This is yet another, this time defensive and accommodating, variant of the continu-
 ous if subtle struggle to contain opposition. Its results, however, demonstrate for us
 what are the clear informal patterns of racial culture beneath and sometimes
 obscured by the official structures of the school.

We have got the Martins (Bill), Croft (Joey), Rustin, Roberts
 (Will), Peterson (Eddie), Jeffs (Fuzz) and Barnes (Spike) in the
 European room. Bucknor, Grant, Samuels, Spence in the West
 Indian room and Singh, Rajit and co in the Asiatic room. So
 much for integration! There are three distinct rooms. You go
 into the white room and you will probably sit down and have
 a cup of tea made. You go into the Indian room and they are all

playing cards and they are jabbering to each other, and then you go into the West Indian room and they are all dancing to records. In the West Indian room they are sort of stamping around twisting.

From the point of view of 'the lads' the separation is certainly experienced as rejection of others. There is frequent verbal, if not actual, violence shown to 'the fuckin' wogs', or the 'bastard pakis'. The mere fact of different colour can be enough to justify an attack or intimidation. A clear demarcation between groups and a derogatory view of other racial types is simply assumed as the basis for this and other action: it is a daily form of knowledge in use.

- Spanksy We had a go at the Jamaicans, 'cos you know, we outnumbered them. We dayn't want to fight them when they was all together. We outnumbered them.
- Spike They was all there though.
- Spanksy They was all there, but half of them walked off dayn't they there was only a couple left. About four of us got this one.
- Joey Not one of us was marked . . . that was really super.

Racial identity for 'the lads' supplants individual identity so that stories to friends concern not 'this kid', but 'this wog'. At Hammertown Boys there is an increasing and worrying tension between the ethnic groups, particularly the Caucasians and the Asians, which sometimes flares up into violence. The deputy head then gets everyone into the hall and lectures them, but this only suppresses the immediate expression of dislike:

[In a group discussion on recent disturbances at the school]

- Joey He [the deputy in the hall after an incident] even started talking about the Israeli war at one stage, 'This is how war starts. . . . Pack it in'.
- PW (. . .) was he convincing you a bit?
- Joey He was just talking, we were just listening thinking, 'Right you black bastard, next time you start, we'll have you' - which we will.

This curiously self-righteous readiness to express and act on dislike is reinforced by what 'the lads' take to be a basically collusive attitude of staff - no matter what the public statements. This is perhaps even an unconscious effect and certainly where racism exists amongst staff it is much less virulent than that in the counter-school culture. There is, however, by and large much less sympathy and rapport between (a massively white) staff and ethnic minorities than between staff and whites. In an almost automatic cultural reflex minorities are seen as strange and less civilised - not 'tea', but 'jabbering to each other' and 'stamping around'. Certainly it is quite explicit that many senior staff associate the mass immigration of the 1960s with the break up of the 'order and quietness' of the 1950s and of

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what is seen more and more retrospectively as their peaceful, successful schools. Both 'lads' and staff do share, therefore, a sense in their different ways of resentment for the disconcerting intruder. For racism amongst 'the lads' it provides a double support for hostile attitudes. The informal was, for once, backed up by at least the ghost of the formal.

The racism in the counter-school culture is structured by reified though somewhat differentiated stereotypes. Asians come off worst and are often the target for petty intimidation, small pestering attacks, and the physical and symbolic jabbing at weak or unprotected points in which 'the lads' specialise. Asians are seen both as alien, 'smelly' and probably 'unclean', and as sharing some of the most disliked 'ear'ole' characteristics. They are doubly disliked for the contradictory way in which they seem simultaneously to be both further off, and closer to received English cultural models. They are interlopers who do not know their station and try to take that which is not rightfully theirs but which is anyway disliked and discredited on other grounds.

West Indians come off somewhat better at the hands of 'the lads'. Although they are identifiably 'foreign', sometimes 'smelly' and probably 'dirty' and all 'the rest', they at least fit into the cultural topography a little more consistently. Their lack of conformist achievement is seen as more appropriate to their low status, and aspects of their own oppositional, masculine and aggressive culture chime with that of 'the lads'. There is some limited interaction, between males at any rate, on the grounds of shared cultural interests in 'going out', reputation, dancing, soul, R and B, and reggae. The combination of racial dislike with some shared cultural interests meets, however, with most tension in the area of sexual relations where 'the lads' feel direct sexual rivalry and jealousy as well as a general sense of suspicion of male West Indian sexual intentions and practices - ironic, of course, in the light of their own frankly instrumental and exploitative attitudes. 'The lads' feel, however, barely consciously and in an inarticulate way, that they are bound, at least in the serious stage of 'courting', by some unwritten rules of de-sexualisation and monogamy which are not respected in West Indian culture.

To the elements of an enviable style and dubious treatment of women in the stereotype is added finally a notion of the alleged stupidity of West Indians. 'The lads' have their own notions of what constitutes 'sharpness' and 'nous' and the most common butt outside their own circles of denunciations and jokes turning on its opposite, 'thickness', are the West Indians. For the 'ear'oles' there is at least a degree of ambiguity about such charges, but 'wogs' can be safely and deprecatingly seen as 'stupid', 'thick as pudding', 'bone-headed'. This range of prejudice is real and virulent and potentially explosive in the sexual arena but in some important senses more comfortable for 'the lads' than the register of prejudice felt for Asians.

Notes

- [1] It is now recognised that some teachers retained on school teaching staff are seriously disturbed and that this is a growing problem. See, for instance J. Lawrence, 'Control experiment', *The Guardian*, 18 March 1975.
- [2] Spike's letter of apology is carefully pitched to maintain his own dignity as well as to secure his leaving certificate: 'I would like you to accept my sincere apologies The school *itself* has nothing to resemble 'Colditz' in any way whatsoever I realise what I have done, which might I add I find stupid now, *but at the time not so stupid*, so I am now prepared to face the consequence which you see fit' (my italics).
- [3] A recent piece of research on Dartington, the progressive private school in the West of England, claims that its children did not have a taboo on informing. This is extremely unusual and is explained (in that piece of research) by the way in which informal groups and the anti-school culture are inhibited by the exceptional unity, openness and democratic organisation of the school (reported in *The Guardian*, 1 January 1976).
- [4] It has been widely claimed that streaming, traditional subject-based curriculum planning, exams and general achievement orientation are likely to be conducive to the emergence of anti-school or semi-delinquent groups amongst the lower forms. In Hammertown Boys it was quite clear that oppositional groups had emerged under streaming by the end of the third year. However, after mixed ability grouping was introduced at the beginning of the fourth year, the counter-school groups developed and hardened in exactly the same fashion as may have been expected under streaming. Furthermore, it was by no means only the least able who were involved in the counter-school group. Some of its really central members were highly articulate, clear-sighted, assertive, and able to across a wide range of activities. They had decided that, for them and at that stage, the life of 'the lads' offered more than the conventional road. Although continued streaming may have had a reinforcing effect on those of low ability in the 'ghetto' form with the orthodox effects we have been led to expect, we should also be aware that de-streaming can lead to a creative social mix which is developmental, not only for the overall social system of the school, but also, and in particular, for its informal, radical and oppositional wing. And those verging towards the anti-school perspective were, if anything, aided by the new forms of mixed ability groupings, topic centred teaching, student centred teaching and the obvious confusion caused by the high number of group changes during the course of the day, compounded in particular by the sheer number of RSLA options open to the pupils - on other counts, of course, a desirable thing. See D. H. Hargreaves, *Social Relations in the Secondary School*, RKP, 1967; M. D. Shipman, *Sociology of the School*, Longman, 1968; and R. King, *School Organisation and Pupil Involvement*, RKP, 1973.
- [5] The field work in the main case study was focused on boys in a single sex school. There was a 'twinned' girls' school next door, however, and 'the lads' often

charted with groups of girls in the park at lunchtime. Angela Macrobbie first suggested to me the pivotal role of romanticism in the experience of working class girls.

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