

*To Val*

# Learning to labour

How working class kids get working class jobs

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Individuals cannot gain mastery over their own social interconnections before they have created them. But it is an insipid notion to conceive of this merely *objective bond* as a spontaneous, natural attribute inherent in individuals and inseparable from their nature (in antithesis to their conscious knowing and willing). This bond is their product. It is a historic product. It belongs to a specific phase of their development. The alien and independent character in which it presently exists *vis à vis* individuals proves only that the latter are still engaged in the creation of the conditions of their social life, and that they have not yet begun, on the basis of these conditions, to live it . . . . Universally developed individuals . . . are no product of nature, but of history.

Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, 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

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 resistance. 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 patriarchal 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 regulative state institutions. They have an important function in the overall reproduction 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 contribution 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 patriarchy 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

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 Doomsday 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'<sup>[8]</sup> - 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

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. Halsey 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.

## 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?

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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're 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 in 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 paranoid 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

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'm 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 in 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. That 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 CSEs?  
- 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 plays 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

about, I say, 'Oh great, school tomorrow, it'll be a laff', you know.

Will You still never fucking come!

Spanksy Who?

Will You.

[Laughter]

(...)

- You can't imagine . . .

- You can't imagine [inaudible] going into the Plough and saying, 'A pint of lager please'.

Fred 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.

Fred 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 timidness' 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 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.  
PW Would you always know though?

Joey Yes I would (...) It gets around you know, the group within ourself, 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 childish, 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 and 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 old 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 qualifications 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 it 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's . . . none of you like this, none of 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 (. . .) have you ever felt that you should try and stop them? (. . .)

Barry 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, platform-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 maximum 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

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.
- Will He said to me in registration -
- PW (interrupting) Who's this, Archer?
- Will 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'm 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 or 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.

[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?

Spansky Oh ah (...) he laughed, he said, 'Fancy them sending a letter', 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 'worth 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.

[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 what 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

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 (. . .)?

- Webby [on the fringes of the counter-school culture] grassed. Joey 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 kids you meet. You'm 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, as 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

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 wagged 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 sometimes.

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 'ear-oles' is that they 'waste valuable time'. Time for 'the lads' is not something you carefully husband and thoughtfully spend on the achievement of desired objectives

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 concerned 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' laffing 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 What is it about having a laugh, (. . .) why is it so important?  
Joey (. . .) 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 importantly 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, sir, 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'm 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, 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', as 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 all 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 yer, 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]

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 parky 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 'piss-taking' 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 'laffing' 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 'piss-take' 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]

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

[X arrives]

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

X Why am I . . .

Will (interrupting)

He don't even know.

Bill Does your missus hold your cock for you when you go for a piss?

X Who does? [Laughter and interruptions]

- You do

X Who?

- You

X When?

Spike 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 'piss-take', 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 skiing]

Joey (. . .) You'm always looking out on somebody [when skiing] 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 Goin' down the streets.  
Joey 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 cobblers 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?

Eddie I hate kids like that.  
Spanksy Yeah, 'I'm not going to hit you, you'm me friend'.  
PW Well, what do you think of that attitude?  
Joey 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.  
PW What do you feel when you're fighting?  
Joey (...) 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.  
PW Do you actually feel frightened when you're fighting though?  
Joey 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 (...) When was the last fight you had Joey?

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

rumour got around. It was daft actually, it shouldn't've 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 an 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 If there's a bar there, at a dance, it's good.  
 Will 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.  
 - Not really.  
 Spike (. . .) Look at 'em, and fucking back away.  
 Fuzz 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.  
 Will It's OK if you know a lot of people there.  
 Spike 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 Pouf doesn't mean queer.

Will 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?

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

Spike T'aint our scene like (...)

Fuzz 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

'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 Spansy 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 its 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, he's [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

renewed excitement and satisfaction is obtained if you 'get away with it'. Sometimes, of course, you do not 'get away with it'. Two of the Hammertown lads are put on probation for stealing car radios during the research. This is disastrous. Parents are 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, where 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':

[In a group discussion]

Bill 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.

Joey 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 thieve and then, when you come out like, if you don't get caught immediately, when you come out you'm really happy like.

Bill 'Cos you've showed the others you can do it, that's one reason.

Joey '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.

(. . .)

Fuzz (. . .) 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!'

(. . .)

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 on 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!

X And after you know coming down the road we were just in a fit, weren't we? We was that, you know, it was that closely worked out.

Y And we spent it all up The bleeding Fountain, day'nt we. Getting pissed down The Old Boat.

X Oh ar . . . I saved ten bob for the ice rink, remember?

- Yeah.

PW Why did you want to break into the school rather than anything else?

Y Got no fucking money (. . .)

X We knew the school well and if you try and break in anything else like houses and that, you know, you're not sure if there's anybody in, it's a bit risky, you know what I mean, but the school you know there's nobody sleeping here, you know there's almost no way you can get copped.

### 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 flies 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

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'are.  
 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]

Will (. . .) 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.

PW What does your mum think?  
 Will Her just sits there, I wouldn't do it in front of our dad.  
 PW Why not?  
 Will 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.

### Racism

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 continuous 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.

Head of Upper 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

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 staffs 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

chatted 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.

## 5 Penetrations

Although we have looked in some detail through case study at the experience and cultural processes of being male, white, working class, unqualified, disaffected and moving into manual work in contemporary capitalism, there are still some mysteries to be explained. In one sense it might seem that one set of random causalities - individual pathology and cultural deprivation - has simply been replaced by another - cultural creativity and continuity. We have seen how some working class lads differentiate themselves from the institution, but why is this so? We have seen the conviction with which they hold their views, insights and feelings of cultural election, but what is the basis for this subjective elevation? We have seen their attitude to the occupational structure, but how can we explain its reversal of the conventional evaluation? We have seen how their genuinely held insights and convictions lead finally to an objective work situation which seems to be entrapment rather than liberation. But how does this happen? What are the basic determinants of those cultural forms whose tensions, reversals, continuities and final outcomes we have already explored?

### Elements of Analysis

In order to answer some of these questions and contradictions we must plunge beneath the surface of ethnography in a more interpretative mode. I suggest that we may approach a deeper understanding of the culture we have studied through the notions of penetration and limitation.

'Penetration' is meant to designate impulses within a cultural form towards the penetration of the conditions of existence of its members and their position within the social whole but in a way which is not centred, essentialist or individualist. 'Limitation' is meant to designate those blocks, diversions and ideological effects which confuse and impede the full development and expression of these impulses. The rather clumsy but strictly accurate term, 'partial penetration' is meant to designate the interaction of these two terms in a concrete culture. Ethnography describes the field of play in which the impulses and limitations combine but cannot isolate them theoretically or show them separately.

Penetrations are not only crucially skewed and deprived of their independence, but also bound back finally into the structure they are uncovering in complex ways by internal and external limitations. There is ultimately a guilty and unrecognised - precisely a 'partial' - relationship of these penetrations to that which they seem to be independent from, and see into. It is this specific combination of cultural 'insight' and partiality which gives the mediated strength of personal validation and

identity to individual behaviour which leads in the end to entrapment. There really is at some level a rational and potentially developmental basis for outcomes which appear to be completely irrational and regressive. It is, I would argue, only this contradictory double articulation which allows a class society to exist in liberal and democratic forms: for an unfree condition to be entered freely. More concretely, the specific cultural and subjective self-preparation of labour power which we have examined involves a potential progression towards more rational alternatives, which is suspended and caught off balance, unprotected, by crucial limitations. It is precipitated finally - without a stake in the conventional nor yet in an alternative - as the subjective inhabitation of a certain definition of manual labour power. This is a precipitation, however, which nevertheless carries over with it some of the affirmation and election based on blocked or distorted cultural penetrations. The astonishing thing which this book attempts to present is that there is a moment - and it only needs to be this for the gates to shut on the future - in working class culture when the manual giving of labour power represents both a freedom, election and transcendence, and a precise insertion into a system of exploitation and oppression for working class people. The former promises the future, the latter shows the present. It is the future in the present which hammers freedom to inequality in the reality of contemporary capitalism.

The remainder of this chapter outlines some of the impulses towards penetration in the counter-school culture. The next two chapters deal with those internal and external limitations which prevent and distort their sweep down to the really determining conditions and full context of the cultural form. Much of what follows is relevant to working class culture in general. Before that, however, it is necessary to examine more closely the elements involved in the notion of 'penetration': the real form of its action in the world, the scope of this action and its base in human agency. In particular we must define in what sense cultural penetrations of the fundamental relations and categories of society can be either 'rational' or 'creative'.

The counter-school culture and its processes arise from definite circumstances in a specific historical relation and are in no sense accidentally produced. The recognition of determination does not, however, dismiss creativity. Two qualifications must be insisted upon immediately however. Creativity is in no individual act, no one particular head, and is not the result of conscious intention. Its logic could only occur, as I argue later, at the *group* level. Secondly creativity cannot be pictured as a unique capacity or one able to produce limitless outcomes. Nor can it be considered in any sense as mastery - over the future or the present. On the contrary, it leads, paradoxically, to profound entrapments barred over more by the flush of subjective certainty.

Having entered these caveats, however, it must also be insisted that this cultural form is not produced by simple outside determination. It is produced also from the activities and struggles of each new generation. We are dealing with collective, if not consciously directed, will and action as they overlay, and themselves take up 'creative' positions with respect to finally reproduce what we call 'outside determinations'. It is these cultural and subjective processes, and actions which flow

from them, which actually produce and reproduce what we think of as aspects of structure. It is only by passing through this moment that determinations are made effective in the social world at all. Decisions are taken by individuals 'freely' and with 'consent' in this realm which no amount of formal external direction could produce. If working class kids on their way to work did not believe the logic of their actions for themselves, no-one outside, nor outside events, could convince them - especially in view of the conventional assessment of what they are doing and where they are going. The culture provides the principles of individual movement and action.

The penetrations produced, however, at the cultural level in the working class by what I still want to call a certain creativity are by no means quite open ended. They run along certain lines whose basic determinants lie outside the individual, the group or class. It is no accident that different groups in different schools, for instance, come up with similar insights, even though they are the products of separate efforts, and thus combine to make distinctive class bonds. All the groups are penetrating through to roughly the same really determining conditions which hold their present and future possibilities. The object, therefore, of creativity is something to be discovered, not imagined. The limits to, and internal relationships of, what is discovered are already set. In another society 'the lads' would have been shown the way, they would not have discovered their own.

Of course the whole specificity of the cultural level developed here is that such insights are not merely set lessons learned, nor passive information taken in. They are lived out and are the result of concrete and uncertain exploration. It is on the basis of such 'insights' developed in its depths that those other forms of behaviour, action and enjoyment are predicated which give the most flamboyant appearance and obvious creative life to a culture.

In a sense this most central point of reference is an absent or at least silent centre beneath the splendid bedizenment of a culture. It is impossible to prove its rationality. No amount of direct questioning will elicit it from cultural participants. The variety of forms and challenges at the surface of the culture bewilder a notion that they might have a concentric cause. This is why the ethnography of visible forms is limited. The external, more obviously creative, varied and sometimes random features must be read back to their heart. The logic of a living must be traced to the heart of its conceptual relationships if we are to understand the social creativity of a culture. This always concerns, at some level, a recognition of, and action upon, the particularity of its place within a determinate social structure.

One of the most profound reasons why this social creativity cannot be expressed rationally at the surface of the culture is that it is truly only half the story. It really *does not* proceed with a pure expressive purpose from the centre of the culture. We must posit the penetration as a clean and coherent insight in order to say what it is, but the concrete forms of cultures, as ethnography insistently reminds us, do not allow single pure dynamics. In their very formation these 'insights' are distorted, turned and deposited into other forms - such as subjective affirmation of manual labour - which make it hard to believe there has ever been, or could ever be, even

a notion of a rational kernel, never mind that it should be easily expressed. This means, amongst other things, that we must distinguish between the level of the cultural and the level of practical consciousness in our specification of creativity and rationality.

The argument is not that insights are made consciously in any one mind or even in the same mind or groups of minds over time - although the spoken everyday word might illuminate aspects of it variably and in contradiction with itself or perhaps unconsciously. Direct and explicit consciousness may in some senses be our poorest and least rational guide. It may well reflect only the final stages of cultural processes and the mystified and contradictory forms which basic insights take as they are lived out. Furthermore, at different times it may represent the contradictory moments of the cultural conflicts and processes beneath it. In this, for instance, it is unsurprising that verbal questions produce verbal contradictions. Not only this but practical consciousness is the most open to distraction and momentary influence. Repetition of given patterns, attempts to please the other, superficial mimicry, earnest attempts to follow abstract norms of, say, politeness, sophistication or what is taken as intelligence, can be mixed in with comments and responses which have a true cultural resonance. Survey methods, and all forms of methods relying basically on verbal or written responses, no matter what their sophistication, can never distinguish these categories.[1]

This is not in any way to dismiss consciousness. It is a privileged source of information and meaning if properly contextualised, and ultimately the only stake in the struggle for meanings. It is part of the cultural level and relates most basically to it as the immediate expression of its law. It binds in with it, and has a consistency, validity and directly developmental role with respect to its complexity. Consciousness is in any conceivable sense 'false' only when it is detached from its variable cultural context and asked to answer questions.

The creativity and rational impulses of the counter-school culture are not then idealist or fantastic products of the imagination. Nor are they basically centred on the acting individual and his consciousness. Nor are they able to take any turn they wish. They are not finally able in any way to prefigure the future.[2] A romantic view of working class cultural forms asserts that they are experimenting in some way with the future. This implies that they provide concrete outlines for living for when capitalism is overthrown. There is no way in which such imaginings can promise what they offer or give what they promise. It is quite wrong to picture working class culture or consciousness optimistically as the vanguard in the grand march towards rationality and socialism. If anything - the central case in this book - it is these elements of rationality and of the future in working class culture, and particularly in that of the school, which act finally in their current social form and in complex and unintended ways to prevent precisely that. It is the apparent cultural ascension of the working class which brings the hell of its own real present.[3]

We must seal this list of negatives, however, by positing the one distinctive and often unrecognised potential that working class cultural creativity and insight really

does have. It is embedded in the only class in the capitalist social formation which does not have a structurally based vested interest in mystifying itself. Though there are many barriers to a proper understanding, though there are many ideological inversions and distortions, and though the tools for analysis are often missing, the fact still remains that the working class is the only class not inherently structured from within by the ideological intricacy of capitalist organisation. It does not take nor, therefore, need to hold the cultural and social 'initiative' and is thus potentially freer from its logic.

The working class does not *have* to believe the dominant ideology. It does not need the mask of democracy to cover its face of oppression. The very existence and consciousness of the middle class is deeply integrated into that structure which gives it dominance. There are none who believe so well as those who oppress as honest men. What kind of bourgeoisie is it that does not in some way believe its own legitimations? That would be the denial of themselves. It would be the solution of a problem of which they were the main puzzle. It would invite self-destruction as the next logical move. The working class is the only group in capitalism that does not have to believe in capitalist legitimations as a condition of its own survival.

Clear boundaries must, however, again be marked. This potential for de-mystification falls short of an ability to prefigure other forms - that must wait for a basic structural shift to reflexively determine its own cultural practices and stable forms of pattern and circle in intention and unintention. All we can say is that the de-mystification of capitalist ideology, legitimations and self-delusions would be a precondition for a properly socialist society. We have yet, though, no examples of this. For the moment, and especially for our immediate object of study, this greater capacity for cultural penetration has, in its real social form, resulted in a deeper and more entangled entrapment within the capitalist order. It is far from settled whether this capacity, in any way in which it has actually been taken up, is a blessing or a curse.[4]

This is to argue, therefore, for a certain kind of creativity. It is still free-floating, however, unless we can specify the human base from which it springs and its particular form of work on the world, its form of praxis.

I suggest that the smallest, discrete unit which acts as the basis for cultural penetration is the informal group. The group is special and more than the sum of its individual parts. It has, in particular, a social dynamic which is relatively independent of issues and locations, preconceptions and prejudice. A social force which we might simply call loyalty tends to overdetermine previous attitudes and the specific conditions of the group's existence. It has been shown in American micro-sociology that leadership, leadership aims, maintenance of the group, and convergence of individual views, are permanent characteristics of groups (at least in Western capitalism).[5] It is a requirement for the group's continued existence that there should be strongly held group views and purposes. Social psychology calls this high morale. The power that is thus generated in the group, and its

unspecified open nature, constitutes an important social force. It is partly from this source that wider symbolic cultural articulations are generated.

We have, therefore, in the informal group a relative suspension of individual interests and a commitment to the reality of the group and its aims, which is not closely specified in the membership history, or location of the group. In this sense the group can, therefore, be considered as a subject in its own right. It has an internal impulse to find an objective specific to its own level in a way not limited by the previous knowledge, experience or ideology of its individual members.[6] I want to suggest that working class counter-school culture, supported by the informal group and an infinite series of contacts between groups passing on what is best and most relevant, turns its generated and open-ended force at least in part upon a de-mystification in its own way of its members' real conditions and possibilities within a class society. This is not to assert that any such intention, or final content of understanding, is actually in any one person's head, the result of an individual subjective will, or even in the form of an individual rationality. We are dealing with the unit of the group, and the specific level of cultural 'insight'. It should also be remembered that the partiality of the penetrations made at this level anyway prevent their full rational development and expression.[7]

Having suggested the basis, force and scope of what I maintain must be seen as a kind of creativity, it remains to suggest the characteristic manner of its work upon the world, the praxis which yields what I have called cultural penetrations. The characteristic expression of this force upon the world is, I suggest, a kind of production. The cultural does not simply mechanically mark, or in some simple sense 'live out' wider social contradictions. It *works* upon them with its own resources to achieve partial resolutions, recombinations, limited transformations which are uncertain to be sure, but concrete, specific to its own level and the basis for actions and decisions which are vitally important to that wider social order.

The relevant materials are not necessarily provided from outside for this kind of work and production. Indeed the praxis I am pointing to *produces* partly its own materials for its own activity in a struggle with the constrictions of the available forms.[8] What delivers the group force into the concrete form of the specifically cultural as studied in part I of the book is importantly a deflection from the dominant mode of signification - language - into antagonistic behavioural, visual and stylistic forms of expression. Conventional words cannot properly harness and 'say' the material of penetrations made at the infrastructural unit of the group in the mode of the cultural. Words created under bourgeois sway in determinate conditions cannot express what did not go into their making. Part of the reaction to the school institution is anyway a rejection of words and considered language as the expression of mental life. The way in which these creative insights are expressed, therefore, is one of expressive antagonism to the dominant bourgeois mode of signification - language. In a real sense for the working class the cultural is in a battle with language. This is not to reduce the cultural to anti-abstract behaviour. It is to posit it, in part, as an antagonistic way of expressing abstract and mental life centred, not on the individual subject, but on the group: not on the

provided language but on lived demonstration, direct involvement and practical mastery.

This is not to deny individual consciousness and language use in their dialectical connection with class practice but to suggest the possibility in a class society of an asymmetrical and distanced form of relationship between the two. Language is no less rich in the counter-school culture than in the conformist one - indeed it is a great deal more incisive and lively - but it cannot express, and is therefore not used in that mode, those mental insights which are anyway too much for the received language. Critical meanings arising from the force of creativity in informal groups are diverted back into the group and into the cultural to inform, enforce and shape many other kinds of physical and stylistic practices there. Relatively autonomous cultural practices such as transformations in clothes, habits, styles of behaviour, personal appearance and group interaction can all be seen in the light of this larger praxis.

Amongst other things this level of cultural activity 'expresses', mediates, or reports on, in its own materials and practices, a notion of the world as it is specially inhabited by the social groups who constitute its terrain. If only because of this social position and *lack* of disqualification and self-mystification discussed earlier, there are likely to be elements of (perhaps distorted or displaced) radical insight, as well as much else besides, buried in specifically cultural activities. These activities - by working on real materials in particular contexts and producing surprising, unexpected or transformed outcomes - also act to expose and cast into doubt the workings of the larger ideologies, institutions and structural relationships of the whole society.[9] This is achieved without any necessary direction, intention or purpose. It happens almost by the way, as if a by-product, in the immediate concerns of the day to day culture. It never-the-less strengthens the culture, may change its basis and increase the scope of its confidence and action. It increases the sense amongst its members of election and affirmation and provides a fuller and more finely judged grounding for cultural activities, style, and attitudes which it is felt hold a greater relevance and resonance than can be directly explained. Experientially it is an aspect of how the culture 'works' for its members in the way that others do not. The combination of these two kinds of cultural production and their interaction, especially in relation to major life decisions and transitions, help to make up what I have called cultural penetrations.

An interpretative analysis makes it possible to probe this level. One can interrogate the cultural for what unspoken assumptions lie behind it. What are the grounds that make this attitude sensible? What is the context which makes that action reasonable? What is being expressed through what kind of displacement or projection in such and such an object, artefact or symbolic complex? It is through such questions that it is possible to build up a construction of the rational impulse towards penetration of its context and conditions of the counter-school culture. We are dealing with an analytic category, of course, and our 'penetrations' can never be taken from the mouths of the social agents, but it has a concrete referent in the cultural and its specific level of collectivity. The cultural forms may not say

what they know, nor know what they say, but they mean what they do - at least in the logic of their praxis. There is no dishonesty in interpreting that.

## Penetrations

### *Education and qualifications*

'The lads' rejection of school and opposition to teachers can be seen in the light of a penetration of the teaching paradigm outlined in chapter 3. Their culture denies that knowledge is in any sense a meaningful 'equivalent' for the generality of working class kids. It 'sees through' the tautologous and manipulative modifications of the basic paradigm - whether dignified with 'relevant'/'progressive'[10] theories or not. It 'knows' better than the new vocational guidance [11] what is the real state of the job market.

The counter-school culture thus provides an eye to the glint of steel beneath the usual institutional kerfuffle in school. It has its own specific practices but it also searches out and critically exposes some of the crucial social transactions and contradictions within education. These can be grouped in three sets. They are all addressed to unmasking the nature of the 'equivalent' on offer.

Firstly the counter-school culture is involved in its own way with a relatively subtle, dynamic, and, so to speak, 'opportunity-costed' assessment of the rewards of the conformism and obedience which the school seeks to exact from working class kids. In particular this involves a deep seated scepticism about the value of qualifications in relation to what might be sacrificed to get them: a sacrifice ultimately, not of simple dead time, but of a quality of action, involvement and independence. Immediate gratification is not only immediate, it is a style of life and offers the same thing too in ten years time. To be an 'ear'ole' now and to gain qualifications of dubious value might be to close off for ever the abilities which allow and generate immediate gratifications of any kind at any stage.

The sacrifice might, then, be exorbitant, but so too might the object of the sacrifice be meaningless. Cultural values and orientations suggest that the outcome which qualifications bring is not always an unmixed blessing. Qualifications are likely to be low anyway and not likely to affect job choice ('What's the use doing CSEs when the others have got 'O' levels - Spike) and are not seen to be such an important criterion for selection anyway in the jobs 'the lads' are likely to obtain ('I'll always be able to show 'em if I can do it' - Joey). But what would be the meaning, in any case, of academic 'success' and its likely result of moderate upwards movement in the hierarchy of jobs? The possibility of real upward mobility seems so remote as to be meaningless. For 'the lads' 'success' means going into an apprenticeship or clerical work. Such jobs seem to offer little but take a lot. And this assessment is clearly made in the cultural mode. Free cultural involvement, social collectivity, the risk of the street and factory floor, and independence of mind would all be lost for a mainly *formal* - not *real* - prize. The cultural choice is

for the uncertain adventure of civil society against the constricting safety of conformism and only relative or even illusory official progress.

These cultural penetrations are, I would argue, of something real. Their form is of direct cultural activity and immediacy but they expose more than they know. In the first place there is a common educational fallacy that opportunities can be *made* by education, that upward mobility is basically a matter of individual push, that qualifications make their own openings.[12] Part of the social democratic belief in education even seems to be that the aggregate of all these opportunities created by the upward push of education actually transforms the possibilities for all the working class, and so challenges the class structure itself.

In fact, of course, opportunities are created only by the upward pull of the economy, and then only in relatively small numbers for the working class. The whole nature of Western capitalism is also such that classes are structured and persistent so that even relatively high rates of individual mobility make no difference to the existence or position of the working class. No conceivable number of certificates amongst the working class will make for a classless society, or convince industrialists and employers - even if they were able - that they should create more jobs.

It may well be argued that (as penetrated at the cultural level in its own way and for its own different immediate purposes) the proliferation of various certificates for working class occupants is more about obscuring the meaningless nature of work and constructing false hierarchies and binding people into them ideologically, than it is about creating or reflecting, the growth of more demanding jobs.

Secondly the culture makes a kind of assessment of the quality of available work. Though it is questionable whether they secure employment anyway, it can be suggested that what qualifications seem to promise for their working class bearers concerning the quality of work they might expect is basically illusory in the first place. Most work in industry is basically meaningless. Again we can see the general accuracy of the cultural penetration concerning the commonality of all forms of modern labour and the dubiety of the conformist road and absorption in the job - maintaining a relevance at another level (which reflects back on the lived level of course) even as it is produced on its own, immediate, cultural terrain.

More than ever today the concrete forms of most jobs are converging into standard forms. They require very little skill or training from their incumbents, and cannot offer realistic opportunities for intrinsic satisfaction. Despite the rearguard action of job restructuring and job enrichment [13] the overwhelming weight of the evidence is that more and more jobs are being de-skilled, standardised and intensified.[14] It is quite illusory to picture the labour market as open to determination from the pool of skills and capacities amongst young workers. One need only mention the unprecedented scale of unemployment amongst young workers at the moment [15] and the worrying trend towards structural unemployment of unskilled youngsters [16] to question the power young people have in any meaningful sense over the occupational market.

Objective grounds therefore certainly exist for questioning whether it is sensible

to invest the self and its energies in qualifications when both their efficacy and their object must be held in great doubt. The counter-school culture poses this problem - at least at a cultural level - for its members; the school does not.

Bourdieu and Passeron have argued that the importance of institutionalised knowledge and qualifications lies in social exclusion rather than in technical or humanistic advance. They legitimate and reproduce a class society. A seemingly more democratic currency has replaced real capital as the social arbiter in modern society. Bourdieu and Passeron argue that it is the exclusive 'cultural capital' - knowledge and skill in the symbolic manipulation of language and figures - of the dominant groups in society which ensures the success of their offspring and thus the reproduction of class position and privilege. This is because educational advancement is controlled through the 'fair' meritocratic testing of precisely those skills which 'cultural capital' provides. [17]

Insofar as this is an accurate assessment of the role and importance of qualifications, it supports the view that it is unwise for working class kids to place their trust in diplomas and certificates. These things act not to push people up - as in the official account - but to maintain there those who are already at the top. Insofar as knowledge is always biased and shot through with class meaning, [18] the working class student must overcome his inbuilt disadvantage of possessing the wrong class culture and the wrong educational decoders to start with. A few can make it. The class can never follow. It is through a good number trying, however, that the class structure is legitimated. The middle class enjoys its privilege not by virtue of inheritance or birth, but by virtue of an apparently proven greater competence and merit. The refusal to compete, implicit in the counter-school culture, is therefore in this sense a radical act: it refuses to collude in its own educational suppression.

Finally the counter-school culture makes a real penetration of what might be called the difference between *individual* and *group* logics and the nature of their ideological confusion in modern education. The essence of the cultural penetration concerning the school - made unselfconsciously within the cultural milieu with its own practices and objects but determining all the same an inherently collective perspective - is that the logic of class or group interests is different from the logic of individual interests. To the *individual* working class person mobility in this society may mean something. Some working class individuals do 'make it' and any particular individual may hope to be one of them. To the class or group at its own proper level, however, mobility means nothing at all. The only true mobility at this level would be the destruction of the whole class society.

Conformism may hold a certain logic for the individual then, but for the class it holds no rewards: it is to give up all possibilities of independence and creation for nothing but an illusory ideal of classlessness. The individual might be convinced by education's apparent resume of what is supposed to happen in society - advance through effort for all who try - but the counter-school culture 'knows' much better than the state and its agencies what to expect - elitist exclusion of the mass through spurious recourse to merit. The counter-school culture and other working class

cultural forms contain elements towards a profound critique of the dominant ideology of individualism in our society. They expose at some level the consequences, possibilities, realities and illusions of belonging to a class for its members - even where its constituent individuals are still behaving perhaps individualistically and competitively in some things and in the private spheres of their lives. In particular, the counter-school culture identifies the false individualistic promises of dominant ideology as they operate in the school.

It is in the school with its basic teaching paradigm that those attitudes needed for *individual* success are presented as necessary *in general*. The contradiction is never admitted that not all can succeed, and that there is no point for the unsuccessful in following prescriptions for success - hard work, diligence, conformism, accepting knowledge as an equivalent of real value. There is a generalisation in the school from an individualistic logic to a group logic without a recognition of the very different nature and level of abstraction of the latter.

Of course the careers version and certain modifications and theoretical developments of the basic teaching paradigm hold that 'success' cannot be measured on a vertical scale of qualifications or of different job status alone. There is a horizontal quotient as well. It is possible to 'succeed' in a job conventionally registered as being of low status if it demands, utilises, or allows the expression of capacities other than the conventional ones. It is possible, for instance, that even a meaningless job could be made a 'success' if it were carried out with pride and honesty. The vertical class scale of occupation actually faced by working class kids is converted both morally and practically into a differentiated multi-dimensional structure which promises to hold riches for all.

The uneasy stretch between the presentation of hard work and conformism both as a specific way to success and as a generally desirable property; the uncertainty of presenting the academic gradient as something which is worth moving up but which by no means exhausts all sources of value and achievement; the contradictory attempt to squeeze potential for self-development and value into all human capacity even as it slides down off the graph of the school's own proper academic measures: these all recognise, in some way, the difficulty of extending an individualistic logic into a class logic, but attempt a reconstitution of the same move in yet more mystified forms. These produce the most basic wobbles in the institutional axis which the counter-school culture is quick to pick up in its own way. The cultural penetration of the contradictions at the heart of education is a powerful force for the inception and reinforcement of *differentiation* in individual biographies. The counter-school culture reasserts as one of the bases of its visible forms a version of the appropriate class logic and gives an identity to - 'explains' - the position of its members, not by an illusory accommodation in the dominant academic and occupational gradient, but by a transformation and an inversion. For the class as a class, the academic and occupational gradient measures not abilities but simply its own immovable repression. The working class *is* the bottom half of this gradient no matter how its atoms move. The wisdom of movement up the gradient as an individual is replaced by the stupidity of movement as a member of



a class. By penetrating the contradiction at the heart of the working class school the counter-school culture helps to liberate its members from the burden of conformism and conventional achievement. It allows their capacities and potentials to take root elsewhere.

*Labour power: a commodity like no other*

The counter-school culture confronts directly the reality of the school institution and exposes something of the unfair exchange it attempts to make – especially in the light of the other kinds of exchange the culture has forged in its own name. At its own level it also explores the special nature of human labour power. It has materials with which to suggest the potentially limitless nature of commitment. In particular it demonstrates that labour power is not a fixed but a variable quantity, and that no matter how it is presented normally or officially the individual has at least some control over its expenditure.

A commitment to work and conformism in school is not the giving of something finite: a measured block of time and attention. It is the giving up of the use of a set of potential activities in a way that cannot be measured or controlled and which prevents their alternative use. Getting through a term without putting pen to paper, the continuous evasion of the teacher's authority, the guerrilla warfare of the classroom and corridor is partly about limiting such demands upon the self. These are important sites for the learning by individuals of a certain sense of labour power. When 'the lads' arrive on the shopfloor they need no telling to 'take it easy', 'take no notice', or that 'they [management] always want more, you've had it if you let them get their way'. Indeed, in several important ways, working class kids practised in the institutional deflection of the requirements of an external system from their own vital energy and interests are more adept than their future peers at knowing, settling and controlling their own activities. This is because, at least in part, it does not matter, in the end, whether their labour power is withheld in the school, whereas those involved in shopfloor culture are more strictly coerced to produce and cannot limit their effort beyond that relatively high point fixed by the need to reproduce at least their own subsistence.

The overthrow of the educational exchange, which parallels more basic forms of exchange in capitalism, gives the form of a cultural penetration (expressed, of course, not in words or direct statement, but particular cultural practices at their own proper level) of the fact that whilst labour power is bought and sold on the market place it is, in fact, like no other commodity. It is unlike all other commodities because it is not a fixed quantity. No matter how the matter is judged morally or politically it remains true that labour power is the only variable element in the capitalist system. It must therefore be the source of expanded capital and profit. In essence, the labourer can produce more in value than is represented by his wages.[19] Better management or capitalisation – *intensification* – of his variable capacities produces greater value.[20] Labour power is the only thing in nature that can be bought with this variable capacity. Classical Marxist theory tells

us that it is the individual labourer's blindness to the special nature of the commodity which he sells which is at the heart of the ideological legitimization of capitalism. It conceals processes of exploitation and the source of profit. The counter-school culture, however, responds in its own way to the special nature of labour power. As if by instinct it limits it. In its own immediate logic this is to maintain the pre-condition for the sensuous physical and mental involvement of its members in its own activities.

This cultural instinct, I would argue, constitutes also a kind of penetration of important general ideological and material relationships in our society. This success, so to speak at another level, acts back, however, ultimately to develop the culture in a particular way and to guarantee its long-term relevance and success.

The theoretical framework of the capitalist system is this: the labourer sells his labour power fairly and freely on the market like any other commodity, but then gives it – not in a finite quantity as with any other commodity – but as the full expression of his own variable natural powers. It can therefore produce far in excess of its price, i.e. wages. The *apparent* equivalence of wages and human power in his own bargain with capital convinces the labourer of the freedom and independence of all before the law – the freedom and equality of the capitalist state and Judiciary. This apparent equivalence enshrined in the paraphernalia and majesty of the state and its laws hides from him the nature of his own exploitation and also what he shares with his class and which might have formed the basis for class solidarity: that same exploitation. In essence an infinite capacity has been bought for a finite sum and socially legitimated in a way which allows this purchase and use to continue unopposed. It is this special conjunction of legitimization of access to, and exploitation of, a variable capacity which removes the limits of production in capitalism, where envy and too close a knowledge of direct exploitation in the face to face exploitative relation of Lord and serf in Feudalism, for instance, had limited it. The productivity of capital is the liberated productivity of labour power given not as a quantity but as a capacity.[21]

The still common weekly wage packet can stand as a revealing concrete example of this classic ideological move. In middle class professions it is clear that the yearly salary is paid in exchange for the use of continuous and flexible services. Remuneration here is not based on the particular amount of time spent on the job and of course those 'on the staff' are expected to work overtime and at home for no extra cash. Such workers, their wage form makes clear, are being paid for what they *are*: for the use of their capacities, for their general potential as managers, accountants, etc. The social implications of the weekly wage packet are very different. The *general* capacity of labour power which is recognised by the salary form is here broken up into weekly lumps and riveted to a direct and regular award. Weekly wages, not yearly salaries, mark the giving of labour. The quantity of the wage packet is the quantitative passing of time. Its diminution is loss of measured time, its increase 'overtime'. With such a riveting it is that much easier to overlook the real continuous, sensuous and variable quality of labour power and to miss the

sense in which its full giving over time opens up enormous human energies which are actually unmeasurable.

What amounts to a fetishism of the wage packet - with carefully nurtured tight-gummed compact brown envelope precisely showing currency domination in finger flick top, heavy silvered bottom, paraded around on Thursday afternoon - breaks up the weeks, quantifies effort, and presents to consciousness the massive effort and potential of human labour power as a simple concrete weekly equivalent to the crisp 'fair' wage. Whereas a monthly cheque paid unseen into a bank account might break open, this weekly riveting contains, any realisation of the disjunction between the variable potential of long term vital effort and a fixed wage return.

Though it would be wrong to impute to 'the lads' individually any critique or analytic motive, it is clear that their collective culture shows both a responsiveness to the uniqueness of human labour power and in its own way constitutes an attempt to defeat a certain ideological definition of it. We saw in the ethnography that 'the lads', from the resources of their culture, saw their own labour power as a barrier against unreasonable demands from the world of work - rather than as a special and privileged connection with it. This feeds directly into oppositional shopfloor cultures whose object is at least partly to limit production and the potentially voracious demands of capitalist production on individuals.[22]

It should also be emphasised again that this kind of cultural penetration is connected with the whole nature of the culture and is more than a simple mental category. It is the basis of quality in the specifically cultural response. There is a clear counter and intentional use of those capacities actively freed from the demands of an open-ended commitment. This use is *characteristically* working class and is relatively free from the superstitions, puritanical reserves and mystifications which attend their usual absorption into the conformism of capitalist production.[23]

The freedom that capitalism falsely promises to the whole individual can be one-sidedly and ironically rescued by a collectivity of individuals realising in common all those parts of themselves saved from absorption into production. For 'the lads' there is a distorted freedom in the commercial dance, in the streets, in fighting, in spending money, in rejecting others which no other system but capitalism guarantees. It is no fault of the working class - quite the opposite - if such as these freedoms are, they are used for class cultural purposes.

The products of this independent ability of the working class - profane testing of the formal, sharp un-reified language, oppositional solidarity, and a humorous presence, style and value not based on formal job status - are no less the product of the capitalist era for their subversive, or potentially subversive, forms. Though these things must not be exaggerated or romanticised or seen out of proportion to the minimal real freedom and material base which allows them, they arise nevertheless not from a mere suffering of, but from a creative response to, the demands of capitalism.

### *General abstract labour*

We saw in the section on ethnography that, to all intents and purposes, 'the lads' do not basically differentiate between particular concrete types of work which they regard as being open to them - at least at any intrinsic level. There is near indifference to the particular kind of work finally chosen so long as it falls within certain limits defined, not technically, but socially and culturally. Sometimes the actual choice is made literally by accident. This sense of the commonality of labour is in marked contrast to the sense of range and variety in jobs projected by careers advisory services and teaching.

I want to suggest here that this perspective (though produced in its own specific cultural mode) can be understood in the light of a real penetration of the role of labour in the modern structure of capitalist production. It is made on the basis of maintaining a space and vigour for cultural activity but its assumption of the commonality and meaninglessness of modern work is important in a much larger context. It is this larger validity which, of course, strengthens, maintains and adds a particular resonance and success to the cultural in the long term.

It is indeed the case that what is common to all wage-labour work is more important than what divides it. The common denominator of all such work is that labour power yields to capital more in production than it costs to buy. It surely cannot be disputed that capitalism is organised for profit rather than use. Most wants in our society are satisfied not directly but through the mediation of the 'incentive' of profit. For good or ill one thing is certain, for the businessman or manager it is this incentive which is the spring of action, not the material of human wants through which it works. It does not matter what product is made since it is money which is really being made. The labourer will be switched with alacrity from the production of one commodity to another no matter what his skills or current activity when 'market conditions' change. The sprawling nature of many conglomerates which indeed include unlikely combinations such as meat-packing and space age exploration is living proof that profit, not production of what might be needed, is the lynchpin of enterprise.

There is no inherent interest, therefore, in what objects may be used for, only in the profit to be made from their production and exchange. As we have seen, profit can only arise from the exertion of labour power. Though the exploitation of labour is of the essence, the particular form of labour involved does not therefore matter to capital any more than does the nature of the particular object produced - so long as there is a contribution to profit. Since its concrete and particular form does not matter, we may call what is common to all wage labour 'abstract labour'. [24]

The inner logic of capitalism is that all concrete forms of labour are standardised in that they all contain the potential for the exploitation of abstract labour - the unique property all labour power shares of producing more than it costs when purchased as a commodity. It is this which links all the different branches of production and forms of labour, and makes the concrete form of labour, and the

specific use of its products, contingent upon the central fact of its status as abstract labour.[25]

This commonality may be clear from the point of view of capital and less clear from the point of view of labour. For, as counselling and vocational guidance [26] insist, there are real differences between, say, window cleaning, park work, catering and factory work. It is the expansion of the service and public sector and the contraction of the industrial sector which is very often the basis for claims that there is a wider range of opportunity open to young people now than ever before. Against this, however, it can be argued that the capitalist industrial model is dominant over all and sometimes very different branches of employment. The current government strategy to revive manufacturing industry and 'make it profitable' is ample evidence that the social democratic state recognises the primacy of industry over other categories of employment. Industrial capitalism is dominant in even more profound ways than this simple quantitative one, however. It enforces its central logic of the efficient deployment of abstract labour in enterprises and activities quite outside itself and in many apparently different concrete forms of labouring. It provides the central paradigm for the use of labour. In view of this central dominance the actual meaning of the new and wider range of *what is dominated* must be questioned closely - not presented as concrete proof of diversity.

The 'standard minute', in one form or another, is becoming the basic unit for all timesheets in all sectors of employment no matter what the actual form of labouring involved. Its central purpose is to break up and make comparable all kinds of work. It allows management to more directly control the expenditure of labour power so that 'skills' or customary time-wasting practices - actually important differentiating elements in particular kinds of concrete labour - are not allowed to hide slack time and impede management's utilisation of abstract labour. In this sense, even work undertaken in public corporations, public services or non-profit-making bodies is strictly comparable with industrial work directed towards profit.

Suggestions, and some operating schemes, for rationalisation and cost-effectiveness in education and the welfare services demonstrate the concrete spread of capitalist industrial logic to service and public occupational areas which are numerically larger now than manufacturing industry. This is to argue neither for a reduction nor an expansion in the service and public sectors, nor is it to deny that society needs to make decisions about its deployment of labour power. It is rather to point out that the expansion of these new areas is still basically under the sway of capitalist principles, and in particular the mediation of want through the category of the efficient use of abstract labour. It is not, as is often argued, under the sway of a nascent socialism. Under pressure of cuts in state expenditure we are seeing an even more rapid move to welfare defined as the greatest time social workers can spend with the greatest number of clients for the least cost, and education defined as maximised 'contact time' between staff and students - no matter what actually happens in these unit-costed hours. This management orientation suppresses the possibility of other approaches. Welfare and education could proceed from a direct recognition of collective needs, and an examination of those

structural and cultural forms which inevitably generate suffering and 'inadequacy'. Such an approach would hinge around planning for human needs and purposes - not around the efficient use of 'abstract time'. As it is, we are approaching the day when filling in standard minutes on the timesheet every day will be, despite their different forms, the most basic reality of the working life of the teacher and social worker as it is now for the plumber and carpenter, and as it always has been for the industrial worker under capitalism.

The measure of abstract labour is, then, time. We have looked at the unit of a minute but more generally it has been widely noted that the rise of capitalism out of feudalism was associated with changed notions of time.[27] Natural logics of cyclic seasons, the position of the sun in the sky, hunger in the belly or a task to be done were replaced by clock logic as the basis of time. Not returning with the sun or the season, not a signal for the appropriateness again of an activity, but a standard finite quantity, time was remorselessly running out and taking opportunities with it. In capitalism time runs straight not in a circle. It is to be saved and used. It is the measure which allows complex tasks to be synchronised: value and profit to be measured and created. 'Time is money', but the real measure which connects the two is abstract labour.

The unified movement of an inevitable linear time characteristic of the capitalist age also has a kind of ideological effect. It suggests a sense of a homogeneous society engaged in the slow progress as it were, of the narrative which follows. There is an implied pervasive concept of maturation and continuity. This invites a gradualist, reformist perspective upon what is taken to be a unified society in which all share the same timescale and appreciate its careful warning pace. It tends to suppress a notion that different social groups may have different times, or some no times, or others attempt to pull time violently forwards.

Though it must not be exaggerated we can see elements of the counter-school culture not only as cultural penetrations but as a limited defeat of this dominant sense of time. The culture in its mostly successful informal direction of its members timetables, and subversion of the official one, is directly freeing space for cultural activities but is also rejecting artificial order and gradualist patterns of bourgeois time. In a sense 'the lads' events and adventures are hidden from bourgeois time. This is an effect, of course, which if not directly intended never-the-less further strengthens cultural practices in the cultural milieu.

So far we have considered the commonality of labour in the abstract. Abstract labour, however, as a living principle in real social relations is producing visible empirical forms of its tendency more obviously every day.[28] As we saw before, de-skilling is a very real process. Concrete labour is regressing more and more to a mean standard de-skilled labour. Even though there is an apparent move towards employers demanding more and higher qualifications the real move of the skill content in the jobs to which they apply is in the opposite direction. Even high craft jobs in toolshops, for instance, are yielding their varied and unitary nature to specialised repetitive flow technology.

Most mechanised factory work is standardised now and could be done by

a child.[29] The giving of a real standardised labour is paced by the rhythm of the machine or the line and requires neither planning nor skill. Whether particular individuals feel sick or well, whether they have degrees of CSEs matters not at all. The particular concrete form of their individual labour power is irrelevant so long as it does not stop the line. Concrete labour power is important not for its intrinsic or particular contribution but for its withdrawal of the potential negative: it will not interrupt or disrupt production. We can see in modern machine manufacture and mass production an approach of abstract labour to the very surface of concrete labour.

The whole thrust of modern techniques of organisation and methods such as time and motion study is, in one important sense, to narrow the gap between concrete and abstract labour. The commonality between all labour in the abstract is embodied here in the concrete thrust to move all labour to the golden mean of the one best way of doing things. The capitalist Eldorado has been the one best way. The convergence of particular forms of labour to a concrete standard as the tendency of the principle of abstract labour is perhaps best exemplified in the work of the man who is usually credited with the addition of motion to time study. Gilbreth explicitly took labour in the abstract as his model for the improvement of concrete labour.[30] Previous approaches had taken the shortest *existing* way of completing a task, broken it down and standardised it. Gilbreth developed a classification of basic elementary movements he called 'therbligs' without regard to a concrete model. They were measured in ten-thousandths of a minute. Real concrete tasks could therefore be built up before their execution from these building bricks. The calculation of the best abstract method of doing a particular task before its existence reveals for us that the tendency of its existence is really towards the abstract mean. Capitalism, again, distils itself in its own advance. Such an approach - even where not finally successful in its own exacting terms - clearly has the most profoundly accelerating influence on the standardisation of particular jobs inherent within the capitalist system. The 'therblig' is the ultimate attempt to turn man into machine: his unique concrete capacities into optimal standard labour. It is difficult to argue for the variety of modern labour in the face of the 'therblig'! In its robotisation of a ten-thousandth of a minute capitalism shows us its desire to make robots of us all - all of the time.

'The lads' indifference to the particular form of work they enter, their assumption of the inherent meaninglessness of work no matter what kind of 'right attitude' they take to it, and their general sense of the similarity of all work as it faces them, is the form of a cultural penetration of their real conditions of existence as members of class. The perspective on work offered by the counter-school culture really is superior to that supplied officially by the school. The cultural 'recognition' of the commodity form of labour power, and of the principle of abstract labour which underlies and connects particular forms of labour, is the vital precondition for the limitation of subjective absorption in these things and for the cultural exploitation and celebration by 'the lads' of their own capacities for their own ends and purposes. This freed human ability and involvement supplies materials for the

cultural level which go towards its own forms of production which maintain and develop cultural penetrations to start with. The cultural is the creative, varied, potentially transformative working out - not the suffering - of some of the fundamental social/structural relationships of society. As the counter-school culture lives, against, exposes and reacts to the principle of general abstract labour it is worrying at the very heart of how the capitalist system runs and maintains itself. There is potential here for a, not merely partial and cultural, but for a total social transformation. What prevents this?

## Notes

[1] For me this is the fundamental failing of English contributions to the debate about class consciousness. The level of verbal response concerning political inclinations, and the assertion of commonsense categories of consciousness and orientation towards the political system often related to such evidence as codified in survey, may conceal real cultural dynamics which work in the opposite direction and have the opposite potential, or represent relatively arbitrary positions in relation to the real meaning of the cultural forms. I would regard, for instance, the 'privatised' worker, insofar as this is a coherent category, as one of the most advanced and potentially radical working class types, rather than the most incorporated. My analysis also suggests a reversal in the conventional evaluation of the 'traditional' worker: see J. H. Goldthorpe and D. Lockwood, 'Affluence and the British class structure', *Sociological Review*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1963; J. H. Goldthorpe, et al., *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, Cambridge University Press, 1969; J. H. Goldthorpe, et al., *The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour*, Cambridge University Press, 1968; and M. Bulmer (ed.), *Working Class Images of Society*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975.

Parkin's categories are sounder in the sense that they are related to national class cultures rather than to the empirical working up of responses at the level of practical consciousness. However, their ambit is very similar and they pose similar problems for my perspective. What is the real cultural and social base for 'the radical value system'? What forms of penetration and advance lie behind the incorporation of those within the 'negotiated value system'? See F. Parkin, *Class Inequality and the Political Order*, McGibbon and Kee, 1971.

[2] This is the fundamental weakness of Lukacs' view of working class consciousness, and the grounds for charges of historicism levelled against his work. For me it also mars Gramsci's account of working class culture, the mass party, and the drive for cultural hegemony - in other respects compatible with the present work. The sharpest and most salutary warning against historicism and humanism is provided, of course, by the structuralists. See G. Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, Merlin, 1971; A. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, Penguin, 1974; Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, New Left Books, 1970; and Althusser, *For Marx*, Penguin, 1969.

[26] The strength and partial success of vocational guidance and its differentiation of working situations rests upon, I would argue, a mediated and misrecognised sense of the cultural adaptations made to manual work. There is a variety here and also a degree of meaning. These do not relate, however, as the guidance perspective so often suggests they do, to the intrinsic quality of particular work - or insofar as they do the *trend* is for their separation. Vocational guidance personalises the cultural and maintains a viability by transferring it to the technical.

[27] See E. P. Thompson, 'Time, Work Discipline and Industrial Capitalists' in *Past and Present*, (38) December 1967.

[28] The fundamental principle here is that abstract labour underlies and connects all forms of labour with respect to capital. We can only derive a *tendency* from this for skilled labour to give way to unskilled labour, or for abstract labour to approach actual embodiment in concrete labour. No matter what the scope of this tendency, however, there is always a distinction between these two. Concrete labour does vary. Machine maintenance, for instance, is distinct from the operation of that machine. It is important, however, that the abstract principle is empirically observable in its tendencies. For a useful clarification on these matters see Geoff Kay, 'A note on abstract labour', *CSE Bulletin*, vol. 5, no. 1 (13), March 1976.

[29] Most manual work needs only a mental age of 12 or less. See G. C. Mathews, 'The Post-School Adaption of Educationally Sub-Normal Boys', unpublished MEd thesis, University of Manchester, 1963.

[30] See W. Spriegel and C. Myers (eds), *The Writings of F. Gilbreth*, Irwin, 1953. There are limits to this approach. It is the ultimate attempt to use human power as a force of production. Humans are, however, also part of the social relations of production. The informal group as the basis of a cultural class force against endless exploitation isolates these techniques and resists them. 'Gold-bricking' and 'systematic soldiering' persisted after the introduction of O and M techniques. 'Human relations' techniques following upon the empirical discovery of the importance of the human group by Mayo and his associates were an attempt to neutralise this opposition. The most recent 'new' human relations aims to utilise and win over the power of the informal group in one way or another. However, O and M still remains dominant as the single most influential management service and still best exposes the basic inner drive of capitalism.

## 6 Limitations

As we have seen, the counter-school culture makes certain cultural penetrations of the conditions of existence of its members. There are potential materials here for a thoroughly critical analysis of society and political action for the creation of alternatives.

In one sense the reason why these cultural penetrations and associated practices fall short of transformative political activity is simply the lack of political organisation. No mass party attempts to interpret and mobilise the cultural level. This is too facile, however. The lack of political organisation itself can be seen as a result of the partiality of the penetrations - not vice versa.[1] The cultural level is clearly partly disorganised from within.

The ethnographic account reminds us again and again that there is only one social outcome. Gigantic forces in conflict resolve into one reality - not serial realities allowing us to read back their pure determinants and forwards their proper outcomes. The pure logic of cultural penetration runs straight only on the page. In reality simultaneous forces of distortion, limitation and mystification resolve this pure logic into a partial logic. In the way in which it is actually effective in the world the half-rejection and cultural penetration of the present social organisation by the counter-school culture becomes an always provisional, bare, sceptical, yet finally accepting accommodation within the status quo. It never-the-less, however, contradictorily maintains a degree of conviction of movement, insight and subjective validation in individuals even as they accept this subordination. In the present tangled knot of ideological entrapments in contemporary capitalism the most remarkable demonstration of this contradiction is that of a nascent cultural understanding of abstract labour and class solidarity amongst disaffected working class kids being delivered into a particular subjective affirmation and 'free' giving of manual labour power.

### Divisions

Cultural penetrations are repressed, disorganised and prevented from reaching their full potential or a political articulation by deep, basic and disorientating divisions. The two most important are those between mental and manual labour and those of gender. (Racism which is also significant here is dealt with in a later section.)

The rejection of the school, and the cultural penetration of the unfairness of the 'equivalent' it offers can be seen as the rejection of individualism. It is also, however, simultaneously the rejection of mental activity in general. In the moment of the defeat of individualism its mark of separation passes. Individualism is

defeated not for itself but for its part in the school masque where mental work is associated with unjustified authority, with qualifications whose promise is illusory. Individualism is penetrated therefore at the cost of a practical division of human capacity and a yielding of the power to properly exercise one half of it. As one kind of solidarity is won, a deeper structural unity is lost. Although 'the lads' stand together, they do so on this side of the line with individualism and mental activity on the other. The human world is divided into those who are 'good with their hands' or 'good with their heads'. The burden of the cultural penetration that all work is the same is thrown mainly on to a notion that all *manual* work is the same. Manual labouring comes to take on, somehow, a significance and critical expression for its owner's social position and identity which is no part of its own proper nature.

We can see here the profound, unintended and contradictory importance of the institution of the school. Aspects of the dominant ideology are informally defeated there, but that defeat passes a larger structure more unconsciously and more naturalised for its very furnacing in (pyrrhic) victory. Capitalism can afford to yield individualism amongst the working class but not division. Individualism is penetrated by the counter-school culture but it actually produces division.

The other great division which disorients cultural penetration is that between male and female. It is, at least in part, an internally produced division. The male counter-school culture promotes its own sexism - even celebrates it as part of its overall confidence.

The characteristic style of speech and movement, even in the absence of females, always holds something of the masculine spectacle. The ability to take the initiative, to make others laugh, to do unexpected or amusing things, to naturally take the active complement to the appreciative passive, these are all profoundly masculine attributes of the culture, and permanent goals for individuals in it. Not only this but a more concrete hallmark of being a member of the culture is to have either sexual experience or at least aspirations which are exploitative and hypocritical. Girls are pursued, sometimes roughly, for their sexual favours, often dropped and labelled 'loose' when they are given. Girls are asked to be sexy and inviting as well as pure and monogamous: to be consumed and not be consumed. The counter-school culture emphasises sexual division at the same moment that it penetrates the artificiality of individualistic division.

In its sexism the counter-school culture reflects the wider working class culture. This is partly, of course, because it turns to some of the wider class models for guidance during *differentiation* of the school educational paradigm. As he becomes disillusioned with the school, for instance, one of 'the lads' finds one of the most deep-seated and abiding models of sexual division and domination in the working home. Members of the counter-school culture are also much more likely to find a job - out of necessity - than are the conformists, and to experience a particular kind of sexism, both directed at them personally and as an aspect of the working environment in general. It becomes for them part of the worldliness and superior style of that whole working class culture of the workplace which they admire and

are busily reconstructing in relation to the particular oppositions and determinants of the school.

Although there may be an institutionalised sexism in our schools, it is not as strong as the reproduced sexism at the informal level of its working class male oppositional culture. Schools must be given some credit for holding out a degree of liberalism and formalistic equality. It is no product of the school's manifest intentions that sexism and profoundly naturalised divisions arise in more virulent forms at the moment when its own authority is broken. All the same it plays out a vital and systematic, if unintended, role in the reproduction of a class society.

### Labour power and patriarchy

The cultural penetrations examined may even have survived the disorientation and schism caused by the divisions outlined above if they had remained divisions in the abstract or separate from each other. As it is, there is further complex fusion of these divisions absolutely characteristic, in micro form, of a knot of meanings central to the stability of the capitalist system itself and appearing in all of its manifestations. Let us now consider this knot.

The mental/manual distinction alone presents a fertile field for the construction of naturalised divisions in human capacities. What is surprising is that a portion, including such as 'the lads', of those who make up the social whole are content to voluntarily take upon themselves the definition and consequent material outcomes of being manual labourers. This is surprising since in the capitalist mobilisation of the mental/manual distinction it is conventionally, and according to the dominant ideology, the mental labourers who have the legitimised right to superior material and cultural conditions. Mental work is held to be more exacting and therefore to justify higher rewards. It is not difficult to explain why that which is ideologically seen as desirable and which is really rewarding materially should be pursued. The fact that all do not aspire to the rewards and satisfactions of mental labour is what is in need of explanation. Just because capitalism needs a split such as this does not explain why its need is satisfied. It is only in a perfectly reflective empirical world that the shape of a need determines the inevitability of its satisfaction. Moreover, the real mechanisms at play in the satisfaction of this need are covered over and mystified, and hidden from view by the way in which the dominant ideology, and the meritocratic view of what happens in schools for instance, really do seem to assume that all are trying to achieve broadly the same aims in life.

The way in which we are all expected to pursue the same aims suggests that those at the bottom of a class society are there apparently, and they believe it for themselves, because of their own smaller capacity to achieve these aims. All accept, so to speak, the same rules, meanings and goals of the game - and also what counts as winning and losing. In fact, of course, as the humanistic developments in education and careers counselling partly recognise but wrongly interpret, this model

could never actually work under modern conditions. It assumes that the lower factions of the working class are really a sub-species. It is more feudalism than capitalism. Though it is usually misrecognised, one of the things which keeps the capitalist system stable, and is one of its complex wonders, is that an important section of the subordinate class do not accept the proffered reality of the steady diminution of their own capacities. Instead they reverse the valuation of the mental/manual gradient by which they are measured. 'The lads' under study here prefer (for the moment), and affirm themselves through, manual labour. This, of course, provides the missing link for a social chain of class distinctions. All other classes above this can celebrate, justify, and see a comparative base for their own superiority in the mental mode in the currency of the dominant ideology. The 'ear'oles' conformism, for instance, takes on a more rational appearance when judged against the self-disqualification of 'the lads'. Whether or not there is that much difference in the actual work they do, they can gain some advantage and social approval from defining it, their relationship to it, and their own identity in a relatively more mental mode.

A reverse polarisation of a too well-learned distinction neatly complements the dominant ideology and gives it a sounding board for the subjective creation of identities in labour for all those factions above the lowest. Without this clinching inversion of the ideological order at its lowest reach in relation to the giving of labour power the system could not be stable. No amount of conditioning in state agencies could provide a fully human identity for those at the bottom of the class structure: coercion or permanent struggle, not free consent in submission, would be the basis of the social order.

This important inversion, however, is not achieved within the proper logic of capitalist production. Nor is it produced in the division of labour spontaneously. It is produced in the concrete articulation on the site of social classes of two structures which in capitalism can only be separated in abstraction and whose forms have now become part of it. These are patriarchy and the distinction between mental and manual labour. *The form of the articulation is of the cross-valorisation and association of the two key terms in the two sets of structures.* The polarisation of the two structures become crossed. Manual labour is associated with the social superiority of masculinity, and mental labour with the social inferiority of femininity. In particular manual labour is imbued with a masculine tone and nature which renders it positively expressive of more than its intrinsic focus in work.

Gender and mental/manual difference provide the atavistic divisions to be worked up into contemporary concrete cultural forms and relationships, but it is only the learning that division is not always and automatically to its own disadvantage which prevents sectors of the working class from seeing division as oppression. For 'the lads', a division in which they take themselves to be favoured (the sexual) overlies, becomes part of, and finally partially changes the valency of a division in which they are disadvantaged (mental/manual labour power).[2]

It is often overlooked that where two sets of divisions are lived out in the same concrete space they cannot remain separate. The pressure of consciousness and

culture which work upon their own materials in their own location and seek a kind of unity will not live separately in two systems of ideas which both occur in the compression of their own life space. Such systems can only be separated in abstraction. As ethnography reminds us it is not a theoretical capacity but an empirical imperative that there must be a conjunction of systems. The secret of the continuation of both sets of divisions in labour and gender lies, at least partly, in their lived profane conjunction under the class system of capitalism, and not in their own pure logics. In this crossover conjunction the masculine - in its own proper field a state or formalistic law of superior status - becomes movement, action, assertion. An essence, which, it can be argued, is trans-historical, is given a style and a concrete worldly form of expression under capitalism. Manual labour power - in its own proper field neutral or even dissociated physical work on nature - becomes dominance and a form of election. It is given an expressive purpose.

If a form of patriarchy buttresses the mental/manual division of labour, this division, in its turn, strengthens and helps to reproduce modern forms of sexual division and oppression. It is precisely because there are divisions at school and work which operate objectively to their disfavour but which can be understood and inverted in patriarchal terms that those gender terms must themselves be continuously reproduced and legitimated. If the currency of femininity were revalued then that of mental work would have to be too. A member of the counter-school culture can only believe in the effeminacy of white collar and office work so long as wives, girlfriends and mothers are regarded as restricted, inferior and incapable of certain things. As we have seen, there is ample evidence of this belief amongst 'the lads'. The ideology of domesticity they impose on girlfriends, the patterns of homely and subcultural capacity and incapacity, all underwrite the restricted role of women. It is from the ideological division of labour, not simply from the domesticity of the house or patriarchal ideology that some of the real determinants and rationales of these practices spring.[3] For our immediate purposes the result of this cross-valorisation is that the flow of cultural penetration, and particularly its nascent appreciation of general abstract labour, is diverted into a surprising affirmation of labour power. There are two important processes. In the first place the association of different kinds of work with different sexual genders confirms the nature of division in the world of work. Mental activity for 'the-lads' is not only barred because of their particular experience of the institution of the school, but also because it is regarded as effeminate. Many of their own mental activities and feelings are expressed and acted through the cultural, the stylish and the concrete. In the crucial, critical and classic shift, what they take as mental work becomes for 'the lads' mere 'pen-pushing', 'not really doing things' and, most importantly, 'cissy': it is not basically man's work or within the manly scope of action. We see at least why the 'ear'oles' are likely to be regarded as effeminate and passive 'cissies' by 'the lads', and why other names for conformists include 'pouf' or 'poufter', or 'wanker'. Despite their greater achievement and conventional hopes for the future, 'ear'oles' and their strategies can be ignored



because the *mode* of their success can be discredited as passive, mental and lacking a robust masculinity.

In the second place the whole meaning of what masculinity stands for reinforces the sense in which the weight of the cultural penetration concerning labour power and the nature of modern work is thrown contradictorily on to an affirmation of manual labour power. There is a further infusion of meaning into manual labour power which is no part of its intrinsic nature.

Manual labour is suffused with masculine qualities and given certain sensual overtones for 'the lads'. [4] The toughness and awkwardness of physical work and effort - for itself and in the division of labour and for its strictly capitalist logic quite without intrinsic heroism or grandeur - takes on masculine lights and depths and assumes a significance beyond itself. Whatever the specific problems, so to speak, of the difficult task they are always essentially masculine problems. It takes masculine capacities to deal with them. We may say that where the principle of general abstract labour has emptied work of significance from the inside, a transformed patriarchy has filled it with significance from the outside. Discontent with work is hinged away from a political discontent and confused in its proper logic by a huge detour into the symbolic sexual realm.

The brutality of the working situation is partially re-interpreted into a heroic exercise of manly confrontation with *the task*. Difficult, uncomfortable or dangerous conditions are seen, not for themselves, but for their appropriateness to a masculine readiness and hardness. They are understood more through the toughness required to survive them, than in the nature of the imposition which asks them to be faced in the first place.

Though it is difficult to obtain stature in work itself, both what work provides and the very sacrifice and strength required to do it provides the materials for an elemental self-esteem. This self-esteem derives from the achievement of a purpose which not all - particularly women - are held capable of achieving. The wage packet is the provider of freedom, and independence: the particular prize of masculinity in work. This is the complement of, and is what makes possible, the fetishism of the wage packet. A trade is judged not for itself, nor even for its general financial return, but for its ability to provide the central, domestic, masculine role for its incumbent. Clearly money is part of this - but as a measure, not the essence. As Spanksy's father says, 'You can raise a family off polishing'. The male wage packet is held to be central, not simply because of its size, but because it is won in a masculine mode in confrontation with the 'real' world which is too tough for the woman. Thus the man in the domestic household is held to be the breadwinner, the worker, whilst the wife works for 'the extras'. Very often of course, the material importance of her wage may be much greater than this suggests, and certainly her domestic labour is the lynchpin of the whole household economy. The wage packet as a kind of symbol of machismo dictates the domestic culture and economy and tyrannises both men and women.

In a more general sense in the machismo of manual work the will to finish a job, the will to really work, is posited as a masculine logic and not as the logic of

exploitation. 'It's a man's want to be finished when he starts a job', says Joey's father about his heavy drop forging work. The very teleology of the process of work upon nature and the material power involved in that becomes through the conflation of masculinity and manual work a property of masculinity and not of production. Masculinity is power in its own right, and if its immediate expression is in the completion of work for another, then what of it? It has to be expressed somewhere because it is a quality of being. That is the destiny which a certain kind of self-esteem and dignity seem naturally to bring. Where the intransigence and hardness of a task might bring weakness, or collective opposition or questioning, an over-ride of masculinity - a transferred teleology of production - can cut in to push back fatigue and rational assessment of purpose. [5]

And if the nature of masculinity in work becomes a style of teleology, completion, femininity is associated with a fixed state. Its labour power is considered as an ontological state of being, not a teleological process of becoming. Housework is not completion, it is maintenance of status. Cooking, washing and cleaning reproduce what was there before. Certainly in a sense housework is never completed - but neither is it as difficult or productive as masculine work is held to be. Female domestic work is simply subsumed under *being* 'mum' or 'housewife'. 'Mum' will always do it, and should always be expected to do it. It is part of the definition of what she *is*, as the wage packet and the productive world of work is of what 'dad' is.

Far from patriarchy and its associated values being an unexplained relic of previous societies, it is one of the very pivots of capitalism in its complex, unintended preparation of labour power and reproduction of the social order. It helps to provide the real human and cultural conditions which in their continuously deconstructed, reconstructed, fragile, uncertain, unintended and contradictory ways actually allow subordinate roles to be taken on 'freely' within liberal democracy. We have the elemental, though finally illusory, reversal of real conditions in experience which is necessary for the 'free' functioning of consciousness and will in finally determinate conditions. What begins as, or has the potential to be, an insight about the commonality of the giving of labour, and of the identity of the working class, amongst 'the lads' and in the counter-school culture becomes broken down into an assertion about manual labour only, and then distorted into strange affirmation of it. Labour comes to express aspects of an essence or quality not intrinsically part of its nature or relation to capital. More concretely, in an important sense it is because 'the lads' know division and superiority in courtship, in the home, on the street, in the pub, and in the family that they understand and accept division at school and work and find short term celebration and long term accommodation within its least favourable term.

Masculinity must not, however, be too simply posed. It has many dimensions and edges. In one way it is a half-blind, regressive machismo which brings self-destructive violence, aggression and division to relationships within the working class. In another way, imparting something of what lies behind it, masculinity expresses impulses which can be progressive. Behind the expression of masculinity



lies an affirmation of manual labour power and behind that (though mediated and distorted) a sense of the uniqueness of the commodity of labour power and of the way in which general abstract labour unites and connects all kinds of concrete labour. The masculine disdain for qualifications, for all its prejudice, carries still a kind of 'insight' into the divisive nature of certification, and into the way in which mental work and technicism are mobilised ideologically primarily to maintain class relations rather than to select the most efficient or to increase productive efficiency.

It is in the understanding of this contradictory complex of masculinity and the strange articulation of sexual and labour divisions that we have the beginnings of an answer to the problem outlined earlier: why that which is conventionally registered, artificially defined and ideologically imbued as the least desirable and satisfying work (manual work) should be taken on voluntarily, and even with some enthusiasm by an important group in society - at least for long enough in their youth to be trapped forever.

Manual work is *seen* significantly differently by this group. Its stigma becomes *positively* expressive. Such work is undertaken in part to express things other than its objectives or dominant ideologically ascribed identity within the capitalist system. These things are not themselves without an aetiological 'rationality' which though displaced and transposed is potentially more adequate than some of those accounts which directly define manual work as inferior.

It is the unlikely hard stone at the bottom of the social system of self-selection into manual work which allows, in the currents of ideology against it, 'new classes' to effervesce upwards in experiential relations of ascendance. [6] For instance both the conformists and the non-conformists of this study are, in fact, working class and objectively doing similar work in a similar position *vis-à-vis* the productive proceeds. Yet the conformists can believe themselves, especially equipped with qualifications, to be in 'better' jobs than, and to be a 'different kind of person' from, 'the lads'. And once such a division is founded in the working class, of course, it massively legitimates the position of the middle class: not capitalism but their own mental capacities keep them where they are.

### Racialism and labour power

Racial division helps, as with labour and gender divisions, to found the whole epistemological category and possibility of division. It also provides an evident underclass which is more heavily exploited than the white working class, and is therefore indirectly and partially exploited by the working class itself (at least lessening their own exploitation); it also provides an ideological object for feelings about the degeneracy of others and the superiority of the self (thus reinforcing the dominant ideological terms which make the comparison possible). Racism therefore divides the working class both materially and ideologically.

There is also a sense, however, in which racism tones the sensual giving of labour

power for sections of the white working class such as 'the lads' in a way which leads to further nuanced affirmation of a particular kind of labouring. It marks the bottom limit of the scope of masculinity and delivers it not as a vulgar assertion of everything physical and menial, but as a more carefully judged cultural category. Since immigrant racial groups are likely to take the worst and roughest jobs, they are also potentially likely to be harder and more masculine. It is untenable that another social group should take the mantle of masculine assertiveness, so such jobs are further reclassified to fall off the cultural scale of masculinity into the 'dirty', 'messy' and 'unsocial' category.

A complex map of occupations therefore develops which does not have a single principle of organisation. Very light or mental work is marked down as 'cissy' but the heaviest and most uncompromising work is not necessarily masculine. It can be marked down as dirty and unacceptable through association with immigrant labour. Racism must be understood with respect more to the complex social definition of labour power under capitalism than to any pure and inevitable ethnic hostility.

There are variations, of course, in relations and social definitions between the races. West Indian males seem to have preserved a degree of machismo from the real and imputed degradation of their conditions (it would be interesting to see how far this is related to their sense of their own labour power). Certainly some white working class hostility towards young West Indians seems to be based on a kind of sexual jealousy. Of course just as his work situation is downgraded from the masculine to the dirty, so the West Indian's supposed sexual prowess can be downgraded from the natural to the disgusting.

In the case of Asians there seems to be evidence of an opposite move on the basic cultural scale of work so that successful shopkeepers, businessmen and students are defined by many working class whites such as 'the lads' as 'cissy', passive and lacking aggression alongside conformist, effeminate whites (c.f. 'queer-bashing' and 'Paki-bashing'). Some of the virulence of this response may be accounted for by the perception of this move upwards (and into its set of characteristic prejudices) in relation to the feeling that the Asians should really belong with the rough and dirty workers anyway. There is a confusion about which category of prejudice to apply, and in a certain sense the Asians suffer from both.

If the basic general thesis of the contradictory cultural forms in which labour is prepared has any validity, however, it should also throw light upon such preparation amongst immigrant groups. [7]

Certainly in the case of some young second generation West Indians their cultural responses and processes can be likened to those of 'the lads'. They are in some respects more advanced in a way which shows up aspects of the present situation more clearly. Such lads have, for the most part, grown up and been educated in England and have had broadly the same experiences as their white fellow pupils at school and in and around the neighbourhood and district - from a structural point of view anyway. It may be suggested that this will have led their informal culture to certain kinds of mediated 'insights' about the nature of the school and the labour market similar to those amongst the white lads. They also, however,

inherit from the West Indies a culture of wagelessness and poverty. It appears to them as if there is a viable possibility of surviving without wages – or in some cases without any kind of official and visible means of support at all. This opens up the possibility, therefore, of certain accurate insights about the nature of their future being carried forward not as an affirmation of a certain kind of work but as a *refusal* of all work.

This is not to say that their culture, and the actions springing from its logic, are without mystification or are not finally distorted and made partial in their own ways. However, if they close the circle too early by a refusal to work not properly based on an analysis of, and politically articulated with, the real conditions and possibilities of this society, they highlight the half-completed nature of the white response with its contradictory mixture of penetration, rationality, distortion and final incorporation.

As structural unemployment becomes a permanent feature of this society and some sections of white youth are forced into long term unemployment there may well develop a white ethnic culture of wagelessness (borrowing very likely from the West Indian one, though compare the currently emerging phenomenon of punk rock culture). A necessity might be turned into an invention and, through the cultural mediation, the option of not working become a more widespread 'freely' chosen response. The question of the cultural reproduction of an under class is as full of significance as that of the reproduction of the manual working class. We cannot, however, pursue it here.

#### Notes

[1] This is not to deny the possibility, importance and relative autonomy of political action at its own level. In my view, however, before any mass party could articulate itself properly as the representative of the working class it must understand and *learn* from working class consciousness and culture. Until that effort the dialectical relation of party and consciousness is a dead letter. If spontaneism must be condemned so must 'zombieism' – the attempt to direct working class activity from outside with no thought for (or an assumption that it is morbid or moribund) the cultural, quasi-political and political content which is there already.

This book may be criticised for its lack of direct conjunctural relevance. Certainly the analysis provided is basically organic. However, I would argue more generally that we need, so to speak, a law of value of the political before we can properly analyse the market place of the conjunctural.

[2] The basic cross-valorisation discussed here is relevant to groups other than the male working class. The association, for instance, of femininity with mental work implies a contradiction for working class women. Masculinity is an aspect of their *class* cultural identity no matter what their feminine gender on other grounds. This association also implies for middle class women a further restriction, passivity,

and inherent absurdity of their social and cultural roles even than their gender definition implies. We have here elements towards an explanation of the women's movement, its class origin, and to forms of working class antagonism to it.

For middle class males there are also contradictions between a class and cultural (patriarchal) definition of their masculinity. They are by no means immune from the inversion of the occupational gradient accomplished and underpinned by patriarchal values in an important area of working class culture. For the class base and origins of the developing 'Men's Movement' see A. Tolson, *The Limits of Masculinity*, Tavistock, 1976).

The male working class case presented in the main text is not, of course, without contradictions. Racial complexities threaten it from one side, and the reduction of work experience which allows – even given the scope of ideological play – masculine experiences threatens it from the other.

[3] Juliet Mitchell's important book attempts to demonstrate the strict redundancy of patriarchal forms in modern capitalism. Both as outlined by Engels in his materialist analysis (*The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*), and in Mitchell's account of the cultural analyses of Freud and Levi-Strauss, patriarchy now seems to be superfluous. For Mitchell, apparently, it lives on as an historical trace without any continuously and relevantly reproduced logic or justification. Not only this, but patriarchy and capitalism are preserved as two quite distinct entities by Mitchell (p. 379). This lends her to posit an untenable dualistic politics (pp. 406, 414 and 415). She asserts that the systems are in contradiction but there is no actual depiction of the process of struggle between, or dialectical transformation of, both. We are dealing here surely with a contradiction that lies ultimately within *one* complex and differentiated unit, an *internal* contradiction specific to the complex balance of modern capitalism. It is precisely the oblique conjunction of the capitalist mode of production and patriarchy which make them difficult to sort out at the level of consciousness. It is the inheritance of pre-capitalist forms and their profane and complex determinate relation with (and partly constituting it) a specific and determinant kind of capitalist mode of production which helps to divert the insights bred at the cultural level, and more properly focused on specifically capitalist relations, into reactionary, immobile or neutral forms. What does indeed confound the pure logic of the system also confounds working class culture.

More generally, this book highlights the potential danger of the women's movement being vitiated by a too-short-run notion of a patriarchal sexism which oppresses them directly in some way outside capitalism. The need is for a dialectical and connected notion of a determinate capitalist patriarchy which transforms and fixes the whole social totality. This clearly has important implications for men as well as women – though it is undoubtedly women who suffer the sharpest most obvious and visible oppression. (Juliet Mitchell), *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, Penguin, 1974.)

[4] Masculinity is so deeply embedded in the giving of manual labour that we might actually question the 'objectivity' of those methods which aim to intensify and increase the efficiency of labour. The role of transformed patriarchal influences

## Appendix

At best, daily life, like art, is revolutionary. At worst it is a prison house. At worst, reflection, like criticism, is reactionary. At best it creates plans for escape. Taking part in detailed life in order to reflect can be to combine the worst of both. It takes the innocence out of the former to congeal the latter with guilt.

I am strictly forbidden, because of shortage of space, to discuss methodology and its relation to theory and practice at any length. My general approach to problems in this area is discussed elsewhere. [1]

I would just like to mark a recognition here that, no matter how modified, participant observation and the methods under its aegis, display a tendency towards naturalism and therefore to conservatism. The ethnographic account is a supremely *ex post facto* product of the actual uncertainty of life. There develops, unwilling, a false unity which asks, 'What follows next?' 'How did it end?' 'What makes sense of it?'. The subjects stand too square in their self-referenced world. The method is also patronising and condescending - is it possible to imagine the ethnographic account upwards in a class society?

I do not deny the existence or the necessary relative independence of research and enquiry as an activity, but it may well be that any application of the knowledge so gained will have to invert aspects of the PO paradigm. The silences and enforced secrecies of the method are ultimately political silences and the secretion too of a *capacity*. It is a refusal as well as an enablement.

Still we cannot invent a form out of its time. It is necessary above all to approach the real *now* in one way or another - one-sidedly, elliptically or not. The ethnographic account, for all its faults, records a crucial level of experience and through its very biases insists upon a level of human agency which is persistently overlooked or denied but which increases in importance all the time for other levels of the social whole. Although the world is never directly 'knowable', and cannot empirically present itself in the way that the ethnographic account seems sometimes to suggest, it must nevertheless be specifically registered somewhere in theory if theory pretends to any relevance at all. Theories must be judged ultimately for the adequacy they display to the understanding of the phenomenon they purport to explain - not to themselves. This book has attempted, especially Part II, to take the advantages still offered by a qualitative method to respond descriptively and theoretically to a real and difficult level of social existence whilst resisting tendencies towards empiricism, naturalism and objectification of the subject.

There follows an edited transcription of a group discussion recorded in January 1977 at the university, of some of 'the lads' from the Hammertown school who had

read early drafts of the book. The discussion centred on how my role as a researcher had been seen and what the 'results' of the research meant to them.

(...)

Bill The bits about us were simple enough.  
John It's the bits in between.  
Joey Well, I started to read it, I started at the very beginning, y'know I was gonna read as much as I could, then I just packed it in, just started readin' the parts about us and then little bits in the middle (...)  
Spanksy The parts what you wrote about us, I read those, but it was, y'know, the parts what actually were actually describing the book like I didn't ...

(...)

Perc I think we got to dislike you eventually.  
PW Really.  
Perc Truthfully I was a bit fed up of yer.  
Bill Speak for yourself when you say, 'we', say 'you'.  
Joey Not 'we'.  
Spanksy It was nice to be out of lessons.  
Perc Oh yeah, that was about it wor it, nice to be out of lessons.  
Spanksy Don't say 'wor it' and look at us and expect us to say 'yeah'.  
Joey (... ) I thought, you know, I thought he's not doin' this for his own sake, he's doin' it 'cos, y'know, somebody's put'im up to it and he wants to find out why we do it, y'know, do a 1987 [sic] thing and cut parts of yer brain out and ... (... ) You were virtually the answer to our prayer, because do you remember, we used to make vague attempts at writing accounts of things we'd done at school, y'know what I mean, we'd had to make an essay ... (... ) I thought that we were the artists of the school, because of the things we did, I thought definitely we had our own sort of art form, the things we used to get up to. And we were definitely the leaders of the school ... and placed amongst ... if we were all separated and placed amongst groups of the ear'oles we could have been leaders in our own right (... ) something should have been done with us, I mean there was so much talent there that it was all fuckin' wasted. I mean X, he was as thick as pigshit really, but if someone had took him and tutored him ... he'd got so much imagination. To do the things he did, I mean he used to play up better than most of us X had, he must have been something more than the dumb stupid animal he put on.  
John I dunno though.

[Laughter]

Bill (. . .) I thought, y'know, we'll have to kinda watch out for this, y'know. He's gonna let Peters and all them lot know what's goin' on, and then after a bit y'know, I realised that wasn't right and then I just enjoyed it 'cos it was a skive, y'know, get out the lessens. I wasn't really interested in it at first y'know. I could get out of lessons, have a smoke for an hour or so. Then, after, I just got slowly and slowly involved in it and I really enjoyed it.

Perc I wanted to go to you.  
PW Even though you disliked me.  
Perc I enjoy talking to people, but sometimes I used to think, y'know, he's asking some bloody, y'know, right things. I used to think you was asking a bit much, personal things y'know.

PW Do you mean in the group discussions or the individual ones?  
Perc Individual, I'd y'know, I doe mind talkin' to yer on me own, I'd, y'know . . . when yer with yer mates yer say a lot of things yer know that don't really happen, and now, I think a lot of things were said . . .

Bill You mean you think a lot of it was med up?  
Joey Well, I can tell yer now, straight from the fuckin' knuckle, none of it was med up.

Chris Almost 90 per cent of what I've read in there was, I can actually remember.

Perc O yeah I can remember a lot of things what I read.  
Joey (. . .) Even if the individual acts were exaggerated the point's still there (. . .) the feelin' was in us.

John They seem in the book a lot tougher than they actually were.  
Spanksy It's only how they seem to us.  
John When you're with your mates everybody changes, everybody changes, they do things a lot bigger, everybody seems a lot tougher (. . .) when they was talking about what they'd done.

PW Was it true?  
John Yeah, what they said was true, but they didn't seem that tough to me.

Spanksy It's cos we know everybody that was, I'd never been to another school, I know places over Newtown, they'd eat me alive, they'm massive places, they'm terrible . . . I was workin' at the one school and these four kids come over to me and they was only babies, they cum up to me and they said, 'Are you a new kid?' I say, 'No, no'. They says . . . they was cumin' up to me, fists all clenched up. What I was doin' I was gettin' some big housebricks to prop this big radiator up y'know for me mate, like, and I got these housebricks, like, y'know . . . I was only in the school fifteen minutes and I'd got kids cumin' up to me, after me.  
(. . .)

Bill You were staff (at first), you were somebody in between, later on I took you as one of us.

Joey (. . .) you were someone to pour our hearts out to. You were obviously as old as most of the staff, and yet none of the staff . . . they represented . . . they were so far apart from us. They used to sit with us at dinner table but you couldn't really talk to them just 'cos of the fact that they were staff.

John (. . .) You could understand what they was sayin' and doin' like. Anything that happened you'd understand, like, if they'd done something wrong the night before, you'd just listen, understand, whereas teachers . . . you know, they'd say, 'That's wrong' anyway, and you'd think, 'Don't say anymore about it'.

Bill The main difference is, you listen to us, you want to know what we've got to say, they don't, none of them.

John They want to know so that they can get on good terms with yer.  
Perc All they'm doin', they'm doin' their jobs, that's it.  
Spanksy They're tryin' to pull themselves up . . . all they'm tryin' to do is win us over, and then go up to the headmaster and say to him, 'I'm alright with them, when they'm in my class they're alright'.  
Joey When you first started asking questions something illegal must have come out and we'd told you things we'd done wrong and we never got any backlash off other members of staff which obviously meant you hadn't told anybody.

(. . .)

PW What does closeness mean? Take Jenkins [laughter] he was trying to be close and he really cared, what was different about him?  
Joey His whole manner, the way he carried himself . . . I think that closeness has to be tempered with a correct amount of discipline.  
PW But I didn't discipline you at all.  
Joey I think if you had told us to do something, if we were playing up and you told us, we'd 'a' stopped.

Perc Oh are.  
Joey 'Cos you'd been close to us and we'd have listened to you as one of us . . . you know what I mean. What we needed was someone like us who was just older, more responsibility.

Spanksy (. . .) If any of me mates had told me, 'Oh come on Spanksy, you'm too much there mate,' I'd'a said, 'OK it's gone far enough'. Comin' from you at that time, it would have seemed as if it was one of them tellin' me.

PW Did you feel as if I should have been telling you?  
Spanksy No, we never thought about it, it's the first time we talked about it, dayn't think about it.  
(. . .)

PW Do you think 'the lads' culture was sensible now, if it say, stopped you coming here.

Spanksy I could never come here [the university], I couldn't stand sittin' at a desk, I couldn't stand it writin', I can't sit at a desk and write all day, I can't.

Joey It wasn't sensible [messing about in school], it was the only thing you could do . . . it was more fun than doing fucking nothing (. . .) They gave us the responsibility and we just didn't know, no matter how much anyone told me, if they'd've hypnotised me, I still wouldn't have thought I really needed them, 'cos I read it in the book, we all thought we were gonna make it without 'O' levels, we can you know but it would have been much easier with 'em.

(. . .)

PW If you're not having a chance is it an individual matter or does it relate to the working class (. . .) doesn't that point to politics. Nobody needs to force you lot into factories, you're all rushing out to get there.

Joey We've just been thrust into society too soon, we've been brought up to be too selfish (. . .) we're too selfish, we couldn't care less, you see on the tele so many people fuckin' affluent, you just want to try and do that, make it, get money, you don't care about others, the working class.

(. . .)

Bill All I want for my kids is all I've ever wanted.

PW How you gonna get it?

Bill Foul means or fair.

PW You individually or you in a group?

Bill I just wanna get it for them and I will, not perhaps everything.

PW The question remains, how you gonna do it?

Joey (. . .) It's been this way too long (. . .) you gotta help yourself, how many revolutions have there been that really worked? And after a revolution there's got to be someone at the top . . . and eventually would become middle class (. . .).

John All I want for my kids is try your best, it's no use tryin' to make you do something you don't want.

(. . .)

PW Your own mental ability might have been blocked by your own conviction that you were going to be masculine.

Joey It wasn't that, it was just that mental work was what teachers required, to do what they wanted. If the teachers had let us play

up, say, 'OK, off you go', if they'd 'ave said that we'd've wanted to do whatever they said they didn't want us to do (. . .).

Perc Everyone wants to be tough at school, everybody likes to think people look up to them. 'He's a hard kid'.

PW But does it help you in the end, or the working class?

Spanksy It helps you around the streets.

Bill It helps you get through youth (. . .) we can just see for the moment that nobody's gonna take the piss out of us.

Joey They won't take advantage, take advantage in our sense, you know, they'll never make a fool of us in these years 'cos we're so masculine, that's all I can see. If I'd've taken the track of the 'ear'oles' all the violence in me would have petered out a bit, you know what I mean, it would have jaded a bit . . . and then 'the lads' who were still performing would take advantage of you, I could never do it.

PW The rep., the masculine ability to fight . . .

Joey It's our previous life, our fathers were working class, physical, their physicalness has come over to us.

John Them that's got the brains, they'll be the bosses in time to come and people like us will be the workers.

PW If Joey hits him 'cos he's 'dancing funny' [Joey had earlier described how he'd 'picked on' someone at a dance the previous Saturday apparently for this offence] is he winning?

John Yeah, he is in a way, if Joey had a rich boss and he met his son at a dance and he done 'im it would be self-satisfaction for Joey.

PW That cancels it out does it?

John Yeah, it does in a way.

Joey (. . .) I knew I had to be violent or I couldn't get out there on the streets. No matter how much I was gonna get in the future I'll still get a good kick out on the streets, you know what I mean (. . .).

PW But you could go back to college.

Joey I don't know, the only thing I'm interested in is fucking as many women as I can if you really wanna know.

#### Notes

[1] For a general discussion, see 'The Man in the Iron Cage', *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, no. 9, and the theoretical appendix of *Profane Culture*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978. Some of the problems encountered during this specific research are outlined in the final report to the SSRC 'The Main Reality', available as a stencilled paper from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Birmingham University.