

THE MAIN REALITY

Transition from School to Work - Final Report to SSRC.

PAUL WILLIS

SP38

35p.

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Final report on the SSRC project entitled  
'The Transition from School to Work'

P.E.WILLIS,  
Centre for Contemporary Cultural  
Studies,  
Birmingham University.

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### Final Report

We were first led to an interest in the school and the experiential passage of working class boys into the work situation, by an awareness of a long standing omission in the Centre's work. Dr. Willis' previous work at the Centre (1) had been typical of the traditional cultural studies perspectives in that it concentrated more or less exclusively on the leisure time activities of young people. Since one of the main focuses of the Centre's work was Working Class Culture, it became increasingly clear that the study of young working class people should involve some knowledge, precisely, of that zone of their lives which lends its name to the general class description, and which is likely to be the single most important area of involvement and experience for young people - work. Furthermore, we felt that even our studies of the leisure activities of the young might be vitiated by the complete absence of any consideration the work dimension. Though chronologically separate, we felt that leisure activity was by no means a separate domain of experience from work activity. Even in leisure it was felt that some central meanings and values might have been derived from the work situation, or have developed in specific kinds of relation to the work situation.

We were impelled, therefore, by this general interest, towards the symbolic and cultural patterns which go to make up the world of work, and the place within it of the young adult or adolescent. The double articulation of the interest in youth, and the interest in work, promised a rich vein of research which would throw into high relief some of the crucial elements of the culture of work - because viewed through the innocent eyes of the neophyte, and which would illuminate more general aspects of the culture of the young - by adding a dimension of their existence ignored till now.



When we came to examine the literature (2) concerning the transition from school to work, we found a considerable omission which was curiously complementary to the omission we had noted in our own work. Certainly the literature dealt with work and the transition to work, and we accepted the central if negative findings which emerged from so many studies : that the entry into work was a problematic experience for most school leavers : that the formal agencies of guidance were relatively ineffective - that social class, the home, the school were the crucial background determinants of job choice. But this treatment of work and the young man's passage into it, was virtually without any insight derived from a cultural perspective. What was missing was a presentation and discussion of the actual experience of the subjects as they made their passage, and an exposure and discussion of the located culture, and its often hidden meanings, through which the subjects actually live.

The original objective of our research was, therefore, to draw back something of the opacity of the transition from school to work. Instead of marking it as a 'problematic' experience, we wanted to know the nature of the internal dynamics of the situation as experienced by the participants. Instead of stopping at the acceptance of the (accurate) description of the official agencies as ineffective, we wanted to discover what were the schemes, and sources of meanings by which the subjects were in fact guided. Instead of charting the objective causal relationship between job choice, class, school and home, we wanted to know how these structural determinants actually worked at the personal and subjective level. How did the individual perceive these factors, and how did they influence the immediate cultural world by which and through which we supposed the school leavers would actually make their minds up? The principle concept with which we proposed to pursue our objectives were those of 'subjective meaning' and the 'informal culture of work'. The nature of our interest

determined the use of qualitative methods (see next section). Though we hoped that our chosen methodology would allow a much fuller and a more varied set of 'results' than a mere validation or not of prior theoretical models, it was possible to frame our interest in two basic and formally stated research hypotheses. These formed the basis for a submission to Research Council to support a project on 'The Transition from School to Work.'

- 1) In the construction of this perspective (on the world of work and his future in it), the working class school leaver will frame his definition of the situation primarily with reference, not to the formally organized sources of meaning about the world of work, but to the 'informal culture of work'.
- 2) The transition from school to work is more adequately understood from the 'subjective meaning' perspective of the actor than by the adoption of more institutional viewpoints.

#### Research Programme and Methods

We made plans to test, explore and further investigate our hypotheses by mounting case studies in the field. We were successful in gaining SSRC support for our project, and work began in April 1973.

After a preliminary two month stage of observation and enquiry, and a crude survey of possible case study groups, a friendship group of twelve working class, average ability boys was selected from the fourth form of a non-selective Secondary School in the Birmingham area (3). The particular school was selected because it was in the heart of, and drew from, a stable and traditionally working class, industrial area and was equipped with a Youth Wing on the school site which was well attended by the fourth year. We felt that preliminary approaches to the group could be made best through the more informal and relaxed setting of the Youth Wing in the evenings,

rather than in the more disciplined setting of daytime school. The particular group was chosen amongst other things for its cohesion, willingness to respond, and its congruence to our pre-set parameters - working class, average ability, white, non-academic. Staff at the school and the local Careers Officers were most helpful, and willing to accept the researcher's presence. During late May, 1973 the chosen group was approached through the Youth Wing of the school. Great care was taken by the researcher to adopt a role of maximum openness and informality with the boys, though the nature of the research interest, and researcher's identity, were never concealed. This crucial contact phase of the project was successfully completed and the group came to accept the researcher fairly readily. For the balance of that term, and for the whole of their next and last school year, the researcher moved on to regular discussions with the group some of which were taped; in-depth individual taped interviews; general informal observation around the school; and attendance at a range of normal classes, including the complete run of careers classes.

During the same period a careful analysis was made of careers teaching materials used in the school, and of the formal information concerning careers that was supplied to the boys. Materials and teaching techniques of all the main subject areas constituting the regular timetable for our group, were also studied. Parents of all individuals in the group were contacted and interviewed on tape in depth.

One other group in the same school, and four other groups of a similar age in a range of different schools within the Birmingham conurbation were selected and contacted to give a comparative dimension to the main study across the dimensions of class, ability and attitudinal stance to the school. These comparative groups were

also due to leave in Summer 1974. Discussions were recorded with all of them.

Although it should become clear from the much fuller treatment of the results of the research in the next section, we should mention here that there was some shift in our objectives during the course of this stage of the research. This happened as our theoretical concepts were progressively exposed to the field. Firstly, it became clear very early on that the friendship group was more important than we had allowed for - and we did always intend to base our main case study on a friendship group - because it was the main support of the pupil culture of the school and the main location and determinant of individual subjective experience. Though we were still very much concerned with subjective experience, we located it more and more at the group level rather than at the simply personal.

Secondly, it became clear very early on that working class kids going through their last year at school could not be considered as one large homogeneous group. Even amongst those kids who could be considered of average to low ability, there was a clear division between those with a positive adaption to school and those with a negative adaption to school. (4) It was also clear that those kids with a negative adaption to school were also those who were most influenced by the situated informal culture we were interested in, and were also the ones destined for those semi-skilled and unskilled jobs which we held to be at the heart of working class culture proper. We determined, therefore, to base our main case study on a friendship group of anti-school working class kids. Our most important comparative case study became that of a friendship group drawn from those with a positive orientation to school. Both of these groups were located in the same school. It may be argued that our progressive refinement of our target group to a friendship group, and a negatively orientated

group, vitiated its representativeness for the general body of average to low ability working class school leavers. However, we would argue that such friendship groups constitute the single most important structure for those experiencing their last year at school and facing the passage into work, and that, as such, they have great importance even for those not directly involved in these specific groups. Understanding the processes at play in such a group will allow us to make comments and suggestions about the situation of all working class early school leavers.

Thirdly, it became increasingly apparent as we got further into the field work that we had started out with a somewhat mechanical, rigid and restricted notion of the 'informal culture of work'. Firstly and most obviously, the informal culture of the boys as it is related to work prospects and choice could not be dissociated from the general informal culture of the boys at school. This culture was not a series of static, discrete, quantum of knowledge, but a dynamic unitary process which, just because it was orientated towards different situational problems at different times coming up with different sorts of response, should not therefore be broken up into geographic-type pieces. We were really concerned, therefore, not with the 'informal culture of work', but with the informal culture in school and how it related to the world of work.

Secondly, and in a related way, we came to see that we had started out with an implicitly inanimate, information-flow-type, model of informal cultural arrangement. As we progressed in our work it became clear that this informal culture was based less on re-interpretations and selection of provided information, official and otherwise - which was how we had foreseen it - and more on what might be termed creative, group based processes which generated oppositional values attitudes and practices from materials which were certainly provided, but in no sense handed on unchanged or in the

same form. The 'school' was not only - as we had foreseen - a source of materials for the boy's developing self understanding and configuration of future work roles, it also had to be understood as a dynamic, complex, contradictory process occurring in a varied and uneven structure. This structure held certain spaces, or facilitating tendencies, which - perhaps unintentionally - encouraged alternative, group based generation of practices, skills and values which were far more than transposition of content from other sources. Alongside a certain shift of our interest from the individual to the group, there was also, therefore, a change in emphasis from a notion of informal culture as something into which information flowed from the outside, to a more structured notion of informal culture - where and when and how was the culture located in terms of the organization of the school - and to a more dynamic and transformatory notion of culture as made and supported by the social group.

These shifts in focus allowed us to define more exactly the kind of group we were interested in and upon which we wanted to base a case study, and they also allowed a more exact and thought-out marshalling of the methods most appropriate to our material. As set out in our original application we had foreseen that we would use a range of quantitative methods :

Participant Observation  
Observation  
'Just Being Around'  
Group Discussions  
Recorded Group Discussions  
Informal Interviews  
Formal Interviews  
Dairies

In fact all of these methods were used in the field, although our developing interest in the group and its processes, and in the dynamic aspects of cultural organization, impelled us more to the



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qualitative end of the range, and towards PO proper, in order to generate the maximum possible of directly observed data. So many important processes occurred at a non-verbal level, and were not strictly recountable at a verbal level, that it became increasingly clear to us that a really inward appreciation of the lads' culture, and subjective orientations within it, could only come from the closest exposure to their actual practices.

The problems of using anything which approaches classic PO in the school are, however, enormous. There is the obvious problem of the age gap between the researcher and the boys, and less obvious, but perhaps for that all the more intractable, problems turning on the huge in feelings, attitudes and cultural responses between the two. Furthermore, there are added and relatively unusual problems associated with the attempt to conduct PO in a situation structured by authority. In Paul Willis' previous experience of PO he has been with his subjects in the unstructured zone of leisure. In the school it was quite different. The power differential between them meant that it was impossible to maintain a close and trusting relationship with both staff and pupils. Any tendency towards the staff would have been identified by the lads - particularly those with a negative orientation to the school - as complicity with the school and its authority. You were taken, simply, as staff. That cut off exactly those information flows, and inhibited those types of behaviour, with which we were most concerned.

On the other hand, if you were to lean towards the kids in order to attempt some version of PO proper, then you ran a considerable risk of being identified by the staff as a subversive agent bringing unnatural and destabilizing tension into the class room. This might have resulted in exclusion from the school.

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The researcher, committed as he was to a more qualitative flow of data, choose to negotiate these problems in the 'main' case study by a combination of a pronounced lean towards the kids in the situation coupled with a strategy of making clear explanations to staff in private. For the researcher this meant, in effect, taking great pains not to act like, or to be seen as, a teacher, as well as asking other teachers not to treat him as a colleague. He took care never to sit in front of a class, or to be caught in a position where he might be expected to direct or control the boys. Out of class, in and around the school, and in the recorded group discussions, he took care to avoid an authority role and made no comments about smoking, bad language, rough or lawless behaviour. He told the lads that he was interested in 'Explaining the experience of school, and how you find a job, from your side', and staff that he wanted, 'To get their feelings and reactions as they are expressed, and as they are shared, amongst the group, when staff are not around.'

By and large this strategy worked from the point of view of the relationship with the kids. Whilst not accepting the researcher as a group member, they certainly accorded him a privileged third party status. He was not a teacher, was easy to talk to, and most of all would not 'shop' them. In our experience it is always surprising the extent to which subjects will accept a researcher on the basis of his simply expressed interest and demonstrated trustworthiness. Towards the end of the school based field work the researcher was able to gain sufficient acceptance from the group to enable him to join them for complete day cycles - that is, during classes and for their free time - so that, in these highly difficult circumstances, something approaching genuine participant observation was achieved.

Furthermore, as the relationship with the kids developed, the recorded group interviews became very much more spontaneous, fuller and richer, so that they began to serve not merely as reporting sessions, but also as examples of group based cultural processes at work.

There was, then, a degree of success in the chosen research strategy. This did not relieve the method, however, of its internal stresses and contradictions - nor did it lessen the feelings of tension and anxiety within the researcher. Other researchers contemplating the use of genuinely qualitative methods in a structured context such as the school, should be well aware of the of the problems and understand the nature of the choices they must make. For the nature of our research strategy was to elect for a commitment to the boys really, and as it was perceived, at the expense of such loyalty and conformity to staff standards as is conventionally expected of a 'responsible' adult. These costs can be minimized by clear statements of purpose to staff, but there is always a balance of disadvantage and mistrust. No teacher likes another adult in his class, especially when that adult is not only observing the proceedings, but has also made it clear that he will not act as an ally in a crisis. The researcher experienced many awkward situations in classes where there was misbehaviour. Whilst neither encouraging, nor taking part in this 'messing about', he could no more help the teacher to control the kids. The most acute and awkward situations occurred where the researcher had witnessed, or had first hand knowledge of, misdeeds in such a way that staff might reasonably have supposed him to be witness for the prosecution. Of course, even if it had been attractive, any such role would have sabotaged the researcher's standing with the informal group. Silence had to be kept, there was no way to remain

impartial in the way that conventional tenets of 'neutrality' might suggest. Such silences, where they ran in the face of counter knowledge in the staff, could be interpreted as complicity in wrong doing, and as subversion of the school's discipline.

This possibility held further concern for the researcher, since his subject group might have taken his loyalty in these matters, and his close interest in what was happening to them, as encouragement to further misbehaviour, and even to the positive putting on of a show. This is, of course, the classic danger - the 'Hawthorne Effect' - of social research. However, this risk had to be taken. Careful questioning of staff - when the case study group were well out of sight - revealed that there was no observable difference between the behaviour of the lads when he was around and when he was not around. Most staff thought that the behaviour of the group was no more extreme than had been expected of them before the researcher's appearance, and was no worse than that of other similar groups who had passed through their hands. For the lads, they assured the researcher that things were quite 'normal' when he was around, and that they had quite soon ceased to notice whether he was around or not.

At any rate, it should be clear that whilst a more qualitative methodology yields the most relevant data for a study of located subjective meaning and its immediate context of cultural patterns and symbols, it is also an extremely difficult method to manage in the field. This is especially true of qualitative field work in a structured context where the regular participants of the on-going situation will not allow a non-aligned position to the researcher. It is a tribute to the tolerance, understanding and openness of the staff, and particularly to the Head and Deputy Head of the school



in which we based our 'main' case study, that the field work was carried out successfully and our objectives satisfied without any major ructions or confrontations.

An important secondary problem that arose during this period of research should be mentioned briefly. This concerned the difficulty of getting tape recordings of kids, staff, parents, and careers officers transcribed in sufficient numbers or at a sufficiently high standard. It is inherently difficult to analyse verbal material, and the rolling nature of our empirical and theoretical interests meant that selection criteria were liable to change during the course of the research. It is highly desirable that all taped materials should be transcribed, analysed, sorted and stored in a written fashion. The sum of eight hundred and fifty pounds which we budgeted for this task was quite inadequate, and the organizational basis of its administration - casual secretary help - quite inappropriate. Casual secretaries cannot be supervised properly, and rarely have the commitment to produce satisfactory work. During the course of this project we have used ten different secretaries, have failed to transcribe all the material which was available, and have produced useable texts only at the expense of several hundred hours extra work from the full time researcher. We strongly suggest, therefore, that any one using similar techniques to our own should budget for a full time secretary over a fairly long period in order to be sure of making the best use of the material they expect to generate.

More generally, the only area from which we had a disappointing data flow in this period was that of the lads' leisure time activities. This was foreseen, of course, in our original application, and was the direct result of the limitation of the project to one researcher. However, some material relating to leisure activities was collected.

The researcher spent a number of 'free evenings' with the group. A lot of information was collected from day time discussion groups about their leisure activities, self-placement in the larger symbolic system of Youth Culture and their preferences in pop music and materials broadcast by the mass media, etc. The dairy method in conjunction with the group discussion proved a useful technique here. Although the written standard of the dairies was often low they provided some kind of framework within which the boys were able to, move systematically than they could in a spontaneous group discussion, to recall patterns of behaviour.

Four of the 'main' group left at Easter, 74, and eight at Summer. The second stage of our research programme was to follow all twelve of these boys, as well as three selected boys from comparative groups out into the work situation. This was successfully completed in all cases. Two days were spent actually working alongside each subject. At the end of each period the researcher interviewed the subject in depth on tape. The aim here was both to get something of the sense of the 'shop floor culture' into which the lads were moving, and also to see how the lads had responded to this situation, what kind of adaptations they were making and how the school had actually helped or hindered their transition. An attempt was also made to interview various people at work in positions of authority about their perspective on 'the promising worker' and how the transition from school to work was best accomplished.

Surprisingly enough the methodological problems of this stage of research were less severe than those of the previous stage.

To start with, the period of field work in each case study was quite short. This meant that, although PO was used, there was simply no time to worry about the finer points of the method.

Generally it had a large intermixture of more straightforward observation since it was not really possible in the time available to form close relationships with quite new social groups. On the other hand, a surprisingly varied and rich flow of data was achieved considering the short time spent in each situation. The researcher's involvement in these situations amounted to far more than the formal visit of the outside expert.

We think the unexpected smoothness of this stage of the research arose from the closeness of our contact with the lads. In effect, and with deceptive ease, this contact satisfied some of the main conditions for entry into the field work situation. It gave the researcher a patron in the shop floor group; it provided him with a feasible and comprehensible account of his presence; and perhaps most important, established a mode of ease and naturalness with one group member so that kind of general participation in the life of the group became possible in a very short time. The range of material gathered about cultures of the work place was a substantial and unexpected benefit of our long term research strategy and the emphasis we placed on coming in close to a small number of people over a protracted period. (5)

The main difficulties during this period of the research were in the setting up and planning of the field work sessions. Very often managers found our request to work alongside chosen lads - rather than simply come into interview them in the Personnel Manager's office - rather strange. Our requests were frequently passed on or delayed for long periods. The most successful strategy was to identify by phone the manager who could actually make a decision about the researcher's entry, write to him in detail about the research and its objectives, then follow up again by phone until a concrete arrangement for a face to face meeting had been made. Once this

contact had been achieved, the manager's advice, or more often that of his first line manager, was invaluable in helping to plan the precise details of the researcher's working situation. It is vital for the researcher to have some real task on the shop floor, or he gets in the way and everyone becomes embarrassed. On the other hand, it is clearly vital to be as close as possible to the subject, and whatever group he is part of, and to come into functional contact with this group as much as is possible. It is also important to make sure that the researcher is not given VIP treatment or carried off to meet senior management for long periods. The same strictures that apply to the structured situation of the school also apply to the working situation. It is vital to avoid being perceived as, 'a bosses man'.

It was crucial to have the sympathy and help of managers in planning how to deal with these problems. Certainly, any researcher contemplating similar work should not be tempted to compress or short circuit the necessary stages of planning and negotiation. Although one of the keystones of the qualitative method is naturalism, the mechanics of mounting the method in a period of field work are from obvious and natural.

The second stage of the field work was completed successfully by January 1975. Our fundamental objectives remained unchanged through this period, and the form and mix of our methodology remained virtually as we had planned it.

### FINDINGS

Though our research was organized to test and explore the hypotheses which have been outlined, we also hoped to produce a final document which was more than a validation or refutation of particular hypotheses. We hoped that it would also reproduce - often in the words of the kids themselves - something of the actual texture, meaning and experience of the lives of our subjects during the critical phase of their last years at school and their transition from school to work. Such a project can only be partially adumbrated in the present text. It is in two books presently in preparation that we hope to most fully exploit the possibilities of our qualitative methodology. We have attempted, however, to hold something of this second aim in what follows especially in terms of letting the kids speak for themselves.

Before coming to the detail of our findings it is worth stating certain central themes that have emerged in a more formal manner. It is clear that our original interest in 'informal culture of work', and 'subjective' orientations within it, has to be specified and located in a more structured context. The 'informal culture of work' can only be considered as an aspect of the informal culture of the school generally. This is the central formation which responds to a number of situations and choices: subject choice, job choice, relations to staff, relations to girls, relations to peers, types of leisure involvement. It is absolutely necessary to understand this unified informal culture before proceeding to specified areas such as orientation to work.

This culture cannot, however, be considered alone or in isolation. Most basically, we argue it has to be located with respect to the informal group, and in particular with respect to informal groups with a negative orientation towards the school. Certainly it was always our intention to site our case study on a friendship group, but we did not properly foresee that as well as being a privileged level of entry into cultural and subjective meanings, this kind of group was also the main organizational unit, the main bearer, and ultimately the main generator of those meanings. In terms of intra-group processes we found - and it is a finding which surprised us - what can only be called a genuine creativeness. At the outset of the research we had expected to find an informal culture amongst the pupils, but we had thought that the content of this culture would have been largely drawn from the outside - attitudes, values, practices drawn via parents and neighbours from the wider working class culture, or pieces taken straight even if inverted, from the official culture and communications of the school. Now whilst the attitudes and practices of the informal group did draw from outside sources, and may be seen as part of the wider working



class culture, they were in no sense mere reflections or imitations of these things. The informal group developed its own distinctive, intricate and organized practices and abilities. It did not take over simple, inert communications from the outside, but appropriated whole spaces within the institutional structure and shaped them for their own purposes.

The internal functioning of the anti-school group could not, however, be understood entirely with respect to itself. The group had to be placed within the larger context of the school as

Institution and against the other informal groups that went to make up the internal cultural topography of the school. The particular location of a group within this matrix school/other groups, was crucially important to its internal processes. In our study and in the case of the anti-school group we found that the crucial co-ordinates of this kind were opposition to the school as Institution, and rejection of other groups of pupils - particularly that large group identified as conformist to the institutional norms of the school. It is only in relation to these cross binding factors that we will understand the formation of the informal group, the types of content it generates at a cultural level, and the perspectives it develops on job choice and the world of work.

To come, now, to our case study work, we identified two main groups in school - the conformists and the non-conformist. It was the latter group which interested us and on which we based our 'main' case study. It was the group which was likely to include those lads of average to low ability [in terms of achievement at any rate], who were not going to get leaving paper qualifications, and who were destined for basic un-skilled or semi-skilled working class jobs. In the terminology of such lads the two groups were the 'boys' and the 'ear'oles'. These two groups formed the poles for the internal landscape of the year, if not of the school. The 'boys' largely either rejected the overt aims of schooling and the legitimacy of teachers to guide them, or were deeply ambiguous about what they thought the school was trying to do - mainly it boiled down to 'pushing us about'.

The 'ear'oles' largely took the school in its own terms and accepted the legitimacy of the teachers. For the 'boys' they were 'creeps', 'arse-creepers', 'teacher's pets' and generally despicable for their conformism to school norms, for their lack of assertiveness, for their inability to show any autonomy, and most of all for their inability to create 'fun' for themselves - to 'have a larf'.

PW1 (....) why not be like the ear'oles, why not try and get CSEs?

Derek 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 and one B

- Who's that?

Derek Birchall

Spanksey I mean what will they remember of their school life? What will they have to look back on. Sitting in a class room, 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 J.A.s. Some of the things we've done on teachers, it'll be a larf when we look back on it.

[...]

Perc Like you know; he don't get, he don't get much fun, well say Spanksey plays about all day, he gets fun. Bannister's there sweating, sweating his bollocks off all day while Spanksey's doing fuck all, and he's enjoying it.

Spanksey 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

Spanksey 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 larf', you know.

Will You still never fucking come!

Spanksey Who?

Will You.

/laughter/

[....]

You can't imagine

- You can't imagine (inaudible) going into the Flough and saying, 'A pint of larger 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.

In terms of their structural location, the most crucial feature of the 'boys' and their culture was entrenched and personalized opposition to the school and its agents.

[in a discussion on teachers and vandalism]

Joey (... ) they're able to punish us. 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 er'm 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?

[in a general discussion about mates and boredom]

Joey It's sort of a challenge, coming to school thinking, 'How can I outwit the teachers today?', like. The teachers 're the establishment, they've done things to you, you don't like what they've done, how can you get back?

[in a general discussion about teachers in their school]

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.

Spanksey 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?

-Yeah

-Yeah

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, 'cos, er., 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 out 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 Simmondsey [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.

The 'boys' opposition to the school and its agents, and their scornful rejection of the 'ear'oles' - not least because of their acceptance of the legitimacy of the school - were very powerful determinants of what amounted to an anti-school alternative or counter culture within the school. Membership of this culture, or the manner of your relationship to it, was very much more important to the non-academic working class lad than was the achievement of any formal aims of education, or the satisfaction of any other independant or 'free' form of social connection. It was the spine around which their day and thoughts were organized; the dichotomy 'boys'/'ear'oles' was the most basic organizing structure of school life.

[in a discussion about the importance of being one of the 'boys']

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

Spanksey I can imagine, .. you know, when I have a day off school, when you come back the next day, and somethings 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

One of the interesting things the research brought to light was that, in terms of individual biographies at least, the split between the two groups and the development of the 'boys' culture could be easily traced. By and large it seemed that all children entered the first year as 'ear'oles', even if they had been in some form of non-conformist group in the Junior School (and there was evidence that these did exist). In the second, or more commonly the third year and sometimes the fourth year, a process occurred amongst some of the lads which might be termed differentiation.

This was where the mental and social support of the teacher, and the acceptance of the legitimacy of his proclaimed aims, were decisively withdrawn. The essence of this scepticism was a refusal to accept the teacher as automatically better than the children in all modes. The institutionally prescribed aims of gaining self esteem were - sometimes quite suddenly - seen as not the only grounds for gaining self esteem: 'that doesn't rank them above us, just because they are slightly more intelligent'. For parallel with the disaffection from the teacher - sometimes seen as a cause of it - was an affiliation with a group of peers marked out precisely by the attempt to develop modes of activity and schemes of values which gave alternative grounds for self-respect and a viable identity. Diligence, deference, respect - these became things which could be read in quite another way.

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 realize 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

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

It is during the stage of differentiation when the individual joining the 'boys' first develops an analysis of his social position viz a viz the school and the people in it. The teachers are trying to enforce patterns of behaviour and standards which are seen, essentially, impositions. The other kids of his own age - the 'ear'oles' - accept these standards, collude in their maintenance, and judge their own worth and progress with these official measures.

A value laden social map of the school year emerges on which virtually everyone can be placed.

[in a discussion about what groups they will find at work]

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 (...)

Many things which were confused and uncertain before - whether to speak to so and so, why somebody has always attracted you, why someone else has always been faintly boring - became clear in this stage of 'coming out.' This social mapping was very much more a product of the self-elected 'boys' group than it was of the indicated 'ear'ole' group. Members of the conformist group had a less developed sense of what divided people, and reacted to the 'boys' more on the individual basis of dislike of being called 'dozy': resentment when 'troublemakers' stopped the class working smoothly: jealousy of the social and sexual accomplishments of certain individuals. The very nature of the derogatory title, 'ear'ole', with its connotations of passivity, absurdity and inexpressivity - to the 'boys' it seemed that the 'earholes' were always listening never doing - indicates quite clearly which group

was doing the signifying of the social landscape. The conformist group did not generate any counter terms to either identify, or evaluate differently, the major social groupings. Arset generally, and specific usages of conventional words, were the product of the 'boys' and decisively not of the 'ear'oles'.

Members of the counter school group could remember quite clearly when they first joined the 'boys' and what changes had ensued.

[in a discussion on 'ear'oles']

Will In the first and second years, I used to come you know..., in the fifteenth, no lower than fifteenth, I used to be you know, what you would call brainy really, and then the third years and I was in 3A and I got to know Bill then, we, you know...(.) I started goin' to dances and that, like you know, even if it was only up to Youth Club and that, that was a danse like you know, and then you started to get more, um, how can I put it er..., how can I put it?

Spanksey -Cocky more, like ...

Will Cocky, I suppose you could put it like that

Fred It's the second year I went astray. Me and Spike first, I used to come, I come twelfth in the first years or twelfth in the second years and then I met Bill and all them (...) we went out with them one night, picked up a big crate of bleeding bottles, Bill and them did. I thought if I don't do it they're goin' to think I'm a right wanker... Ficked up a crate of bottles, threw them, me and Spike you know, shit ourselves like, we was down the end of the road before they'd even started running, and then Bill threw bricks and all this you know, and scratching cars, fucking hell.

The research was focussed upon working class schools so, at least in this context, there were no systematic differences in the class background of our two groups. There was certainly, however, a difference in the kind of aspirations the two groups had. The

'ear'oles' were likely to be academically motivated, interested in going on to do CSEs at the end of the fifth and very careful about their choice of subjects. The 'boys' were not academically motivated, were much less interested in taking CSEs, chose particular subjects on the basis of the 'easy option', and regarded their final year at school, if not all those years beyond the point at which they had learned to read and write, as a waste of time. There was some evidence that the parents of the conformist group were themselves more conformist and that they took more interest in the progress of their children, were less fatalistic, protected them more and were more likely to have plans for their son's futures than the parents of the non-conformist group. This study is not suited to supply statistical answers to these questions, but the following two quotes from parents - the first of one of the 'boys' the second of one of the 'ear'oles' - gives some indication of the kind of parental attitude which was often associated with a certain kind of pupil orientation.

Mr. A. (a metal polisher) This is probably one factor you don't... People don't probably think it's important, is money today. There's a group of chaps here, they go out every day (...), then there's little (his boy), 'cos he goes to school, he has to rely on me to give him a pound. I can't afford to give him any more but how does he feel amongst them others. Education's gone by the board now, they'm out there ain't they. Somewhere to go, a discotheque or something, they go and buy sandwiches, ice cream, cake...can't, he ain't got it, he's the same age as them or he might be a few months younger you know.. (...) Education is right at the back of their minds you see. Their pockets you see, that's in their minds.

Mr. A. (...) he's talked about something, what he wants to do, he definitely wants a job that he can learn what he likes (...), painting and decorating and I think he will be interested in that job, I know it's a job he can do

Mrs. A. He's looking around though in't he? He's looking at the other jobs like, plasterers, bricklayers. He's watching it see, see what goes on like you know, he was telling us wa'n't he.

Mr. A. He'll pick a job out.

Mrs. A. He'll pick a job out of that kind of thing.

Mrs. B. (husband a dustman) We keep drumming that into them - don't get into trouble, don't let us down in that respect. Whatever you want, ask us what you want and within our means we'll get it you. All I go out to work for is to give you a good home, make it comfortable so that they'll always stay. They won't drift off, and whatever they ask us... not spoiling them, but we give them what they want, like, he wanted a drawing board and things for school which really, you know, paying for this house and all the other things...he had it, I mean like track suits and things that he's asked for he's had.

Mrs. B. Well I suggested it and Tony's been ... ever since I suggested being a tool designer he's been all for it, you know, tool designer

PW How long ago was it when you first ...

Mrs. B. Two years ago

PW And was it a kind of casual thing while you were doing something else or...?

Mrs. B. No

Mr. B. No

[...]

Mrs. B. He was all for that, but I have said since, well you know, why not be a policeman, you know, it looks easy enough to do, you're always clean, it's you know, like us, you need security in a job to buy a house.

PW So it's still in your mind a little bit?

Mrs. B. Yes

Mr. B. No...it was when he went to school one day and there was... he's a prefect and he was bossing the kids (...) you know, 'Come on, in here, you got to go over there, get over there' and this bloke was there, he said er.....



- Mrs. B. You'd make a wonderful policeman
- Mr. B. You'd make a smashing policeman
- Mrs. B. One of the teachers (...) says, clean, and they're honest looking. You're clean, you get your money and you get an house as well like.

Certainly for the 'boys' there was a widespread sense that their behaviour, in particular their opposition to the school and scorn of the weak and conformist, fitted into a larger pattern, was expected of them in some way, and was part of an alternative pattern of being supported and protected by their parents over against more official views much in the way that they collectively supported their own alternative culture against the pressure of the school.

[in a discussion on 'ear'oles']

- Spanksey (...) you know, he ain't a mastermind [his dad] you know. He was a ruffian when he was younger you know, he's a larf you know, I couldn't. I don't think he'd like to see me, his kids, you know, me or our Barry or me little sister, 'ear'oles', you know what I mean
- [...]
- Will Yeah, and with me, our old man, he was brainy like, but soon as he left school, started to work at the brewery, used to get the booze down him like you know I dare say, that influenced me.
- Spanksey What's that school on the way to the football Petty Coat Lane, something like that, that was a real rough school that was, in our dad's time, you know what I mean, and he's rough.

Although this question of parental influence is important and our qualitative findings indicate that there was indeed a pattern of influence, we felt that this element should not be exaggerated. For one thing, the parents of both groups were equally clearly working class - from manual and semi-skilled occupations - and perhaps more important, the significance of the creative and self-directed element of the 'boys' culture made us wary of imputing its causation to outside factors to any great degree. It is too easy to assume that this group and its typical

practices and values comes about through inevitable continuities with outside pressures, and conformity to family and environment. Too often, as well, it is assumed that this group's culture comes about as a reaction to defeat, as an attempt to forestall the obloquy of academic failure and rejection by teachers. Reforms in teaching have anyway taken the emphasis off purely academic achievement, and it is now possible for a kid to earn his spurs in other ways, from excellence in sport to liveliness in social studies classes. Perhaps more important, it is by no means only the stupid or unintelligent who join the 'boys'. One of the really interesting things about this group and its culture is that it has the internal life and vivacity to attract to its kids who could have easily taken the conformist road and succeeded in it. This culture does not recruit its members on the grounds of rejection by the formal system, but on its own grounds and for what it can offer.

The voluntary and independent nature of this group in this context must, therefore, be stressed. Though it has profoundly important continuities with the outside class culture upheld by parents, and though it is coterminous with the academic non-achievers, we should not seek to describe or explain its internal elements simply in terms of such factors.

What was the nature of this lively, creative culture for which we are claiming some autonomy - an autonomy which is usually denied or ascribed only pathological importance.

Most essentially this counter culture was organized around the colonization of symbolic spaces within the school - spaces left unpatrolled by the school or polyvalent in themselves. The nature of this colonization was an introduction of meanings and a social ambience which subverted the school and its objectives on the one hand, and established a living and practical ascendancy over the 'ear'oles on the other. This involved the development of a system of practises, and a set of evaluative criteria, opposed to those sanctioned by the staff and aimed at the maximum distancing from, and ridiculing of, the 'ear'oles'. There were many elements within this cultural programme.

As the most visible, personalised and instantly understood element of opposition and ascendancy clothes had great importance to the 'boys'. The first signs of a lad 'coming out' was a fairly rapid change in the appearance of his clothes and hair. The particular form of this alternative dress is determined by outside influences and in particular by fashions current in the wider symbolic system of youth culture. At the moment, and for the schools we worked in, the 'boys look' would include longish well groomed hair, platform-type shoes, wide collared shirt turned over waisted coat or denim jerkin, plus still obligatory flared trousers. Whatever the particular form of dress, it was most certainly not school uniform, rarely included a tie (the second best for many Heads if uniform can't be enforced), and exploited colours calculated to give the maximum distinction from institutional drabness and conformity.

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 an expression of their more located meanings. Though much of this style, and the music associated with it, might be accurately accused of arising from purely commercial drives, and representing no authentic aspiration of its clients, we should recognize that the way in which it is taken up and used by the young in located situations often has an authenticity and directness of personal expression quite missing from its original commercial generation.

We should also understand from this discussion of dress that it is no accident that much of the conflict between staff and students should take place on the grounds of school uniform/casual dress. To the outside it might seem a fatuous argument about differences in taste. Concerned staff, and involved kids, however, know that it is a continuing tussle about authority, a fight between cultures, and ultimately a question about the legitimacy of school as an institution.

Closely related with the dress style of the 'boys' was the whole question of their personal attractiveness. Wearing smart and modern clothes gave them the chance, not only to differentiate themselves from school and from the 'ear'oles', but also to make themselves more attractive to women. It was a matter of objective fact that the 'boys' did 'go out' with girls very much more than did any other groups of the same age. A good majority of them were quite sexually experienced. A smaller proportion, though still substantial, had had sexual intercourse by the fourth year and often much earlier. An important mark of 'differentiation', and affiliation with the 'boys' in the second, third and fourth years was successful sexual experience expressed precisely as achievement. If the lad had not



actually, 'gone all the way' he would certainly show interest in accomplishing such a feat, and join in speculation about with whom such a thing might be possible. The 'ear'oles' on the other hand had much less sexual experience and did not talk about girls in such salacious terms. That the sexual accomplishment of the 'boys' was real, and also successful in establishing a practice and value system different from - though in this case oddly parallel to its unofficial variety - the official one is shown by the manner in which staff, and especially the younger ones, commented - often admiringly - on the sexual adventures and successes of particular pupils.

If manner of dress is the main apparent cause of argument between staff and kids, smoking is the next most apparent cause of discontent. Again we find another absolutely distinguishing characteristic of the 'boys' against the 'ear'oles'. The majority of them smoke, and perhaps more important are seen to smoke. There is great pride taken in having the courage to walk right up to the school gate smoking, stub it out and then walk in. A great deal of time is typically spent amongst the 'boys' planning their next smoke and, 'hopping off' lessons 'for a quick drag'. And if the 'boys' delighted in smoking and flaunting their impertinence with a little white stick, it drove staff absolutely crazy. There were usually strict and frequently publicised rules about smoking. If, for this reason, the 'boys' were spurred, almost as a matter of honour, to continue public smoking, the staff were incensed by the brazen challenge to their authority especially if it was allied to that other offence - the lie.

[in a 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 some'at.

Spanksey 'Call me a liar', 'I'm not a liar', 'Get back then', and we admitted it in the end he 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 Simmondsey was having a fit.

Spike He'd actually seen us light up

Punishment for smoking was usually automatic.

Spanksey Well, he couldn't do a thing [the Deputy], 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, in terms of the continuous guerilla warfare with the school, one of the most telling ways for the 'boys' to spot sympathizers, or more often simply the weak and 'daft', in the enemy camp was to see which teachers, usually the young ones take no action after an unequivocal sighting of a lighted cigarette.

Fuzz I mean Arther, 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 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 larf.

Of course in a very typical conjunction of school based and outside meanings, cigarette smoking for the 'boys' was, as well as being an act of insurrection before the school, also an attempt to associate themselves with adult values and practises. In the attempt to build an autonomous system of values and rewards

within the school, the adult world, specifically the adult male working class world, was turned to as a source of materials. This was obviously the case with drinking. Manifest drinking was an even more decisive signal to staff than public smoking that the individual was separate from the school and had a presence in a completely alternative, even superior and more mature, mode of social being. If a lad was going to smoke and, in particular, to drink this did anyway put certain adult type responsibilities on his shoulders because he had to pay for his indulgences. This led to part time work as well as other practises we shall come to later and the whole experience of confronting the working world - which was itself maturing - from the need for money. Again a distinguishing feature of the 'boys' from the 'ear'oles' was their much greater likelihood to have a part-time job or to be seeking one, and to recognize that there was a logic in their cultural choices which extended to quite firm adult-like commitments to a high income flow.

Accounts of staff sighting kids in pubs were excitedly repeated with much more relish than mere smoking incidents, and inaction after being clocked 'boozing' was even more delicious proof of a traitor/sympathizer/weakling in the school camp than was the blind eye to a lighted 'fag'. Their perception of this particular matrix of meanings put some younger and more progressive members of staff in a severe dilemma, and some of them came up with bizarre solutions which remained incomprehensible to the 'boys'. This incident involved a concerned and progressive young teacher.

[in a discussion on 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 'boys' self-consciously understood the symbolic importance of drinking as an act of affiliation with adults and opposition to the school. It was most important to them that their last lunch time of the last term should be spent in a pub, and that the maximum possible alcohol be consumed. This was the moment when they finally broke free from school, the moment which they would remember in future years. That they had not quite broken loose and that staff wanted to underline this was emphasized when our main group returned to school for the afternoon smelling of liquor and, in some cases, drunk. They were hawled in front of the Head, their parents written to, and final testimonials refused until a formal apology was received. Still, it was "worth it" to the 'boys', and the drinking episode was the most frequently recounted school episode to adult workers in the future working situation. As school uniform and the cigarette declines as the most obvious causes of conflict in those schools which develop towards more liberal regimes, we might expect that drinking will become the next major area where the battle lines are drawn.

These were the physical items around which social practices and rituals accrued. Forms of interaction and social interchanges were developing all the time, to fill spaces left by the teachers or won from the teachers. This was a moving feast, however, in which staff could win temporary reverses, and in which the 'boys' were always on the look out for new chances, and where there were



many contradictions and ambiguities.

[in a discussion on recent urges by the staff]

Derek (...) They say you'm adults and that and yet, some things they, they'll say you'm adults and then they'll say you'm responsible and all this, and then the next thing they'll turn around and say er., "Walk down the corridor quietly in line", and they'll treat us like children.

[...]

PW (...) Is it true, in fact, that you're playing up more than ever?

-Yeah

-Oh yeah

-Oh yeah

-You've got to oppose, you can't.

PW What's causing what? Did you start playing up and the discipline came, or did the discipline come and then you started playing up?

Joey Oh, we was loyal in the first few days, but when we got into all the things we knew we could do like, all the little cracks we could get up to, then we started playing up a bit, and they started getting, er'm...

Fuzz That's it. We was used to an easy life

Joey The first day in science he got, he says, 'If any of you want to come back till five o'clock lads, do some experiments...' We all fucking pissed ourselves day'n we... He thought it was going to be, like the year before, we was all going to be, like, wanting to do it.

Since the 'boys' were non academic, and any way aimed to 'skive', 'blag' or 'wag off' as much time as possible, they were infact unsupervised, or left without any real work even in class for long periods. These comments were typical of our 'main' group of 12 'boys' and it should not be forgotten that these were drawn from a larger group of lads with a negative orientation to the school which accounted for something between a third and a quarter of the school year population.

[in a 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, and the rest of us could join a class where all our mates are

[...]

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

[...]

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]

The central problem for the 'boys', whether during activity that was enforced by teachers, or during periods of inactivity won from the teachers, was to defeat boredom and thread a vital human involvement through the dry institutional text. Even in the most controlled situations they would find some subversive, potentially amusing activity.

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 discrete 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 mak you sing, oh..

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/

In class it was possible to make an apparent acceptance of the teacher's role and legitimacy, and within that structure, turn things to your own advantage for a 'larf'.

[in a discussion on teachers]

Joey

We got a big sheet of paper and, er'm there's twenty two men on a pitch, you gotta mark it out how much area each defenders gotta defend. How much, you know how much space they've got each. So we sez we gotta measure the pitch. So we fucking went up the one day, and we just had a smoke and pissed about and we dain't get it done and he sez next week 'what you gonna go' we said 'we're gonna finish measuring the pitch', and we went up again and it went on fer five weeks. We just went up and measured the pitch... and just messed about with the tape measure like, using it as a discus and things like that.

[...]

Bill

Another thing we do in there, He likes talking about cars, so as soon as we get in there, you know, we'll make summat up so he'll talk all this. The other day I went in, I says 'Our dad's clutch

cable's come off, do you know what to do?', you know and that'll keep him talking about cars then all that lesson.

The really central thing about the 'boys' culture, however, and the major way of overcoming boredom, was 'to be with your mates' unsupervised by staff. When the group was together there were always things to do.

Joey

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 [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 laugh 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

Spanksey

You like to come to school, just to skive, 'cos you get bored at home. You'd rather come here and sit in the Youth Wing or summat

Joey

(...) You'm always looking out on somebody [when skiving] and you've always got something to talk about... something

PW

So what stops you being bored

Joey

Talking, we could talk forever, when we get together, it's talk, talk, talk.

An important and striking element of their interaction, centred on a particular form of joking, kidding language turning on rough practical or physical humour. It was quite common for one individual to be picked on, and ribbed, have 'the piss taken' out of him, 'kidded'

or sometimes viciously needled for long periods. Often it was the same individual who was picked on repeatedly for the same kinds of things: his supposed stupidity, or alleged sexual practices (in one case for reportedly having sexual intercourse during menstruation), or some eccentricity of clothing or appearance. Language generally was much 'coarser' than was common amongst the 'ear'oles' and seemed to make much more muscular use of the local dialectic and specifically generated argot.

There was a general easiness of relations amongst the 'boys' and an ability to be open and expressive which they all commented upon, and which clearly relied on certain characteristics of the language they used.

Will I think it would be easier talking to somebody that you don't have to call 'sir', or you can say, swear in front of like, just act normal in front of, instead of, when you see Clarkey come up the corridor, walk on the other side, 'Watch it, here's Clarkey' (...) I think if you can talk to somebody, like us lot, I could call him a prat, I could call him anythin', y'know what I mean, but we can still talk to each other because, like, you're friends, it's different, you can talk easier to somebody that yer can joke with and everythin'.

All of these practices, whether apparently cruel, or obviously supportive, went to make the group into a cohesive social whole with a frisson which made the 'boys' special. They had real cultural skills - conversation, repartee, quick wits, style, confidence - which were lacking from the 'ear'oles' and decisively marked them out as a force on the cultural landscape. The development of a self conscious sense of being a group and of a kind of solidarity was clear and had identifiable elements.

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'm, 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'm, I just got, two bob off that second year over there', I'd think, 'What a cunt', you know.

[...]

Fred You wouldn't expect one of yer mates to grass on yer either. Like if you was both smoking, say me and Will were smoking in that room, I'd just finished mine, and Simmondsey cum in, and copped him, I wouldn't expect him to say I was smoking as well

[...]

Fred If one of us went home, and you asked, say I asked Will to tell the teacher that I was doing a job, which I do sometimes like. Say, 'Tell him I'm doing a job', he'll say 'O.K.', and he'll tell (...) 'im and I'll be at home really

Will I always say, 'No, I ain't, you know, 'I'm gonna grass you up', like, y'know

[...]

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

[...]

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.



The particular excitement and kuodos of belonging to the 'boys' came from more anti social practices than these. It was these more extreme activities which marked them off most completely, both from the 'ear'oles', and from the school. There was a positive joy in fighting and in talking about fighting and about the tactics of the whole fight situation. It's interesting that many of their important cultural values were expressed through fighting. The solidarity of the group becomes perfectly obvious in the fight situation, the importance of quick, clear and not over-moral thought comes out time and again. Most of all - and there was a kind of bravery in this - the fight puts you at risk and tests your conviction to betray the conventional morality and uphold, with a curious kind of honour, an alternative convention. It was in fighting with its own politics, dangers, scares, strange codes and illicit joys, that one was furthest from the reach of the school, most joyous in your celebration of truly independent and hard-won skills, and most sure of mastery over the 'ear'oles and these of similar tendencies.

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're good enough you beat the geezer. You get him down on the floor and just jump all over his head

[...]

PW (..) after you've had a fight ... How do you feel then?

Spanksey Shaky

Bill Funny feeling, don't you, sort of shaking

Joey -It's all according, if you beat him

Forty feet tall

-Yeah

-You always do

-They might get the police or summat, or a big mob

-No it ain't that

-Can't explain it, you're just shaking, naturally, you know.

[...]

PW How do you feel about equal sides, if you can, you prefer to outnumber?

-Yeah

-Yeah

-Yeah

PW Why's that?

Joey There's no chivalry or nothing, none of this cobbler's 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 the dirtiest methods you can think of, like poking his eyes out or biting his ear and things like this

PW Would you stop and fight knowing you were outnumbered? Because you felt it was important? Or would you usually try and get out?

Spanksey If you was cornered and you had to, like a cat, you know.

Spike I wouldn't run.

Joey It's all accordin' how big the geezer is, if all these was going to get me, I wouldn't run off, but if it was a big load of kids who were older than you like, no messing then, off, straight away

[...]

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

Spanksey 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 an head, but if he's... really something mean towards you, like, whether he fights back or not, you still pail him.

[...]

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

The other main activity amongst the 'boys' which was quite beyond the conventional register, was stealing. Theft was exceptionally widespread both inside and outside school. Again what comes through most strongly is the 'boys' secret and delicious joy in defying authority, celebrating their own values, and most important and confirming both, getting away with it. Theft is clearly

aimed directly against authority - especially if the theft, or what is very closely allied in this sense, vandalism, is against the school - and also an action quite beyond what the 'ear'ole' would even believe possible. That theft also brought extra money was an added, real and concrete advantage - sometimes the apparent initiating course - which fitted in especially with the peculiar needs of the 'boys' for extra cash for smoking and drinking. The 'ear'ole' neither had the need for extra cash, nor the imagination to overcome the conventional morality, nor the quickness and smartness to carry through the deed. Altogether, though in a risky fashion, theft summed up many of the 'boys' values attitudes and most admired kills.

PW What interests me is why you do it (theft), what's enjoyable about it?

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 larf.

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.

[...]

Joey You do anything you can here to, you know, go against them  
-Well I mean, you vandalize books.

Spike Yeah, you smash chairs up, take the screws out of..

Joey Really afterwards, you think, 'Well, stuff me, our old lady payed for that lot out of tax, but at the time you're doing it, you don't think and you don't really care.

PW But do you think of it in the same way as smashing bottles or thieving?

Joey It's opportunity, getting your own back on the teachers when you're caned or something. If you think, if you can get your own back on him you'll do anything you can (...), revenge, sort of thing, getting revenge.

Spike Paper, you nick a lot of paper

Bill Exercise books. Yeah, we had about twelve packets of them,

Eddie Pair of earphones, the other week

Spanksey From school?

Eddie Yeah

[...]

Spanksey We didn't tell anyone about ..., [him breaking into the school and stealing money and goods] Is there anybody here who don't know that, what I just said?

-I didn't know

-I day know

-No

Spanksey We only told, I think we told Joey I think dayn't we?

Will Joey told me

PW How long ago was this?

Spanksey Ooh it'd be about a year ago

Fuzz About a year ago it was

Bill Last year!

PW I mean, you're saying that, it gave you a kick obviously.

Spanksey I ay'n kidding you, it was

Fuzz The fun is planning it all out, and it working out

Spanksey It all worked out brilliantly apart from the nightwatchman. We still done it.

PW And it did give you a kick?

Spanksey Yeah, it was brilliant.

Fred If they had've got copped, it would have given them an even bigger kick

PW I mean, were you worried about getting copped?

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

Fuzz 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, I had on a brown polo neck on, me jeans and fuzz gloves you know and he had all black things on.

Spanksey All Black.

Spanksey Polish on my face

Fuzz No. Laughter 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?

Fuzz Yeah

Spanksey Oh ah. Like this you know. Cause, it's er...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!

Fuzz And I did, really enjoyed it

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

Fuzz And we spent it all up the bleeding Fountain day'n we? Getting pissed down the Old Boat

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

Spanksey Yeah

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

Fuzz Got no fucking money

PW Cos, I mean, you knew the school?



Spanksey 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.

Fred Just like breaking into your own home really, cos nobody's going to come and cop you breaking into your own home.

Essentially we can see the 'boys' culture as a separate and informal domain set over against the school and its formalised and distant logic. This domain was specifically and immediately responsive to their feelings and attitudes. The rationality and importance of living out your meanings within this domain with its distinctive ways of evaluating and acting was just assumed by the 'boys'. It needed no justification or explanation, though to many teachers and 'ear'cles', even its existence was not all that clear. For the 'boys' there was what amounted to a genuine confusion about how it was possible to survive school without its help. This informal domain helped to insulate you from the official definitions of school. It helped you to withdraw trust from the school. The group and its culture was the main focus of, and influence on your identity so that the school became exposed more and more as something it was not sensible to become committed to, or to see in relation to your own development. Exams and academic achievements were not stages in a careful internal advance plotted and aided by the school. Qualifications were just somehow baggage which some people contrived to pick up at school, and which made entry into certain jobs easier, but which in no way changed what you were.

Of course this domain was in no way functionally separate from the school, it developed in close articulation with the structure of the school, and in an intertwined dynamic with staff and other pupils. If this culture was fighting for its terms inside the school, it could establish itself more fully at night. It was interesting that a commercial dance was preferred to the Youth Wing based in the school precisely because it allowed the fullest development of the elements of this culture.

PW You think a commercial dance is better than the Youth Wing, why?

Will There's different people there, there's different people there, than come up here.

[....]

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 (...) 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 might... (...) 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 hardnocks you know.

PW Looking for a fight

Will Yeah

[....]

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 lump 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

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 O.K. 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 [at the Youth Wing in the School] 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 see before

Spike -It 'ad be good then

Will It 'ud 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 get Jules [the Youth Leader] who was attached to the school during the day] walkin' out or summat you know.

Still, the crucial case for us is the school, and the manner in which the 'boys' culture develops in relation to teachers and other groups. Perhaps the most crucial, telling and interesting moment of all is when the informal domain clashes or interacts with the formal one in living instances. Our field work threw up many examples of this particularly during lessons. It was here, most of all, where problems, tensions, discrepancies and crises arose as the two intersected. The particular balance of a class or interaction depended, of course, on the particular nature of the teacher.

PW The staff vary a lot then (...)

Will Well, if you see different teachers comin' along you do different things really

PW How do you mean?

Will Well if you was to see Singh, you just don't care what he's on about, but if it's Clarkey or Peters, not so much Peters, but Clarkey you'd straighten up or summat, or if you hadn't got a tie on, you'd turn around like that.

/laughter/

but er'm, if it's Stewart you just give him a dirty look, I can't stand that prat.

But given this variation, it was possible time and again to see the 'boys' trying to take over a certain situation, or impose some of their meanings, and then retreating under the threat of stern action, or holding a precise but ambiguous balance that allowed honour to be settled. There was no quarter given to a weak master, and elements of their own culture provided a profound common sense map against which to judge what they took as failure in teaching.

[in a discussion on trouble in class]

Eddie Anybody these days who puts up with what he does, they'll be played up for the rest of his life. If you don't show your authority straight away when somebody starts to pick on you, like, they'll keep on all the time, like, all the kids if they know somebody, you can pick on like, or summat, they'll play on him for the rest of their life as long as they know him, they'll keep playing up. You gotta show him that you ain't gonna stand for it in the first place.

Spike It happens with us, like Spratt in the first and second year, I used to be a right cunt I had. I was shit scared of everybody I was, I was a right little wanker, especially him, Spanksey, he used to push me around left, right and centre Spanksey had, (...) Then one day, I'd had enough and, 'cos Spratt was one of the hard boys then, you know, he was a little tufty, and we was in Science, and he got me fucking mad, he kicked me in the fucking back, and everything, so I chased him round and I fucked him, really, I really done him, y'know all his face was smashed up and ever since then, y'know, if you show a bit of authority, show you ain't fucking scared of 'em.

Joey If in Samuels lesson, he just went and dragged somebody outside, went, 'Bang, you got it', and you come back, it.. it, and you think 'Fuck me,

I do want a punch, I won't do the same again'

The 'boys' also had a nuanced recognition of the different tactics used by teachers,

[in a discussion on corporal punishment]

Joey Here's a thing what Mr. Simmond's doin' now, now some weeks back, what was it, we all went down the playing fields, it was the end of the day, and we had these bags of flour and things

/laughter/

Well we were threatened with six like

Spike We were shitting ourselves, I was..

Bill And I was

Joey We got back to school and instead of caning us, he talked to us and sort of made you feel ashamed of what you'd done. Now if he'd've caned us, you'd have got out of his class, and you'd have thought, 'Ah, the old get..we'll do that again now the bastard's caned us.' But now, er'm.., he talks to you and you go out of class, and you can't say nothing against him. You say, 'a bit soft', like, but what can you do, you're stumped

[....]

Spanksey Some teachers try to get down to your level like, and try to be like, you know...like Chapman, he gets us all in the Gym.

Spike He calls him Eddie

Eddie Yeah, I can't stand that, a teacher to call me Eddie

Spanksey He was talking to us, he was goin' 'Bloody' you know, he was saying, 'The Boss', you know Simmondsey.

PW What did you think of that?

Spanksey We thought it was good at the time, you know, now we realise he was only trying to bring us round to his ways, you know what I mean? Split us all up.

Fred Reagon used to come over and sit by me and he used to talk to us. I got really fed up with it one time. I just told him to fuck off. He says, 'Go to the Headmaster', I had four war'n it.?

[....]

Spanksey What gets me about about teachers. When they try and embarrass you in class, like, Fuzz, for instance

Bill In front of all your mates

Spanksey They says to him you know 'I'll get a sand pit for you next week', don't they

/laughter/

Then they started reading my essay out and it was really crap it was

Derek Made it sound worse than it was

Their knowledge of different teaching techniques, and the resources of their own culture allowed the 'boys' to 'ride' the formal, and maintain their own objectives as well as accommodating some of the teacher's. This practice fed directly into many other skills which were being anyway developed by their culture. The 'boys' understood the difference between the formal and the informal often better than their teachers, and certainly understood the techniques for playing one off against another better. Here are the 'boys' talking about their class room strategies. The final example of the boys' taking over the play and making up their own lines is a splendid example of resting the initiative from the teacher. In the actual situation, which was observed by the researcher, the lads took over the class completely and totally replaced the formal with a rancous, violent, imaginary play of their own, interspersed by adverts and jingles, culminating in a sequence of battle sounds and crashes.

PW (...) Just how far can you push the teacher around without them coming right down on you

Joey Really, it's an instinctive thing, really, actually, you always know (...) Mr. Archer you don't play him up 'cos you can have a laugh with him, but you don't have to play up. Er'm, Mr. Bird, he's got a sort of effect about him, like, he'll shout when you're playing up and er'm..we carry on talking when we go in his



lesson, just sit there talking to Bill and as long as you aren't disrupting the rest of the class, he doesn't mind (...).

PW Can you tell when you've gone too far?

Joey You can tell by just looking at 'em, really by what he sez to you, what you can say back.

Spanksey Or when they start getting mad, y'know like this in the face [straining]

Joey Mr. Samuels, his neck gus all red, it's his neck

Fuzz His neck, not his face, just about that far [indicating a point on his neck]

[...]

PW I mean when you say you can 'talk' to somebody are you really talking seriously or are you just playing them along a bit.

-Playing along

-Playing along, trying to get on the good side

-That's it, you're just taking the piss out of them

[....]

PW I mean how much is it just to keep the peace when you think things are really going to blow up

Joey Well, that's it, that's the point sometimes, people like Samuels, Samuels, you never really consider blassing him, 'cos you carry on and it gets even better, he gus really berserk, he went and fetched Clark one day day'n he, (...) but people like Sampson

Spike Keep 'im talking, pacify him, sort of, now and again, show interest.

PW (...) You started off reading the play properly, and then you started putting in your own words

/laughter/

Bill There's a clump of blasted bushes in the way, Pete went, 'I can't see, there's a clump of bl, bastard bushes in the way

PW Then you went on to whole lines that weren't in the book

Eddie Yea, 'I bought a new sink from the supermarket'

/laughter/

Bill And I said summat like, 'Did you, how much did it cost? (...)

Joey He knows he can't stop us

Fuzz Start reading 'em all wrong.

As a footnote to our description of the existence and development of this culture in the school, it is clear that the Raising of the School Leaving age in 1972 has both further encouraged the development of such cultures in school, and has dramatically exposed them in terms of a 'new problem'. The larger numbers of kids going on to the fifth, the greater length of time in which the cultural trajectory of the counter-group can continue, the added burden upon already hard pressed schools, the growing physical and social confidence of the lads, all aid the growth and strengthening of the counter school culture. That an important element of this culture had always been opposition to authority, was proven and dramatized by the response of the lads to this extra year. They were, to say the least, the 'reluctant fifth'. In effect it was a compulsory extra year - it was widely presented as such by teachers - and the coercion of the state and its various agents were used to enforce it. It is hardly surprising then, that given their previous proclivities, the 'boys' should tune into this objective dimension of RSIA and see in it further proof of the arbitrary power of the school, and of the need for redoubled efforts to oppose it at the level of cultural practice. In short RSIA was a red flag to a bull in what was already seen as a bullring. More generally, we would argue that it is a mistake to see problems associated with RSIA in an isolated way. The problems did not suddenly appear in the new fifth, nor are they simply associated with the greater age of its members or the specialness of that one-off RSIA group. They are a dramatic surfacing in the

form of 'a crisis' of a cultural configuration which has long been part of the internal landscape of the school. As future years adjust to the notion of five years at school, and are not presented - late on - with what seems to be a sudden and arbitrary decision, we may expect the 'problems' to subside somewhat. When we reach this point, however, we should not assume that the lessening in acuteness of 'the problem' changes, in any way, the underlying cultural processes of which they were, at one juncture, a dramatic expression.

More generally, we may add a footnote to our depiction of this culture concerning more organizational features of education. It is of some concern to educationalists that the generation of a school counter culture should be placed with respect to how the school is organized educationally (5). It has been widely claimed that streaming, traditional subject based curriculum planning, exams and general achievement orientation, is likely to be conducive to the emergence of anti-school or semi-delinquent groups.

Our small case study work cannot answer properly to the comparative dimensions of this problem, and the situation is further confused for us by the transitional nature of the school in which our 'main' case study was conducted (3). There are advantages, however, in considering a changing situation in depth. It is quite clear that oppositional groups had emerged under streaming by the end of their third year. However, after mixed ability grouping was introduced at the beginning of the fourth year, the counter-school groups developed and hardened in quite as strident a fashion as may have been expected under streaming. Furthermore, our work suggests that 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 across a wide range of activities. Their ability, if not their capacity

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from high forms in the days of streaming. They had simply decided that, for them and at that stage, the life of the 'boys' 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. Where the traditional culture of the 'ghetto' form is enlivened by the yeast of a really quick wit, or a really able strategist of resistance, then it may become something much more dynamic and - to the school at any rate - more fearsome. And those verging towards the anti-school perspective were, if anything, aided in their trajectory by the new forms of mixed ability groupings, topic centred teaching, student centred teaching and the rest. There was 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. It was relatively easy for those so committed to take advantage of this confusion, either to 'skive off' altogether, or to attend 'fun' classes they had no business at. Either way, organizational features of the new more open and permissive regime lent themselves to exploitation by a counter-culture devoted to winning 'space' from the formal institution.

The evidence on this is, of course, equivocal and our case study work cannot present a definitive position on these issues. It does, however, open the question - especially in the light of what we say about basic class cultural processes later - of whether the particular organizational form of the school is, anyway, the most fundamental determinant of its internal social system.

Having understood the central importance of the 'boys' culture, its relation to school and to other groups, for the working class non-academic boy, it becomes possible to make much more sense both of how official communications were received and how the non-academic individual made his actual job choice. All official communications about careers and work were importantly filtered through the group. By and large what might be termed as the denoted (6) message from teachers and careers officers was most heavily filtered. This was the manifest content of particular communications concerning either the practical details of specific jobs, or general principles about the best form of approach to work. Unless an individual had already decided to do a certain specific job, information about it was simply not taken in. It was certainly not true that new information was fed into rational grid system which matched job profile with ability profile, or life style/job/ambition profile. If things were remembered, they were picked up by some highly selective living principle of the counter cultural school group. What is remembered after career's films and careers talks is certainly not what the producers hope to imprint on, what they seem so often to assume are eager, young minds.

[on Careers films]

Perc I wonder why there's never kids like us in films, see what their attitude is to it? What they're like and what we're like.

PW Well, what sort of kids are they in the films?

Fuzz All ear'oles

Perc All goody goodies

Will No, you can tell they've been told what to say. They're probably at some acting school or summat y'know and the opportunity to do this job - Film Careers for other kids, and you've gotta say this, wait for your cue, wait till he's finished his lines.

PW I mean how can you tell that?

Will Well, they're just standing there, seem to be just waiting for 'im to say it, then...  
[...]

Spanksey Another thing I think they try to con you in to. They were saying to be a toolmaker they were saying, 'Now here's a lucky one, he's going into toolmaking without no qualifications'. The next minute, 'Now here's another lucky 'un, he's another whose gone into toolmaking without no qualifications', I think they're all trying to get you in there.

PW How about the speaker who came from the College of Education?

Fred They try to put you off work...Joey, he says to him, 'Do you want to be a painter and decorator, painting a wall, you can get any silly cunt to paint a wall', or, 'Do you want to do the decorative pieces, sign writing'.

Spanksey Got to be someone in society who stops on a wall... I wanted to get up and say to him, 'There's got to be some silly cunt who stops on a wall.'

[in a discussion on a film about farming in the Careers Class]

Fuzz (2) You see all these films on there, right! They've all got some like stupid kid on, 'Oh yes, I'd like to do this,' 'Oh, it's my turn, it's my turn to go and get the eggs.'

Spike 'Oh, it's my turn'

Joey You ain't got a kid like, whose getting pissed up (...), nothing like that

Will Yes, but that film was old wasn't it. Then he might have been a right rogue like, they d'aint have long hair then did they, and they was disciplined more, warn't they?

Information that was given to the kids concerning what might be thought of as an ideology of getting a job, and of getting on in a job, was either blocked, interpreted into unrecognizable forms,



or simply inverted.

[in a discussion on Career's sessions]

Spanksey After a bit you tek no notice of him, he sez the same thing over and over again, you know what I mean?

Joey We're always too busy fucking picking your nose, or flicking paper, we just don't listen to him.

[...]

Spanksey He makes the same points all the time.

Fuzz He's always on about if you go for a job, you've got to do this, you've got to do that, I've done it. You don't have to do none of that. Just go to a place, ask for the man in charge, nothing like what he says.

Joey Its ridiculous

PW What do you mean, in terms of what qualifications you may need?

Fuzz Qualifications and everything, you don't you just ask for a job and they give you the job.

[...]

PW (...) They were on about how good it was to work hard and try to get on (...)

Will 'Tis when you're older, y'know, if you can't cope with the job, but...like, too hard for yer, and wanna sit down and just tell other blokes..when you're younger ....'cos the pay gus down once you go up with some jobs.

Some meanings concerning work did get through these cultural processes and these were what might be called the connoted (6) messages, or latent information. Often it was not intended to transmit this information. It concerned such things as the general ambience of working life; a fascination with processes and machines; the apparent timelessness and inevitability of industrial organisation; the atomised competitive nature of the world of work around the corner; the hardness and givenness of industrial work which just seems to be in the nature of things; the inevitability of having to get an unrewarding job. These meanings did penetrate over the long term, and re-inforced certain perspectives which were

already forming in the group about the world of work. It was not meant to be part, and was not received as part, of the general model which was presented for a rational career's choice. It came from the sheer exposure to a vast number of films where working class people were seen working; from the apparently bewildering variety of specific forms of jobs available; from film of machinery moving shot with a cameraman's instinct for the compulsive; from the teacher's impatience, from his implied or real flashes of departure from the impartial professional consultants line - 'it's a hard world that doesn't owe you a living and you'll soon be on your own in it, so wake up and find a job!

Actual job choice for such individuals was only rarely based on the materials supplied by the agencies, although they did act, sometimes, as useful intermediaries. Indeed the most important finding of the research in relation to job choice is that it may well be confusing and mystifying to pose the entry of unqualified working class kids into industry as a question of particular job choices. Considered just in one quantum of time - the last months of school - individual job choice does indeed seem random and unenlightened by any rational techniques or means/ends schemes. This is the main finding of previous work on the school/work transition (7), a finding which we accept and have replicated ourselves. However, if one takes a longer time span, and looks not so much at individual job choice but more at basic ground shifts in the whole pattern of what is expected from a working life, and what sort of work fits in with a whole constellation of attitudes, practices, activities and values which are developing in the much broader sweep of the social group and its culture, then one finds a more intelligible pattern. To start with, the division between the 'boys'/'ear'ole' cultures is also a division between different kinds of future, different kinds of gratification, and different

kinds of job that are relevant to these things. These differences, moreover, are not random or unconnected. On the one hand they arise systematically from intra school group oppositions, and on the other hand, they relate to quite distinct job groupings in the post school situation. The 'ear'oles/'boys' division becomes the skilled/unskilled and white collar/blue collar division. This continuity between specifically school based informal social groupings, and occupational groupings outside the school is of profound significance for us. The 'boys' themselves could transpose the divisions of the internal cultural landscape of the school onto the future, and onto the world of work outside, with considerable clarity.

[in a discussion on 'ear'oles]

Joey

(...) We wanna live for now, wanna live while we're young, want money to go out with, wanna go with women now, wanna have cars now, and er'm think about five, ten, fifteen years time when it comes, but other people, say people like the 'ear'oles', they're getting their exams, they're working, having no social life, having no fun, and they're waiting for fifteen years time when they're people, when they've got married and things like that. I think that's the difference. We are thinking about now, and having a larf now, and they're thinking about the future and the time that'll be best for 'em.

[...]

Joey

I think they're (the 'ear'oles') the ones that have got the proper view of life, they're the ones that abide by the rules. They're the civil servant types, they'll have 'ouses and everything before us (...) They'll be the toffs, I'll say they'll be the civil servants, toffs, and we'll be the brickies and things like that.

Spanksey

I think that we ..., more or less, we're the ones that do the hard grafting but not them, they'll be the office workers. (...) I ain't got no ambitions, I do wanna have ... I just want to have a nice wage, that 'ud just see me through.

[...]

Joey

I ain't say it's wise, I say it's better for us, people the likes of us, we've tasted, we've tasted, not the good life, we've tasted, you know, the social life that you'd have when you're older. I think we just like it too much, I know I do anyway, I don't think you can cut yourself off from it now and do an apprenticeship and all that ... and not have much bread.

Not only the opposition between these two main groups, but the internal development of the 'boys' culture provides located and deeply influential guides for the choice of final job. For the individual's affiliation with the non-conformist group carries with it a whole range of changes in his attitudes and perspectives and these changes also supply over time a more or less consistent view of what sort of people he wants to end up working with, and what sort of situation is going to allow the fullest expression for his developing cultural skills. The located 'boys' culture supplies a set of 'unofficial' criteria by which to judge, not individual jobs or the intrinsic joys of particular kinds of work - indeed it is already assumed that all work is more or less hard and unrewarding - but generally what kind of working situation is going to be most relevant to the individual. It will have to be work where he can be open about his desires, his sexual feelings, his liking for 'booze' and his aim to 'skive off' as much as is reasonably possible. It will have to be a place where people can be trusted and will not 'creep off' to tell the boss about 'foreigners' or 'knicking stuff' - precisely where there were the fewest 'ear'oles'. Indeed it would have to be work where there was a boss, a 'them and us', which always carried with it the danger of treacherous intermediaries - the landscape would need to be familiar in this sense. The experience of the division 'ear'ole/'lads' in school is one of the most basic preparations for the still ubiquitous feeling in the working class proper that there is a 'them' and an 'us'. It amounts to a cultural awareness of systematic differences in social attitudes

and manners, and of perceived differences in power. The 'us' is felt to be relatively weaker in power terms, but also somehow more approachable, social and in the end, more human. One of the really crucial things about the 'us' which the 'boys' wanted to be part of was that they were in work where the self could be separated from the work task, and value given to people for things other than their work performance - the celebration of those independent qualities which precisely the 'ear'oles' did not have. Generally, the future work situation would have to be one where people were not 'cissies' and could handle themselves, where 'pen-pushing' is locked down on in favour of really 'doing things'. It would have to be a situation where you could speak up for yourself, and where you would not be expected to be subservient. The particular job would have to pay good money fairly quickly and offer the possibility of 'fiddles' and 'perks' to support already acquired smoking and drinking habits. Work would have to be a place, most basically, where people were 'alright' and with whom a general culture identity could be shared. It is this human face of work, much more than its intrinsic or technical nature, which confronts the lad as the crucial dimension of his future. In the end it was recognised that it was specifically the cultural diversion that made any job bearable.

[on the imminent prospect of work]

Will I'm just dreading the first day like. Y'know, who to get up with, an er'm, whose the ear'oles, who'll tell the gaffer.

[...]

Joey (...) you can always make it enjoyable. It's only you what makes a job unpleasant, .. I mean if you're cleaning sewers out, you can have your moments like. Not every job's enjoyable, I should off think. Nobody's got a job they like unless they're a comedian or something, but er'm ..., no job's enjoyable 'cos of the fact that you've got to get up in the morning and go out when you could stop in bed. I think every job's got, has a degree of unpleasantness, but it's up to you to make, ... to push that unpleasantness aside and make it as good and as pleasant as possible.

Not only does the 'boys' culture provide these and many more criteria for the kind of job which is relevant to them, but it also possesses internal mechanisms - the 'kidding', the 'piestake' the 'larf' - to enforce a certain view of what work is appropriate, what the rewards are, and how the individual is likely to be related to his work.

[in a discussion on what jobs they wanted]

Eddie I wanna be a Jeweller

PW A what?

/laughter/

Eddie A Jeweller (...)

PW I dunno, what's the joke. What's funny about a Jeweller

/laughter/

-he's a cunt

-he's a piestaker

-'is, he, he'd knock half of the Jewels he would

He wants to be a diamond setter in six months

He'd put one in a ring and six in his pocket

Do you know anything about jewellery?

No

/laughter/

When you go into a job, you ain't gotta know nothin' about it, have yer, they learn yer, learn yer as you go along.... What do you know about bricklaying?

Ay?

What do you know about brick laying?

I'm not gonna be a bricklayer

/laughter/

Oh, well, You don't know anythin' about it.



Spanksey I don't wanna  
 Eddie What do you know about Civil Engineering, you doe'  
 know nothin'  
 Spike I don't need to know anything  
 Eddie Well I don't need to know anything about Jewellery  
 Joey You don't think you're gonna go straight on to,  
 fucking, twenty quid a week  
 Eddie I dare say I won't  
 Joey That's what you told me down the Anchor, 'Twenty  
 three pounds a week' [very derisive tone]  
 Eddie It's about sixteen quid a week to start.  
 Joey That's a load of bollocks as well.

In all these ways then, the 'boys' culture provided criteria for the kind of work the lad is destined for - basically manual and semi-skilled work. Because these criteria arise from a culture, and because that school based culture also has profound similarities and continuities with the culture of the work place, there is also the further result that once the kids get on to the factory floor, they recognize a great deal: they feel at home. They've had experience of work anyway very often through part-time jobs, and they are immediately familiar with many of the shop floor practices - defeating boredom, time wasting, heavy and physical humour, petty theft, 'fiddling', 'handling yourself'. The paper enclosed with this report (8) sets out some of our findings on the 'culture of the shop floor'. We do not set this work out fully here since we are mainly concerned with the transition kids undergo from the school frame of reference to the work frame of reference, and, as we have seen, the school is actually the main site of this change for the lads we were interested in. Furthermore it should be remembered that the bulk of our research time, as we set it out to the SSRC, was scheduled for school rather than work (eighteen months to six months). The point here is to emphasize that there were direct

and basic continuities between the anti-school culture and the shop floor culture, which smoothed the passage which the lads had already decided to embark upon. There was no 'shock', of anything the proportions we had imagined, when the lad reached the factory; rather there was recognition.

Another aspect which smoothed the entry of the lads into the working situation was the response of their employers to what they understood of the 'boys' culture already generated at the school. The reverse side of the 'them' and 'us' attitude of the 'boys' was an acceptance by them of prior authority relations. Although directly and apparently geared to make some cultural interest and capital out of an unpleasant situation, it also accomplished a recognition of, and an accommodation to, the facts of power and hierarchy. In the moment of the establishment of a cultural opposition, was the yielding of a hope for direct, or quasi-political, challenge. The 'them' and 'us' philosophy was simultaneously a rescue and confirmation of the direct, the human and the social, and a giving up - at any conscious level - of claims to control the under-workings of these things: the real power relationships (9) This fact is of central importance in understanding the peculiar density and richness, as well as the limitedness and frequent short-sightedness, of counter-school and shop floor culture.

Now curiously enough those conformist lads who entered the factory unaided by cultural supports, diversions, and typical, habituated patterns of interpretation, could be identified by those in authority as more threatening and less willing to accept the established status quo. For these lads still believed, as it were, the rubric of equality, advance through merit and individualism which the school, in its anodyne way had more or less unproblematically

passed on to him. Thus, although there was no surface opposition, no insolent style to enrage the conventional onlooker, there was also no secret pact, made in the reflex moment of an oppositional style, to accept a timeless authority structure: a timeless 'us' and 'them'. Consequently, these kids were more likely to expect real satisfaction from their work; to expect the possibility of advance through hard work; to expect authority relations, in the end to reflect only differences in competence. All these expectations, coupled frequently with a real unhappiness in the individual unrelieved by a social diversion, made the conformist lad very irksome and 'hard to deal with.' In manual and semi-skilled jobs, then, those in authority often actively preferred 'the boys' type to the 'con' role type. Underneath the 'roughness' of the 'boys' was a realistic assessment of their position, an ability to get on with others to make the day and production pass, and a lack of 'pushiness' about their job and their future in it. Finally, the 'boys' were more likeable because they had 'something to say for themselves', and would 'stand up for themselves', but only in a restricted mode which fell short of one of the 'us' wanting to join the 'them'. It was precisely this perilous ground upon which the conformist often unwittingly and unhappily stood. For one of the 'boys', not only was the shop floor more familiar than he might have expected, but he was also welcomed and accepted by his new superiors in such a way that seemed to allow for the expression of his own personality where the school had been precisely trying to block it - this was an initial confirming response which further marked up the transition from school as an escape from school.

What are the implications of all this for the so-called 'transition from school to work' of working class unqualified school leavers? Well, in the first instance the initial hypotheses of the research programme were amply substantiated. A) The informal culture of the 'boys' and its located sources of knowledge and information had a more decisive effect on their job choice than did official sources of information. B) That such processes of influence could be understood better from a subjective meaning perspective than from more conventional institutional perspectives. We are now in a position, however, to put forward much more detailed conclusions and suggestions. Firstly, the most profound transition these lads make is not the physical passage from school into work, it is their experiential entry into the distinctive non-conformist group and its culture within the school, and this transition may occur anywhere between the second and fifth years. Secondly, in relation to the 'basic cultural ground shift, and their development of a wholesale and comprehensive view of what is expected from life, particular job choice does not matter too much. Indeed, we may see that with respect to the criteria which this located culture throws up, most manual and semi-skilled jobs are the same and it would be a waste of time to use the provided, middle class grids across them to find material differences. As far as their actual work content is concerned, all these jobs may be expected to be monotonous and arduous, so what matters every time is money and the possibilities of a cultural involvement and diversion. Although the career's programme imbues the 'boys' with something of the sense of the range of jobs and the importance of choosing between them, it's clear that beneath

the surface the power of the cultural process we are pointing to, takes hold. Even if it's not explicitly verbalized, from the way many of the kids actually get jobs, and from their calm expectation that their jobs will change a lot, they do not basically make much differentiation between jobs - its all labour.

[In a discussion on jobs]

Spike I got a job on Thursday. What day's it today?  
er'm..Monday. A bloke come to have our house  
valued, bloke come down to have our house  
valued. I thought I'd dropped in about a job and  
he says, 'Yeah, come up, last night, I had to go  
up last night.

PW What is it?

Spike Insurance Broker, like, doing odd jobs as well.  
(...) then I go on to, you know, selling the  
houses. I started already, I've loaded some  
posters for the window. It's pretty good.  
Yeah, I got a trade behind me now.

[...]

Perc I was with my mate, John's brother, I went with 'im  
to er, .. he wanted a job. Well John's sister's  
boyfriend got a job at this place, and he sez to  
Allan, he sez, 'Go down there, and they might give  
you a job there', and he went down, and they sez,  
'You're too old for training, 'cos he's twenty  
now, he sez to Allan, he sez, 'Who's that out  
there', and he sez 'one of my mates', he sez,  
'does he wanna job' and he sez 'I dunno'. He  
sez er'm, 'Ask him'. He comes out, I went back  
in and he told me about it and he sez, 'Come  
back before you leave if you want it.'

What you doing?

Perc Carpentry, Joining. And a month ago I went back and,  
well, not a month ago, a few weeks ago, and I seen him.

PW Well, that was a complete accident really. I mean  
had you been thinking of joinery?

Perc Well, you've only got to go and see me woodwork,  
I've had it, I ain't done woodwork for years.

[In a discussion of their future]

Eddie I don't think any of us'll have one job and then stick  
to it, none of us. We'll swap around.

Spike It just shows in your part-time jobs don't it,  
don't stick to a part-time job.

Thirdly, the option of affiliation with a school-counter  
cultural group, and a processing of opportunities through the  
criteria thrown up by this culture, is a more sensible, richer  
and saner form of adaption to an unpleasant, unrewarding and  
finally oppressed working situation, than a more considered  
task-orientated form of adaption which would have exposed in the  
bleakest possible manner the real bankruptcy of the actual jobs  
available. For the working class as a whole still does face harsh  
conditions, and the performance of work which by no stretch of the  
imagination could be thought of as rewarding. To face such work  
unrelieved by a cultural involvement or diversion, and armed only  
with middle class criteria which merely confirm the awfulness of  
the situation, would certainly not have been a strategy for survival.

Fourthly, it is clear that these lads voluntarily choose to  
enter the factory gate, at this age anyway, especially as they are  
aided by their dislike, and tumble out, of school. Just as the  
'boys' school culture was not a reflex of defeat, so the entry into  
the lower grades of factory work is by no means perceived as defeat,  
failure or second best. This fact, as we discuss in a moment, is of  
the fullest significance for us if we wish to study and understand  
forms of social stability.

Perhaps surprisingly, then, this suggests that there is no particular 'problem'  
as it is conventionally defined - in the transition of the majority of  
working class kids without paper qualifications into work. That is



providing the jobs are available which is much more questionable now. If jobs are available, it is much more likely to be the socially isolated or conformist working class lads with some, though not particularly high, paper qualifications who experience grave doubts and problems. They may be asked to face the rigours of the factory floor and relatively unskilled work without the compensations of a cultural involvement. It is here that we may find the 'problems' of the 'transition from school to work'.

The recession has gathered very quickly recently and has severely reduced the number of jobs open to school leavers. Of the most recent groups of school leavers in the Smethwick area nearly 45% are still unemployed at the time of writing. Although unemployment was not a problem for the lads in our case study work, we can project their experience and make a few comments on the current situation. It is likely to be the lads without, or with low, qualifications who will suffer most during recession. This, of course, is likely to include the 'boys'. In the same way that PSLI, we argued, had a peculiar function in exposing the oppositional dimension of what had been a more submerged school culture before, so we may expect unemployment, and the freedom and collectivity of the streets, to further encourage and expose this culture, especially in its oppositional mode. This is to say that substantial unemployment may bring about the further disaffection of segments of the young and exacerbate potentially explosive social divisions. Such developments would add a new dimension to the traditional 'problems' of career guidance and placement.

On the other hand, the 'boys' element in the pool of the unqualified, unemployed may be smaller than one might expect. This is because of the semi-autonomous nature of their culture, the breadth of its contact with the working class culture proper, and its existing informal routes for

finding jobs, may stand its members in particularly good stead at this time. It is the 'boys' with their 'cheek', contacts, and flexibility who will have secured the streets and small businesses for all available jobs. For them, it would be a failure - it would prove they were not 'handy' and independent - to be out of work. They did not like to admit that they could not, 'look after ourselves'. It may well be the more isolated individuals, or the conformist individuals, with low or no paper qualifications, who are most severely at risk during recession. These may be the people who are let down by the formal agencies, and for whom there is no informal safety net. Whether or not the social 'problem' of unemployed, oppositional, non-conformist groups surfaces in any noticeable form depends really on the degree and pattern of unemployment in the future (10)

For the Career's Service itself, both in and out of school, the results of this research may seem excessively negative, and to yield little in the way of concrete recommendations for the practice of their work. Certainly this research suggests that it is basic cultural processes rather than official guidance which most importantly determine job choice amongst large sections of the unqualified. On the other hand, it can only help in the long run, if those concerned with careers work have a greater appreciation of the real processes involved in the working class lad's preparation for work. At least, it might be possible to avoid obscuring their presence by the imposition of an inappropriate middle class grid of ends/means and functional rationality.

It might also be possible to intervene and aid these real processes at certain points. Certainly from the personal counselling point of view, it is surely useful to understand something of the real cultural processes you are seeing the result of. If direct help and advice is frequently impossible, at least it is an advance to understand and sympathize. Furthermore, the cultural perspective might allow the counsellor to identify potential problem cases before they are actually suffering at work. The two obvious cases here are social isolates, and the more conformist lads, who might be heading, through lack of qualifications or lack of choice, to the factory floor. These lads are most truly in the worst of all worlds.

Nor should we forget that, although the agencies seem relatively unsuccessful in influencing decisions about type of work, they certainly play a useful role in providing information about jobs, and in putting the individual in contact with the firm, once his basic decision has been made. Furthermore, there are limited strategies open to careers teachers which might increase the relevant knowledge kids have of their future working situation - and so match up their own feelings and type of cultural involvement with different working situations. We're thinking here of work's visits, and work's experience courses - by far the most successful elements of career's programme we saw as far as the 'boys' were concerned.

On the other hand, those involved with careers may feel some uncertainty about aiding the real processes of job selection in the located culture of the school, since this might seem to accept and further stabilize the status quo. We must not forget that an important determinant of the 'boys' behaviour and culture is a negative - and often more accurate than the teacher's - assessment of what the school and working situation holds for them. It is precisely because

of the lack of intrinsic interest here, that extrinsic compensations are sought. A systematic institutional support of cultural practices based on such perceptions runs the risk of further endorsing the unequal and class-structured arrangements of our society which filters the kind of opportunities and jobs open to working class, un - or low - qualified youngsters.

Perhaps the best course is to keep a sympathetic, understanding, helping eye on the real cultured processes at play, whilst also attempting to change the larger structures - in society at the largest scale down to the school at the smallest - to which those processes are, at bottom, a response. Of course, this is to push our analysis further than its stated theoretical and methodological range. The precise position adopted by the teacher or careers officer must depend on his own analysis. We have been mostly concerned to depict and present certain cultural processes and subjective orientations in the school, and to show their effect upon, and inter-relation with, occupational choice. It was not part of our brief to consider the most basic structural determinants of these processes: why, below the immediate experiential level, the anti-school culture develops in the first place, and why some kids feel the need to differentiate themselves from the Institution. It is in answering this question that the concerned individual will begin to work out a long term strategy for helping these kids. For our part, we believe that this study can be seen in the larger perspective of the generation of a class culture.

This is obviously more interpretative and speculative, and is beyond our original terms of reference, but we believe that the processes we have analysed can be most productively seen in the context of the regeneration of a class culture. Our work would suggest that one would most certainly expect to find oppositional groups in all kinds of schools, and our study stresses precisely the point that one must not overlook the level of the school and its specific practices and cultural forms in looking at either education or society, in the more general context. However, it also seems clear that where that school is working class, and where the oppositional group has widespread contrasts with the general and locating working class culture of the neighbourhood and work place then the formation of the counter-school group has special significance : class significance. It rests, at bottom, on a form of identification by the kids - in a specifically cultural mode - of the real conditions which face them. At some basic level the 'boys' assess the possibilities associated with these conditions and eventually close down that range associated with conventional formal advance with the playing of the Institutional game and its prescribed aims. Instead they further open up and explore upon conditions set by the previous closure that range of possibilities associated with a degree of independence, social collectivity, and the celebration of informal, direct, immediate experience. Nor is the conventional range of possibilities closed off simply because they are unobtainable through lack of ability. Many really able boys choose to ignore them. This suggests they are rejecting, at some level, the limited final advantages of a successful negotiation of these possibilities. They make an assessment, in some way, of the validity, number and length of the paths which are apparently offered upwards by the dominant

interpretative and based on a form of ideal-typical analysis not introduced in the main text - can be understood as a kind of self election to a future larger class membership: that of the middle and lower, or 'rough' working class. Now the conformist lads, the 'ear'oles'. accept that the formal possibilities laid down for them at school, and via the Careers Service, at work, are likely to yield the fullest advantages in the long run. In very simplistic terms, they accept what they perceive as the organisational forms and routes laid down by the dominant society and submit themselves - without that large reserved area of independence: the culture of the 'boys' - to its processes. This can be seen as a self-election to the 'respectable', upwardly mobile faction of the working class.

The argument would be, then, that for the 'boys' the school counter culture acts as a vital preparation ground for entry in to the working class culture, proper, of the shop floor. In this sense both cultures share some of the same determinants: the common impulse is to develop strategies for dealing with boredom, alienation and lack of control. The school, however, is special in that it is part of the apparatus of the state, and in the widest sense, of its function of social control. Just as it is possible to link the school counter-culture with the larger informal culture of the working class, so it is possible in a parallel way to link the school with larger, formal, aspects of the State. The modern, welfare, social democratic state has massively intervened in educational processes to give what it presents as greater chances to the underprivileged (11). Though we must be pessimistic about the extent to which there interventions have been successful in their own aims or about whether these aims were anyway entirely unambiguous, it would be idle to assume that they have had no effect. One of the



really distinctive differences between the school and the shop floor situation is precisely the state-protected nature of the former. PSA and the often sincere aims of educationalists, all create more protected space in the school than is possible in the factory: at one real level the school is there to help kids such as these we have been studying. However, the nature of this 'help' is far from obvious and seems to have produced some - for the administrator - unintended effects. Instead of bringing these kids into the safe camp of conformism and progress in the dominant mode, the altruistic and anodyne aspects of the school have been re-interpreted, and claimed by the located class culture. It is hard to believe that working class kids are not very much more developed now, and that PSA, after the initial violent fluctuations, will produce youngsters who are more mature and confident upon leaving. The direction and meaning of this greater maturity, is, however, far from settled. Instead of feeding into the conventionally approved pool of qualities and feelings, it is quite possible that the direction of these changes is towards strengthening a more informal, partly oppositional, class culture. The more developed abilities, and sharper minds, of the new school leavers may well be in the line of particular working class attributes and cultural skills. In this sense we may see the school 'boys' culture, not only as a preparation for the shop floor, but as a - be it minor - creative feed for the culture of the shop floor. The school is supplying cultural members, who - thanks to the State - have had a prolonged and protected period to develop aspects of their identity and culture, which are in the same mode as those of the shop floor, but, in certain aspects, taken to a point of greater accomplishment.

With respect to what we have called the self-election to a class culture, what is surprising is the voluntary and celebratory

nature of this choice. The recognition of class, and of identity with that class, is not a question of defeat, coercion or resignation, neither is it simply the result of a managed, machiavellian, ideological process of legitimization. It is a question, in part at any rate and at this age, of an affiliation which is seen as Joyous, creative and attractive. This fact is of enormous importance to us in understanding the true complexity of social control: there is an element of self-damnation in the acceptance of subordinate roles. It also allows us to begin to understand the astonishing durability of the existing social relations of our society.

This is not to say that the working class culture, as a whole is one of celebration. This would be absurd. The culture remains, in essence, a creative attempt to make the best of hard and brutalizing conditions. On the other hand, it is clear that the culture is not all of a piece, and that there are nodal points of celebration and strength, as well as other points of despair, weakness, atrophy and knashed domination. We would argue that the class culture, as it is bound up with the working class kids' tumble out of the state school, and at a moment before he takes on the grinding responsibility of wife, family and home, is precisely such a moment of strength and regeneration. If this is the apogee of the culture, however, the nadir might be expected not long after.

Our qualitative pilot work throws up a number of topics for future research.

(A) The identification, over larger numbers, of conformist and non-conformist groups in school, and the attempt to see if it is possible to plot their job choice and future development with parameters derived from this study.

(B) The planning and implementation of careers and counselling work more appropriate to non-conformist groups in the school, and cognizant of the social problems of conformists, or social isolates, without paper qualification.

(C) Case studies of lads reaching their early twenties, marriage and responsibility from non-conformist backgrounds. We would predict this as a period of crisis, of possible return to state education, of probable involvement in Union affairs.

(D) Analytic work on the role of the State in Education and its relation to the individual school and its social landscape.

(E) Further work on the nature of working class culture, especially as it is manifested on the shop floor, and how it is related to school cultures.

(F) Investigation of ways in which the oppositional dimension of school and work culture might be understood, or harnessed, at a more political and positive level.

The results of this study are being disseminated as widely as possible. A residential session has been organised by Warley Metropolitan Borough (in whose area the research was conducted) for Careers teachers

from forty four schools and for the careers officers of Warley to hear the results of this work. They have all been circulated with copies of the paper, 'How working class kids get working class jobs.' Dr. Willis has spoken, or is to speak, to several Education Departments, including those of Birmingham, Bristol and East Anglia Universities, and to the City of Birmingham Education College. A number of articles have been completed and will be sent to appropriate journals and two books are in preparation. Efforts are being made to ensure that those concerned with careers problems at the Schools Council, Careers Research and Advisory Centres, the Department of Education and Science, and other governmental bodies, receive copies of this report.

Notes

- (1) See, Pop Music and Youth Groups, unpublished Ph.D., Birmingham University; 'Sub-Cultural Meaning of the Motor-bike', in WPCS No.2, 'The Cultural Meaning of Drug Use', in WPCS No. 7 & 8; 'The Expressive Style of a Motorbike Subculture', in ed. J.Benthall, The Body as a Medium of Expression, Penguin, 1974.
- (2) This literature was reviewed in detail in our application. These are the most significant texts: G. Jahoda, 'Job attitudes and Job Choice among Secondary Modern School Leavers', Occ. Psychol., 26, 1952; P. Jackson and D. Marsden Education and the Working Class, R.K.F., 1962; M.F. Carter, Into Work, Penguin, 1969; K. Roberts From School to Work: a Study of the Y.E.S., David and Charles, 1970; Schools Council, Young School Leavers, H.M.S.O. 1968; Albermarle Report, The Youth Service in England and Wales, H.M.S.O., 1960; Newson Report, Half Our Future, H.M.S.C.; E. Ginzberg, Career Guidance: Who needs it Who Provides it, Who can Improve it? McGraw-Hill, 1971; S.R. Parker, Work and Leisure, Paladin, 1971; W.P.C. Mills, The Transition from School to Industry; Concerning Boys from a Secondary Modern School in Coventry, M.A. Thesis, U. Birmingham, 1959; H.M.S.O., Careers Education in Secondary Schools, Education Survey 18, DES, 73.
- (3) When we began our field work in April 72 this school was designated as a single sex, non-selective, Secondary Modern School. In September 1974, just after the completion of our school-based field work, it was redesignated as a single sex Comprehensive School as part of the general re-organisation of Secondary education in Warley. The school itself change quite considerably between these two dates.



New buildings were added, streaming was replaced by mixed ability groupings, a resources centre was introduced and experiments were made with team teaching and curriculum development programmes. This period also saw the introduction of the Raising of the School Leaving Age, and the implementation of a whole range of new 'option courses' to cope with the enlarged 5th year. Our period of field work, now, therefore, change from a traditional style Secondary Modern School to something like a modern Comprehensive School with its wide range of courses and more open, child and topic centred, teaching methods. Furthermore our 'main' case study group was drawn from the RLA year which experienced the compulsory 5th year for the first time. In some ways it was unfortunate that our case study work co-incided with this period of instability and change, and it makes it harder to generalise from our study. On the other hand, it is precisely this sort of change which is typical of our educational system at the moment, and as we suggest later, there is good reason to believe that certain of the basic processes we identified will be relatively unchanged by the particular type of school regime which is current at any one time. In this sense, there were certain advantages in studying basic cultural processes during a period of institutional change, and certainly there was an unexpected benefit in being able to study the first compulsory fifth year at first hand.

- (4) See for instance, D.H. Hargreaves, Social Relations in the Secondary School, R.K.P., 1967; M.D. Shipman, Sociology of the School, Longmans, 68; R. King, School Organisation and Pupil Involvement, R.K.P. 73, ed. M. Young, Knowledge and Control, Collier - Macmillan, 71.

- (5) D. Hargreaves, op. cit.

- (6) For a fuller explanation of these concepts, P. Barthes, Mythologies, Paladin, 73; R. Baxters, Elements of Semiology Cape, 67. Basically the difference between denoted and connoted refers to the difference between the direct and intended message of a particular communication, and the indirect, often unintended messages which are communicated at the same time through such processes as association, generalised suggestion and use of available cultural stereo types.
- (7) See particularly K. Roberts, From School to Work: a Study of the Y.E.S., David and Charles, 1970.
- (8) See P.E. Willis, Material Production and Human Experience, C.C.C.S., cyclostyled, which is based on this field work.
- (9) We are not positing an absolute break between these two elements: cultural involvement, power. They both have their political and cultural outcomes and connections, and in the middle to long term perspective they are inextricably linked. Nor are we evaluating, the two concepts in any simple functionalist way. In the long term it may, anyway, be the case that the zone of cultural activity yields the most profound and thorough going method for approaching basic questions of power, and changes in power relationships. At this point in the argument we make the distinction for the purpose of an immediate analysis of the culture at one moment in time.
- (10) There is growing evidence that it is amongst groups of black kids, located in inner urban areas, who have no qualification and amongst whom the unemployment rate is going well over 15% and who have developed their own distinctive 'boys' culture, where these 'social problems' are beginning to emerge. See, for instance, Stellan M., 'Sitting Here in Limbo', Time Out, August, 74., Gillman P.,

'I Blame England', Sunday Times, September, 73; Hines V. Black Youth  
and the Survival Game in Britain, Zulu, London 73.

- (11) See the whole series of official education reports, and the key  
series of education Acts from 1873 onwards culminating in the  
recent Raising of the School Leaving Age.