

FUR COAT: NO KNICKERS

A STUDY OF MONEY AND MANNERS IN A *MODERN MANOR*¹

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

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¹ A *manor* is a *working class* term for the local territory a person belongs to in London; it is a borrowing from the aristocratic equivalent. The *manor* in question here is Bermondsey in south-east London. (The official title of Lord of the Manor of Bermondsey is (at time of writing) being auctioned with starting bids placed at £50,000). The title of the thesis *Fur Coat: No Knickers* is an ethnographic expression that is used to refer to a person more concerned with style than substance, with looking good rather than *making good*. The expression refers to the problem of being *modern* which is that instead of being a successful consumer conspicuous for what s/he consumes a person is consumed with desire for things s/he cannot afford and risks being exposed and shamed. The title alludes also to the theoretical preoccupation of the thesis, which is to make explicit what ideologies of 'the real,' 'the natural' or 'the objective' conceal, which is the process of their constitution (Strathern 1981, 1992).

Abstract

Following Bourdieu (1977) and alluding to the work of Toren (1990, 1993a, 1999) and Lave (1991) this thesis supports the argument that learning, understood as a participative, historical and generative process, is intrinsic to all social practice and furthermore that all social practice substantiates human mind. It follows therefore that mind is a learning phenomenon and that it makes no sense, for example, to isolate didactic practice from the wider social situations in which children learn.

The thesis argues that the form participative learning takes is that of an increasingly differentiated competence with respect to complex relations of exchange in objects, bodily actions and language. It is shown how, through particular exchange relations, the value of persons, practices and things is created and transformed as an ongoing and mutually specifying material process. Taking both childhood and the practice of ethnography as examples of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave 1991) the thesis aims towards a phenomenological description of what it means to become *working class* in Bermondsey, South East London.

Responding to a *multicultural* political climate in which claims are made that the *working class* no longer exists, the thesis addresses the popular backlash in which *white working class* people demand that their social values are recognised and protected. What matters in Bermondsey, for example, is that *class* relations are to be understood ethnographically as the difference between *common* and *posh* people and that this distinction is articulated with whether or not a person was *born and bred* in Bermondsey. This means that specific ideas about kinship relations and place, understood as particular forms of materiality, mediate the development in Bermondsey of the kind of persons people can become. The chapters that follow will describe the social processes through which Bermondsey people reproduce (Narotzky 1997) the idea of themselves as a distinctive *community*.

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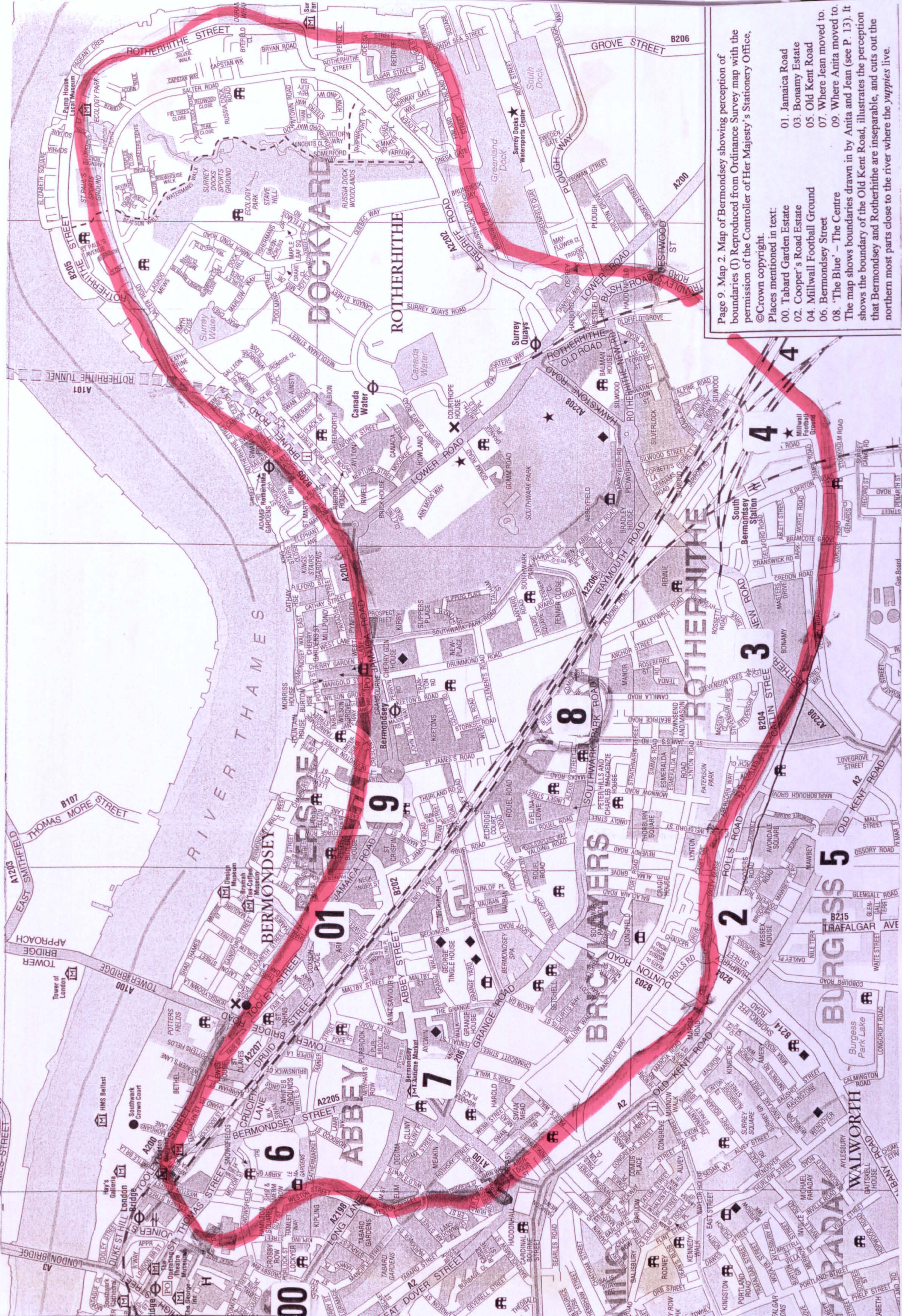
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Last, but not least, heartfelt thanks are due to my family and friends whose strength I have relied on.



Figure 1. The St George's Cross.

Chapter One



Page 9. Map 2. Map of Bermondsey showing perception of boundaries (1) Reproduced from Ordnance Survey map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown copyright.
 Places mentioned in text:
 00. Tabard Garden Estate
 02. Cooper's Road Estate
 04. Millwall Football Ground
 06. Bermondsey Street
 08. 'The Blue' - The Centre
 The map shows boundaries drawn in by Anita and Jean (see P. 13). It shows the boundary of the Old Kent Road, illustrates the perception that Bermondsey and Rotherhithe are inseparable, and cuts out the northern most parts close to the river where the *yuppies* live.

- 01. Jamaica Road
- 03. Bonamy Estate
- 05. Old Kent Road
- 07. Where Jean moved to.
- 09. Where Anita moved to.

Common Knowledge

“Ask them what I am². I’m *common* as shit. I wasn’t brought up I was dragged up on the Old Kent Road. I wasn’t taught to mind my Ps n’ Qs and my favourite word is cunt.”³

Sharon, 31 years, Bermondsey, 2001.

Sharon

Sharon’s mother⁴ was *born and bred* in Bermondsey. She raised her five daughters on the Cooper’s Road Estate adjacent to the Old Kent Road and Sharon, youngest among them, now lives and is bringing up her own daughters on the periphery of Bermondsey not far from the Tabard Estate where I have lived for twelve years. Cooper’s Road is on the wrong side of Bermondsey, too close to the Old Kent Road. Too close for some anyway since the Old Kent Road forms the southern boundary of Bermondsey and beyond that road lies Peckham. People from Peckham and the Walworth Road in the West are known as *Roaders*, traditionally the arch-enemies of Bermondsey people. Speaking proudly about being dragged up on the Old Kent Road is not something a *real* Bermondsey person would do. *Real* Bermondsey people are keenly aware of the clearly defined boundaries of the territory – their *manor* – and they are able to make the necessary distinctions about the kind of people who live inside and outside of those boundaries. The Old Kent and Walworth Road stand for everything that they are not. What they are is *Bermondsey: born and bred* and proud of it as were their mothers and fathers too, preferably, and sometimes their grand and great-grand parents as well.

² Sharon motions to her teenage daughters who are sitting on the sofa opposite her in the living room of her small three-bedroom council flat where we are drinking tea and talking.

³ Throughout this thesis wherever I quote people’s speech I do not attempt to make a systematic linguistic record showing, for example, in all cases where consonants are dropped and syllables merged. I would like at some point to make an investigation into the linguistic particularities of the Bermondsey dialect but did not have the means to do so during this period of fieldwork. Words that appear in italic are ethnographic terms whose meaning is the subject of this research.

⁴ Sharon’s mother grew up on the Bonamy Estate, which is close to the periphery of Bermondsey on the Old Kent Road side. My concern in this thesis is not to try and determine which people actually belong to the category of *real* Bermondsey people but rather to investigate people’s perceptions of the changing and often contested criteria of belonging in Bermondsey. For comparison with other similar studies of *community* formation in England see Strathern (1981) and Edwards (2000).

A person is designated *real* Bermondsey out of a combination of kinship and residence criteria but it is pride about what Bermondsey stands for that counts and this comes from participation in the kinds of social relations in which what it means to belong to Bermondsey is constituted.⁵ It is possible therefore for people of marginal status to gain a degree of acceptance because of the possibilities that showing an interest and taking pride in Bermondsey present for a person's incorporation. Pride makes people more like kin. Sharon, in contrast, meets the formal criteria of belonging and could assume the status of being *real* Bermondsey but instead she shuns the pretension that she presumes pride to be and makes herself simply a resident albeit a different one to me⁶. Compared to Sharon I am a newcomer in Bermondsey. Having lived close to the northern boundary for just twelve years, my residence barely approaches a respectable presence. My next door neighbour who has lived on the estate for forty years periodically asks me how long I've been living here and when I tell her she teases me saying, "Oh Gillian, you're nearly an old timer now." Even though it isn't long enough to really count, the fact of my residency, albeit at the periphery, stands for something and made a difference when I began my fieldwork and needed to establish the legitimacy of my interest in Bermondsey. Although I am a relative newcomer I am not a complete outsider and

⁵ This study describes the phenomenon of *working class pride* and here I use the term description self consciously because I aim towards, but do not presume to have achieved, a phenomenological perspective. I take issue with the increasing fashion for discourses of embodiment and phenomenology in anthropology and other social sciences, which quite often demonstrate a poor understanding of the phenomenological project. I am reminded for example of Charlesworth SJ (2000) which presumes to be a phenomenology simply because it investigates people's experiences, but this, I would argue, is not an adequate stance for phenomenology. To clarify my purpose I define phenomenology here as the study of the way that the human subject comes to have the idea of itself, others and the objective world, i.e. as existing independently of the consciousness that constitutes it. The grim and depressing picture of *working class* life that Charlesworth portrays is arguably a function of the methods he undertakes rather than a true picture of people's lived experience. If, for example, I had conducted ethnographic interviews with school children or with the youths described in chapter four I would have got nothing like the kind of data that I was able to obtain through participant observation. It is easy to imagine that I would have come away with a depressing picture of *working class* masculinity. In any case the analysis of *working class* life that I describe here bears little resemblance to the desperate characterisation given by Charlesworth and I am happy to be able to contradict the scenario he depicts. At the same time I recognise that my study pertains to Bermondsey and not to *working class* people in general.

I am indebted to Christina Toren, who, at the Centre for Child Focussed Anthropological Research at Brunel University has developed a broadly phenomenological model (responding to the work of Bourdieu and Merleau-Ponty) of ethnographic analysis that relies on an understanding of child development. The aim is to describe the world as it is lived by people and at the same time to give a systematic analysis of the way in which taken for granted knowledge is constituted as a historically specific process.

⁶ *Real* Bermondsey people are just one kind of resident in Bermondsey and it is in relation to this ideal that the hierarchical organisation of residents into kinds of insiders and kinds of outsiders is formed as a classificatory scheme for defining personhood.

that makes a difference to the way that Bermondsey people perceive me, but the anomaly of my status is pronounced for various reasons that will emerge as the thesis progresses.

Before I go on with my description of Sharon's position vis-a-vis Bermondsey I want to draw attention to the beginning I have made and to explain how I became interested in Bermondsey in the first place. Looking over the first page of this chapter, assessing its introductory authority, reading and re-reading it, I am mindful of how easy it is with the benefit of hindsight, to begin to make a clear and concise introduction to what it is that makes Bermondsey and its people unique. A more difficult task it occurs to me would be to incorporate into the style of retrospective reflection a sense of how eighteen months fieldwork leads an anthropologist to make objective claims about the social values of a particular people. Because my principal interest is in the anthropology of learning and I argue that learning is an aspect of all social practice including ethnography I cannot very well leave the specific process of learning through fieldwork out of my analysis. After all what I have learnt about the social organisation of a people's value system is as much the ongoing product of the way that I constitute myself as a particular kind of person as the social practice of people living in Bermondsey is⁷.

⁷ Being a *middle class* person and moving into a council flat on the periphery of Bermondsey and raising my children here I have been forced over the years to come to terms with what being *working class* means and writing this thesis is just one aspect of that process. I am interested in the way that hierarchical relations between people of different *classes* are sustained and in particular in the way that disgust, as a distancing emotion, operates to maintain a relative segregation between the *classes* and *races* in England. (I refer throughout the thesis to England rather than Britain because that is the emphasis that is relevant to Bermondsey people). The title of the thesis could just as easily have been, 'An Anatomy of Disgust,' or 'Becoming *Working Class*,' because that is its subject matter, but subjectively it addresses social *class* mobility from the point of view of my descent down the social hierarchy. I use the term *middle* or *working class* ethnographically as those terms, which are widely used in popular English parlance to describe people that are different in specific kinds of ways. I understand that the self-conscious awareness of *class* position in terms of relation to the means of production, the development of capitalism and Marxist politics is an entirely different matter. I do not address the Marxist analysis of *class* here because this is not the sense in which I, or people I encountered during my fieldwork make sense of their *class* position. I for example did not know that I was a *white middle class* person until I got to university and people told me that that is what I was. The point is that *class* is lived through before it is ever rendered an explicit object of knowledge and it is taken for granted 'living through' that ethnography of childhood experience can portray. It is for this reason that I think a phenomenology of social *class* is especially revealing because it begins with the assumption that the world is lived as ready made before the constitutive process is ever subject to critical self examination.

Many Bermondsey people who are hoping for a spokesperson in me may be disappointed because this thesis also represents my claim to participate in another *community*, a certain kind of social scientific one which is a part of my life that was relatively obscured in the field. Being a PhD student at university, having to participate in academic discourse leads me to produce writing of a certain kind and I am aware that Bermondsey people will find this academic style frustrating. Were I still in the field I would be forced to *tell it like it is* so that everyone could understand but the form of exchange that is required of me has shifted toward the endpoint of academic achievement. I attempt therefore to give an account of the conditions for the possibility of my ethnography and its textual productions and at the same time try to do none of this at the expense of a systematic enquiry into the social relations of specific people in particular places. With this more difficult challenge in mind what follows hereafter marks a change in my ambition from wanting to write with an effortless style that conceals constitutive processes to writing that makes description of constitutive process stylish. I will describe the specific kinds of participation that becoming a *real* Bermondsey person requires as well as explaining the social constraints this particular idea of the person establishes. First I turn to the transformation in my understanding about what it means to be a resident of Bermondsey.

I had lived in Bermondsey for ten years before I began my fieldwork in 1999. Actually I didn't think of myself as a Bermondsey resident because living close to the northern border with Borough and close to Borough High Street my spatial affinity was towards the North, Northwest of London and away from the miles of council estates that lie to the South and Southeast. Although I am now proud to say that I live in Bermondsey I really knew nothing about it until I started my fieldwork. Like most outsiders my only orientation to Bermondsey was the knowledge that every Friday morning there is a famous antique market in the square at the end of Bermondsey Street and at the junction with the Tower Bridge Road end of Long Lane. I was only prompted to make a study of Bermondsey because I overheard conversations, in my daughter's playground in Blackfriars, of mothers who had moved into Bermondsey from other areas of South London. One woman, Jean, had moved fourteen years ago from Kennington to a housing association house not far from the antique market. The other woman, Anita, had just recently moved to the

Dickens Estate on a transfer from Waterloo. Sharing stories about what Bermondsey was like for newcomers the women made jokes in exaggerated terms about a people who never come out of their territory unless they have to. They sang the theme song to the old television serial *The Twilight Zone* and laughed as they described a people to whom the rest of the world, which begins just beyond Bermondsey's boundaries, is strange and suspicious. The women commented on the distinctive appearance of the people, and said, "You can tell a Bermondsey *bird* a mile off." I asked them to explain to me what they meant but they said they could just tell, by the clothes, the way Bermondsey women wear their hair and their gold (jewellery.) "Bermondsey's like Alabama," they said and explained to me that 'everyone is related to everyone else' because Bermondsey people 'only marry each other.'⁸ Fully aware that these jokes presented exaggerated stereotypes I was nevertheless intrigued and realised that in all those years that I had lived so close to Bermondsey I had missed something important because I was looking the other way.⁹ These women as newcomers to Bermondsey obviously felt that they didn't belong even though they were bona fide residents and I determined to investigate what the criteria of belonging are and how Bermondsey is imagined from the inside.

Of most interest to me in the beginning was the fact that these women in the playground at Blackfriars were to my mind *white* and *working class* just like the Bermondsey people they spoke of. Yet they described Bermondsey, a place less than half a mile away as if it were a foreign country whose people have strange customs. My idea of a homogenous *white working class* quickly dissolved and I learned in time what anyone moving through London ought to know; the city is historically divided into *manors* which were and sometimes continue to be closely defined territories about which people are often fiercely proud and protective.

⁸ Bermondsey people make the same kind of jokes about people from Deptford who lives less than half a mile away to the south in Lewisham. Deptford people are teased about having their own language that comes from *piky*, *gypsy* and '*diddikoi*' slang.

⁹ The difference before I started my fieldwork compared to during and after it, was the fact that I was trying as hard as possible before not to come to terms with what living on a council estate meant for me. Filled with *middle class* prejudices and not wanting to discover anything about the *working class community* I had moved into I made every effort to turn my attention elsewhere. I took my children to the park at Battersea, shopped at Nine Elms and had no reason therefore to venture into Bermondsey's heartland except on infrequent visits to Surrey Quays. I was a typical snob – 'a person who makes him/herself ridiculous or odious by his/her fear of being ranked too low and by his/her different behaviour towards different *classes*.' (The Chambers Dictionary 1998) This thesis is

Beginning to appreciate these distinctions marked the first stage in my learning about what *working class* life means and shed light on the previously unexamined idea of *working class* people that I held. This idea, from which I endeavoured defensively to dissociate myself, centred around what I know now to be largely misguided *middle class* prejudices about the kind of people who live on council estates, (of whom, of course, I am one).

Looking back to 1990 when I first moved into my flat it is significant to me now that the first attempts, of the mothers with young children in the block, to incorporate me into their network of sociability consisted of invitations to Ann Summers parties which I politely refused. Ten years later, establishing my fieldwork and getting to know the *working class* women from the playground at Blackfriars, I gladly accepted invitations to Ann Summers' parties and later to ladies-only male stripper nights. Taking part in the lewd but harmless celebration of sexuality that these parties consist of was an important introduction to the art of ribald humour that *working class* women enjoy so much. Another woman in the playground, noticing the changes in me, said, "You've changed, you never used to be crude before." To which Anita replied on my behalf, "Leave her alone, she's all right, she's just coming out of herself."

Common Knowledge – Sharon Continued

I meet Sharon after having done eighteen months fieldwork in a Bermondsey primary school (see chapters two and three). She is the mother of Emma, ten years old at the time of my fieldwork and in her final year at Tenter Ground school in Bermondsey. Sharon allows me to interview her in her home and I visit her once a week for six months thereafter. This arrangement is negotiated as an exchange in which I help Emma with her reading and Sharon helps me with my research, patiently answering my questions and allowing me to spend time in her home. On our first meeting I explain my purpose in Bermondsey and ask Sharon if she thinks of herself as a Bermondsey person. She explains that her mum was a Bermondsey woman but even though she is now raising her own children in Bermondsey she always thinks of herself as someone who has grown up on the Old Kent Road. I ask

concerned in part with the way in which I cured myself of snobbery, a particularly English social

Sharon if there is anything special about Bermondsey and she replies, "I see young guys *bowlin*¹⁰ around thinking they are *real* Bermondsey *bods* and they ain't, they just think they are. There ain't nothing special about Bermondsey, I think you might be wasting your time." With that Sharon lets out a loud and raucous laugh, teasing me about wasting my time doing research in Bermondsey. Tracey, 16, one of Emma's older sisters then interjects, adding, "I was coming home the other day and these two girls was standing on the pavement and I couldn't get through and they didn't move. I wasn't gonna step in the road so I says, 'Excuse me!' and they still didn't move so I barged through." Sophie, 18, Emma's other older sister then explains, "Bermondsey girls are bitches, thinking that they own the pavement just 'cos they're Bermondsey." Sharon, Tracey and Sophie identify with Bermondsey because they are residents here and because their family history links them to the place but they distance themselves from the pride that 'being Bermondsey' entails. Tracey and Sophie are learning about this distancing in relation to Sharon's perception about her own upbringing, not having been brought up, but 'dragged up on the Old Kent Road.'

Sharon goes on to emphasise that in her opinion, "Everyone, on both sides of the Old Kent Road, grew up the same." She insists that there's nothing special about Bermondsey people. For her, living the same life is what *working class* people (or what Sharon refers to as *common* people), in South London have in common. They live in similar flats on the same kinds of council estates and do similar kinds of jobs and that's all that matters. Sharon reduces everyone on both sides of the Old Kent Road to a common economic denominator but I know from my fieldwork that shared *class* position is a denial of everything that preoccupies *real* Bermondsey people.¹¹ *Real* Bermondsey people are fiercely proud about being from Bermondsey and

disease.

¹⁰ A *bowl* is a particular way of walking, a way which embodies confidence and pride in having and maintaining a tough reputation. A person might accuse a man of arrogance saying, "Look at him, he's got a *bowl* on him ain't he?" A man who *bowls* may often be seen with a tough looking fighting dog like an English or Staffordshire bull terrier, which becomes an accessory to a *bod's* - tough young man's reputation.

¹¹ Reducing all *common* people to the same level is a disavowal of the achievements of *working class* people who are proud to own their own homes, have a *decent* education, *respectable* white collar jobs and high levels of disposable income not earned through involvement in crime. People like this in Bermondsey often take frequent trips to the family caravan on the Isle of Sheppey as well as annual holidays taken abroad. They may have moved father afield, to Bromley, for example, but have relatives who are less well off still living on council estates doing menial jobs and struggling to get by.

nowhere else except also being from England. For them their way of life and particular history is alive and in need of protection from outside influences, determined not to let it become a thing of the past, they struggle to sustain it as a hope for the future. The place called Bermondsey, the actual space, being *born and bred* there and therefore being inseparable from a history and experience that is shared and lived in common is what makes all the difference. It makes a social value out of territoriality, overrides and forces into the background the solidarity that shared *class* position across the Old Kent Road would seem to make logical.

Common as Shit

Whilst Sharon professes to know nothing about what people think makes Bermondsey special I quickly learn about what it is that does preoccupy her and that is how proud she is to be *common*. She constantly makes evaluations of people, including her own children, on the basis of how *common* people are in relation to her. Having pride in being ‘*common as shit*’ is the baseline against which she judges others. Asking her what being *common* means, she tells me, “Being *common* is about being down to earth, not thinking you’re *upper*” (i.e. better than other people are). It means, “*Tellin’ it like it is,*” (talking straight, telling the truth). Being *common* means that you don’t, as Sharon says, ‘Mind your Ps n’ Qs,’ and “You don’t try to talk *proper*.” In Sharon’s home being *common* means that swearing (foul language), shit, fuck, bastard, fucking, fucking hell and cunt, is a familiar part of everyday speech. When I ask other people what being *common* means they tell me it means, “Knowing what it is like to be *skint*, down to your last £2, there’s no more money until next week and there’s kids to feed.” It means, “I didn’t get where I am today by doing well at school.” (Getting money is more important than anything else is, apart from the family, its cash not qualifications that matter and that’s why you can be *common* and rich which is the ideal combination). Being *common* means that it’s hard work (or crime) that pays and practical expertise is highly valued because bringing money into the house is more important than being well educated which is considered to be an abstract achievement. A *common* person is oriented towards specific kinds of values.

Sharon tells me that being *common* means, “Knowing how to have a good laugh because you’re not stuck up.” She refers to and laughs constantly about the vulgarity of the unruly body, having none of the obsessive modesty of prudish politeness; she makes no attempt to obscure the permanent joke of the sexual and excretory functions of the body. Being *common*, Sharon is at ease with these essential aspects of human being and makes no attempt to conceal them for the sake of civility. She is, as she says, “*Common* as shit and her favourite word is cunt.” Without a doubt being *common* is, for Sharon, a relationship of opposition. Her radical stance opposes all those who think they are *upper*, because Sharon can’t stand pretension. She thinks the pride of Bermondsey people is pretension and she thinks I am pretentious because I am, as she constantly reminds me, *posh*.

Posh Cow

To some extent Sharon constantly plays to the gallery, relishing her favourite word, *cunt*, hoping to offend me. Being labelled as *posh*, having the manners and demeanour that distinguishes me as such and yet living in a council flat in Bermondsey makes me an anomaly and an object of curiosity to Sharon. Living on a council estate means, as Sharon emphasises, that people there share more or less the same economic fate but because my manner differentiates me and stands for my upbringing it leads Sharon to speculate about my past and have different expectations for my future. She knows that *posh* people don’t live on council estates they live in nice houses, so I can’t be that *posh* and yet I’m obviously not *common* either. The idea of social *class*, understood ethnographically as a distinction between *common* and *posh* people, sets up an inextricable relationship between money and manners. Ways of getting money and ways of being in the world are inseparable and it is the effect of this conjunction on the idea of what it means to be English that this thesis attempts to portray.

Being Upper

Subtle markers of speech, clothing, ways of wearing jewellery, ways of wearing hair, ways of walking, physical bearing, posture and demeanour come in time to symbolise the social and economic relationships a person was born into and signify the future s/he is likely to arrive at. Sharon never lets me escape from the apparently

determining affect of my manner, she assumes that because I am *posh*, by definition I must think that I'm *upper*, i.e. a better person than she is. She refuses, however, to acknowledge that being *upper* is something anyone can ever actually be, and asserts in her own manner, the idea that superiority can only ever be a function of pretension. Sharon cannot conceive of the idea that my *posh* manners are just as much a taken for granted aspect of my way of being as her *common* manners are. She presumes that I am constantly trying to be *posh* and trying to talk *proper* because to her way of thinking, everyone is *common* inside no matter what front is put up on the outside. Its not that different from what Anita proposes when she says of me, "She's all right, she's just coming out of herself." The idea is that inside every *posh* person there's a *common* person just waiting to get out because being *posh* is not something anyone can actually be, its all pretension – a put on. The truth however is that I didn't really know what it meant to be *posh* until I encountered myself at the interface with people who think of themselves as *common*.¹²

An interface is a social situation where social *class* is revealed as a relationship of distinctive and apparently insurmountable differences between people. Anita, referring to *class* differences, explains to me that, "There is a *cultural* divide in this country that is never going to be overcome." My fieldwork addresses this divide as an interface between others and myself and of course with Sharon, I am doomed from the beginning. Even as I begin to learn what it means to be *common*, by trying harder to have empathy and 'fit in' and my demeanour begins to change, all of this is evidence to Sharon that I had been *common* all along and was just putting on 'airs and graces' before. Having left a message on her mobile phone one morning, I see her later in the afternoon and she tells me that when she listened to it, she said to herself, "I can't believe I've got this *posh* cow leaving messages on my phone."

As I spend more and more time with Sharon, observing what being *common as shit* entails for a woman, I realise that it is a lot to do with the fun of bawdy talk. I watch her draw out the lewd suggestion in each new scenario, the barbecue tongs that are just like a woman's legs opening and closing, the cork screw that screws and so on

¹² I encountered this interface with women more so than with men and realised that the question of how *common* or *posh* a person is, is far more the concern of women and mothers than it is men and fathers.

ad infinitum and I quickly learn how to raise her licentious laughter. This isn't difficult since I learned early from my father what being crude is, constrained always by my mother's reverence for polite, well-mannered and reserved behaviour. Meanwhile Emma watches in horror as the respectable 'teacher' she is so proud to bring home from school descends into her mother's world. As my vigilance about appropriate behaviour relaxes I break the taboo that *posh* people have of not swearing in front of children. Chatting to Sharon in the living room and forgetting myself for a moment, I swear and call someone we are discussing a bastard. Emma pulls away from the affectionate proximity she was enjoying, "Oh Gillian, why did you swear, I didn't think you swore." Sharon roars with laughter, delighted that I have gone down in Emma's estimation, she emphasises, "She swears, of course she swears what did you think she was - a bloody saint?" Growing up in a household full of tough and brash women, who *tell it like it is*, hiding nothing from her; there is little tolerance in Emma's life for the precious innocence of childhood that is cultivated in *posh* houses. Emma grows up fast and fits in quickly with the adult world that proceeds uncensored around her.

Talking Proper

Before long Sharon introduces me to some of her friends at her daughter's sixteenth birthday party. Raising a laugh out of a crude suggestion, Sharon, pleased that I am doing well, explains to her friends, "I used to think she was *posh* but she's not you see." As the taboos of my *proper* upbringing are challenged, I begin first to be self-conscious and then gradually become aware of how the way that I speak and the content of my conversation is changing as I slowly learn how *common* women talk. It takes me a long time to confidently strike up a conversation, know how to greet people properly, what to talk about and how to give a joke and have a laugh in a new and different way. Unlearning being *posh* is a slow and painful process because it means undoing the value judgement that *talking proper* implies in relation to *common* speech. The educated and expensive talk of the *middle classes* is useless to me with Sharon. With a new awareness I begin to think of *middle class* conversation, when I encounter it, as the means by which the ideas of having had a 'good upbringing,' bringing up one's own children *properly* and having 'good taste' are constituted. At the same time it comes to stand in my mind for finely

differentiated and competitive exchanges between people that pertain to the attainment of a particular way of life and appropriate values including the basic assumption of disposable income. I come in time to call *middle class* conversation 'expensive talk.' With Sharon I have no need of conversation that demonstrates how knowledgeable I am about the world, how broad and diverse my experience of it is and how ambitious I am to get on in life. When I resort to such talk I am teased mercilessly about being *posh* and I quickly learn to keep the diversity and breadth of my education and experience firmly in the background of everyday interactions. I need only to focus on the essential business of everyday life; my family's welfare, our health (conversations about the vagaries of the unruly body predominate), work and ways to get money, housework, the drama of relationships, shopping, sex and gossip about my own or other people's troubles.¹³ As long as I can talk about the fundamental things in life and demonstrate that I can share stories about the often-insurmountable difficulties of life and laugh about it, that is all that matters.

As time goes on I begin to lose the polish of my *posh* accent, dropping consonants, blending and shortening words; my speaking tone gets coarse and louder in raucous moments. I become aware of the charisma of a new language in practice and I realise that as the way I speak changes and I stop *talking proper* I am becoming a person of less worth in my own eyes and that paradoxically that is a good thing. Anita, the woman from Waterloo whose move to and learning about what it means to belong in Bermondsey happens in parallel with my own, watches me go through all these changes as my research progresses and often has a good laugh at my expense. At least she is, as she describes herself, *common* to start with, so all she has to do is learn about the particular local variation of what that means in Bermondsey compared to Waterloo. Unlike me Anita doesn't have to undo herself to learn about what being in Bermondsey means. In fact the direction of her experience moves in the opposite way to mine and the difference becomes instructive, as I will explain later.

¹³ In Bermondsey because there is the perception that everyone knows everyone else there is the necessity for a degree of caution about gossip because there is every likelihood that the person one is talking about might be known or related to the person one is talking to. I quickly realised that loyalty to friends and family requires discretion. Anita explains to me that whilst she is aware that for some people 'keeping to your own' means not mixing with *blacks*, for her it means that 'you don't shit on your own doorstep.' The loyalty of friends and family means more to her than following social taboos, so a *black* person who is her friend is worth more to her than a stranger who is *white*.

One day having just completed a fantastic interview with a market stall holder ‘down The Blue,’¹⁴ I phone Anita to tell her about it and I shout into the phone, “Anita, it was *blandin!*”¹⁵ Too polite to burst out laughing on the spot she phones me the next day, asks me about the interview again and mimicking my *posh* voice she teases, “So it was excellent, then, was it?” In the school playground and subjecting me to further friendly ridicule, Anita then tells me that she couldn’t believe it, hearing me talking like that on the phone and how she had thought to herself, “How the mighty they have fallen!” “Never mind” she says, “You’re on the dark side now, you’ll have a better time.”

It is poignant to me that becoming *common* means being on the dark side, the wrong side of righteous, no longer high and mighty. The metaphors mix height (being above *upper*) and virtue (being *good*) implying that I have now fallen from Grace, from the sacred pedestal of *posh*. On a more serious note and in private, Anita tells me that she is worried that I am going to lose myself, stop being me in the way that I am - go too far with my research. She delights in seeing me cured of my snobbery but doesn’t want to see me corrupted by the changes I am embracing. She intimates to me that there are different degrees of *commonness* and advises that I shouldn’t go too far, “You wouldn’t want to be *common as muck*,” she explains. This is the first intimation I have that there are different kinds of *common* people, apart from the gendered differences between men and women, women are very careful and attentive to the distinctions between kinds of *common* people. Anita gives me a pointer to lead me away from descent into being the kind of *common* person that she feels it wouldn’t suit me to become, and indicates that there are other kinds of *common* women that I can be more like. These are the kinds of women she is meeting in Bermondsey and in relation to whom she is transforming her own aspirations about her life and the future of her children.

¹⁴ ‘The Blue’ is an area so called after The Blue Anchor pub on Blue Anchor Lane. It is an area at the heart of Bermondsey life because the street market that was there was once one of the principal shopping locations. The shops on either side of Southwark Park Road are still frequented but there are only a handful of market stalls remaining.

¹⁵ *Blindin*’ means brilliant.

It is poignant also that the metaphors describing what it means to be *common* liken people to muck and shit, filth, dirt and waste products, things that everyone has to deal with but that are unwanted and have to be disposed of because they have no worth. Being *common* means 'being down to earth,' knowing what it's like to live close to the ground literally and metaphorically. Sharon revels in being '*common as shit*,' and emphasises, therefore, equality between people as an affirmation of the value of worthlessness. She denies the possibility of differential human value. Within this metaphorical relationship dirt assumes a heightened importance for people. Knowing what it's like to be dirty, either literally or sexually, is the constant background against which the battle for cleanliness and respectability is fought by people like Anita who want, unlike Sharon, to differentiate between the different kinds of *common* people that there are. Within the category of *common* women, there is a dichotomy, best understood in practice as a spectrum, between women who are *common as muck* and women who are *common* but stand in relation to *common as muck* women as *posh* people stand to *common* women in general. It is a dichotomy that is difficult to describe but it will become clear as the chapter progresses.

A potent tension emerges between houseproud *common* women, who in Sharon's eyes think they're *upper*, and women who are *common as muck*, where muck refers also to the celebration of sexual filth in swear words and joking relationships. In reality *common* women make use of all aspects of this tension in the way they define themselves, emphasising different aspects of what it means to be *common* at different times and in different situations. Anita saves me from becoming as *common as shit* in Sharon's house and explains, "The secret of being *working class* is being happy with your position, knowing that you have done better than your parents and making sure that your kids will do better than you and that is enough."¹⁶ "Unhappiness," she spells out for me, "Is the result of desiring a life you know you are never going to have. The problem with you," Anita explains, "Is that you're *fur coat: no knickers* – a *posh* woman living in a council flat."¹⁷ It's obvious, therefore,

¹⁶ Anita works as a cleaning lady, cleaning the apartments of *yuppies*, mostly lawyers, who live in the warehouse conversions by the river.

¹⁷ Of course this description works both ways and applies equally to *common* people who have got rich and have plentiful wealth but none of the upbringing and manners that distinguish *posh* people. Perhaps the best examples of this are David and Victoria (Posh Spice) Beckham who are the king and

that I haven't done better than my parents otherwise I'd be living in a 'nice big house,' a big house like the one they live in. It is difficult for me not to desire the life I have already known and become accustomed to. I have the upbringing and the manners¹⁸ that distinguish me as a *posh* person but none of the money that completes the equation. I don't have a 'proper job,' because I'm an anthropologist doing research and nobody really knows what on earth that means, so it is difficult for people to classify what I do as work. Living on what Anita calls 'a sad council estate' makes me by definition *working class* but what kind of *common* woman am I to become? I begin to understand that being of less worth in *posh* people's eyes is what the pride of *working class* people is all about. It flies in the face of the dominant (*posh*) value system that attempts to define and demean *common* people, "It's them and us, that's how it's always been, that's how it always will be," Anita laments. "We are the backbone of the *nation* and no one gives a fuck about us."

Reacting against dominance, *working class* pride creates the means for dignity; it fights back with its own values and being *common* also entails an inverse snobbery.¹⁹ *Posh* people are pitied because: "They haven't got a clue" (about *real* life), "Even with all that education they've got no *common sense*," (no practical skills or understanding about how to deal with *common* people or *real* life). "They don't know what it means to struggle and survive; (have never known poverty) and they don't know how to enjoy themselves because of that 'stiff upper lip.'" On the other hand, depending on the situation certain kinds of *posh* people like doctors, lawyers and teachers, are respected and envied for their education, manner and professional expertise: It all depends on the situation whether hatred, pity,

queen of *common*. The presence of *posh* people on council estates is increasingly noticed as the inflated property market means that the chance to buy ex-council flats on well-located estates becomes the only opportunity for first time buyers to acquire affordable housing.

¹⁸ When I refer to manners I am talking about the whole range of bodily dispositions by which different *class* positions are perceived to be identifiable. Hailing me out as I walk past a pub a *common* woman remarks, "I'd recognise that walk anywhere Gillian, head held high, chin up, you're so *posh*, you don't walk, you glide. Even when I saw you pissed in the Alscot (a pub that is, at time of writing being converted into apartments) that night I still recognised you by the way you walk."

¹⁹ There is increasing kudos associated with being *working class* as evidenced in the increasing numbers of public figures who talk *common*, especially on television. Jamie Oliver, an Essex boy, is a good example. BBC English is becoming a thing of the past, and if anything, people who talk *proper* find themselves discriminated against and confined to serious news programmes. Discussing this trend with Anita, she explains that because *working class* people represent the largest consumer group with respect to television it is only right, in her opinion, that programmes are aimed at *working class* interests. She cites *East Enders* as a prime example. She emphasises that the visibility of *common*

resentment, envy or admiration for *posh* people is evoked. In time I grasp the fact that there are all kinds of *common* people and realise that even in one family each person's relationship to being *common* is different.

Having Nice Things and Being Houseproud

Sharon has three sisters, one of whom she tells me, "Thinks she's *posh*." Sharon insists that her sister isn't *posh* because they all grew up the same and her sister still lives on an estate in Bermondsey. I ask Sharon what her sister does for a living and she laughs explaining that, "She's only an estate caretaker." "What is it then that makes her sister think she's *posh*?" I enquire and Sharon says, "It's because she's got nice things and she thinks she's *upper*, she's houseproud, obsessed about cleaning." Sharon explains that the desire to have nice things is the main source of problems between people because people are always trying to outdo one another. By way of example she tells me about when she bought a new rug. Her friend, who came round, noticed and admired it and then felt she had to go out and buy exactly the same one so as not to be outdone.

Sharon then tells me that since her sister's wedding Sharon hasn't seen her because Sharon and her daughters were invited to the wedding but when they arrived no places had been allocated to them. They had to suffer the humiliation of being tucked away in a corner whilst the rest of the family were honoured in their places. The difference between being *common* and aspiring to be *posh* creates tension and can sometimes divide families. I ask Sharon if it is possible to have nice things and not think you are *upper*. "It is possible," she says, "but I've never met anyone like that." For the sake of provocation and interested in the possibility of *working class* deference for the monarchy, a family who are by definition *upper*, I ask Sharon what she would do if Princess Diana walked in and sat down now on the sofa. She replies indignantly, "I'd tell 'er to get a fuckin' job." Sharon is the self appointed common denominator of social *class*. She is the constant reminder to me that 'having nice things' and 'thinking that you are upper,' is the achievement of a distinction that masks hard economic and social facts. What is masked, and hidden from view, is the

people in positions of importance is a sign of the changing times because in 'the old days' *working*

relationship to poverty and squalor that we all share as a possibility we work to continuously distance ourselves from.

I discuss what I have learnt about the different attitudes towards being *common* with a woman who has recently moved to Bermondsey after having grown up in Camberwell and she tells me that her sister who lives in Bromley thinks she's *posh*.²⁰ When they go out with her sister's friends from Bromley she is told to 'behave herself' as the condition for being invited. I ask her what 'behaving herself' means, what should she not do? She tells me that she shouldn't be loud,²¹ shouldn't hail her sister out across the car park, and shouldn't *talk common* the way you would indoors and of course mustn't swear. I ask her if she teases her sister about being *posh* and she says that of course she does, sometimes breaking the rules she's been given, to embarrass her sister on purpose. The woman's story makes me reflect on what I am already learning, which is that *common* people's humour exerts a levelling force; it consists, in part, of constantly bringing people 'down to earth,' which is why *posh* people often find it so offensive. It is a form of joking that 'takes the piss' out of pretension and requires that a person is able to take a dressing down in good faith and to give it back in good humour without being disrespectful. It's not easy to do but it is a lot of fun when it's done properly and of course disastrous when it goes wrong.

Common as Muck

Sharon has three daughters aged ten, sixteen and eighteen. Even they Sharon tells me, are not all *common* in the same way. The eldest, Sophie, she describes as being

class people only knew power as a collective group.

²⁰ Anita tells me that the same is true of her sister who lives in Kent. Anita's ex-husband used to call her 'The Duchess.' Anita thinks it is sad that people who live in areas like Bromley work so hard to distance themselves from people, even members of their own family, who are considered too *common*. She remembers when she used to visit her sister how her sister would say things like, "Oh, I didn't know you vacuumed everyday like me," or "Of course, you probably only eat frozen vegetables." Anita, laughing, tells me how her sister's pride preceded her fall-out with her neighbour. The neighbour who was *posh* had an apple tree in her garden with branches, which leaned over Anita's sister's garden. In the autumn the apples would fall on both sides of the garden fence. When Anita's sister complained to her neighbour the *posh* woman said disdainfully, "I would have thought that people like you would be glad of a few free apples." In fury Anita's sister replied, "You think I'm *common*? I'll show you who's fuckin' *common*," and she came back with a chain saw and cut the apple tree down. Years later the women are still not speaking to each other.

²¹ It is interesting that the embodiment of *class* even means learning what constitutes an acceptable decibel level in private speaking tone and also in comportment pertaining to the voice in public situations.

'*common* as muck,' one step away from being '*common* as shit.' Sophie who is within listening distance when this ascription is given to her, fights back insisting that she's not as *common* as her mum is because she thinks that the way her mum carries on, swearing and being vulgar in front of her friends is too *common*. Sophie tells me that Sharon embarrasses her and Sophie's friends tease her about how *common* her mum is. Sophie explains that when she brings a boyfriend home, for example, Sharon will tease the boy constantly, saying sexually explicit things, bringing out into the open the suggestion of what his relationship with her daughter implies. Sophie says she feels that she behaves the way her mum ought to behave in company. While Sophie actively resists Sharon's idea of her, her mother teasing her all the while, shouts out to me from the kitchen, "She's *common as muck* really Gillian, when she's indoors every other word's a fuck."

Sophie and Sharon both refer to the difference between the way you are expected to 'carry on indoors' as a *common* person and the way you are required to behave 'in company,' in public or when dealing with the official world which reflects the dominance of *posh* values. Other women speak to me about having a 'telephone voice.' When speaking to strangers and official people they are aware that they try to *talk proper* in order to be taken seriously. Speaking well is like having nice things, everyone knows it's valuable, it's worth something, it counts in the scale of personal value and it gets results.²² A woman laments to me that she can't go for the job she wants, as a telephone receptionist saying, "I can't speak nicely, I'm too *common* for that job." She goes on to tell me about her sister, in contrast, who has got a lovely voice, and about her sister's husband who phones her up just to listen to her talking because she talks so nicely. Sharon on the other hand wouldn't bother to go for a job where she had to pretend to be something that she isn't or doesn't aspire to be. She worked as a cleaning lady in a police station until her back was too bad for it and was then out of work because she'd had to have an operation following a miscarriage. Now she gets by on the social and her long-term boyfriend who lives with her and is (step) Dad to the girls, pays the bills.²³ Sharon says she might, when

²² Talking *proper* is associated with being gentle and polite whilst talking *common* is often perceived to be an aggressive way of talking. This is why *common* people try to moderate their talk when 'in company.'

²³ Sharon's partner kept himself scarce when I spent time in the house and usually hid himself away in the bedroom playing on his Sony Playstation until I was gone.

she's ready, go for a job at the pie n' mash shop round the corner on Tower Bridge Road where Sophie is working. She's not sure about it however because she tells me that, "It's not like the old days when the shop was run by 'the old girls.'" Then, she says, "Everything was spotless and you daren't put a foot wrong," whereas now, she explains, "You've got seventeen and eighteen-year-old kids like Sophie working in there; it's probably all changed."²⁴

Common Decency

Sharon tells me about Tracey her second daughter who is sixteen. Tracey, she says, is not as *common* as Sophie is because she was her nan's favourite and was therefore protected and spoiled. I ask Sharon what she means by protected and she explains that Tracey wasn't 'got at' by Sharon and Sharon's sisters in the same way because she spent so much time with her nan (Sharon's mother). By way of example she compares what happened to Sophie when she was little. Still at home as a child when one of her aunts phoned or came round they would tease her, swearing at her, as a show of affection. In this way swearing becomes part of an intimate joking relationship between certain kinds of relatives and swear words can be known as terms of endearment. Sharon explains how aunts and uncles bring their nieces and nephews 'down to earth' so that they can't presume to be above their cousins who are their aunts' and uncles' children. The joking relationship exerts a levelling force amongst kin. Tracey, Sharon goes on to explain, was protected from all that by her grandparents because she stayed with them a lot when she was little. Sharon then tells me that her mum was completely different to her and therefore had a different influence on Tracey. Her mum, Sharon says, was *born and bred* Bermondsey and she had, "Old-fashioned values, never spoke about sex, hated swearing and especially the word cunt." Sharon tells me that her mum worked for years as a cleaning lady in a Bermondsey girls' school whilst her father worked first in a factory making jelly for jellied eels and then for the Corporation of London cleaning

²⁴ Long before fish and chips or kebabs, pie n' mash was the traditional fast food of *working class* London. It occupies a place in the centre of many people's hearts because it is the kind of food that they were brought up on, their mums or nans would take them for pie n' mash on a Saturday for a special treat. Not all people like it but those who do are often fiercely loyal about which pie n' mash shop they frequent. One man I interviewed travels all the way back from Bromley to have pie n' mash at Manze's on Tower Bridge Road and he won't eat pie n' mash anywhere else. He values the place and its food as an inseparable part of Bermondsey's *traditions*, loves the old fashioned benches for sitting at and the preserved features of the old décor.

public toilets. Sharon explains that her mum held up the value of work and Sharon had to ask her mum for permission to have a day off work.²⁵ If she lost a job Sharon knew she couldn't go home until she'd found another one. At home, Sharon says, she had to 'mind her manners' in a household that was always impeccably clean.

Here, Sharon presents to me, a different kind of *working class* pride one that distances itself from vulgarity, licentiousness and above all filth in both language and household. House-proud women distance themselves from the grim proximity of poverty, taking pride in their house and its possessions and finding dignity in the face of a past that presses too closely to the history of Bermondsey's Victorian squalor. Women, many of whom spend their working hours cleaning the dirt of other people, are often obsessively proud about their own housework. This is their expertise. Children and especially girls of house-proud mothers quickly learn that doing housework is a way to be valued by their mother and is a source of easy cash in the future, or they rebel like Sharon against the constraints it establishes.

During eighteen months fieldwork I first resisted and then began to appreciate the value of housework where once I resented, neglected or paid another woman to do it. I began for the first time to appreciate the value of a nicely kept house; no matter if it was a council flat, if it was clean and nicely kept it was something to be proud of. I felt ashamed when I went to the flats of women who worked harder than I did but still managed, even with children to bring up, to keep their homes immaculately decorated, furnished and clean on a minimal budget. Prior to this I had held the mistaken belief that the only housing you could be proud of was the 'nice big house' that you owned and therefore I didn't appreciate what I had in my small two-bedroom council flat. I learned to take pride in it and eventually exercised my right to buy it.²⁶ I also began to understand that the same sense of pride extends to

²⁵ Part of the 'old-fashioned values,' which some people still cling onto, involved the recognition that people had to work to survive and there was pride in that. Accepting charity and borrowing from the 'Tally Man' was shameful. Many people tell stories of how, as children, they were told by their mothers to tell the Tally Man when he came calling to collect payment due on money borrowed, that their mother wasn't in. Other women spoke to me of putting their fathers' suit in the pawn shop on a Friday so there would be money for the weekend and getting it back ready for work on a Monday morning. In contrast to the old-fashioned pride about getting money through hard work, there is disdain now for able-bodied people who live on and are dependent on 'the social' expecting 'something for nothing.'

²⁶ The right to buy scheme is one of the lasting legacies of the Thatcher era in which council tenants were given the right to buy their homes. It has lately come under critical scrutiny because, in the

personal appearance, to the way you, and especially your children, are turned out on a daily basis, not just for special occasions.

'Gettin' It'

Comparing our experiences in Bermondsey, Anita's friend Jean makes the distinction between 'home grown' Bermondsey people and those who have to be taught. I suggest that surely it is impossible to teach what 'being Bermondsey' means and Jean replies, "No it's not, Anita's got it, she's only been here a year and she's getting' it." Anita affirms, "I'm getting' it." To which Jean replies, "I knew she was getting' it when she said the kids were wearing new dresses to Tulips²⁷ tonight and I thought, 'Well that's it, she's here.' Cos they always have to look like they've stepped out of a washing machine, the kids [in Bermondsey]." I realise then that there is competition between women about the way their children are turned out and Anita explains that the ultimate challenge in Bermondsey is to keep girls in bright whites, tracksuits that stand proof of meticulous washing skills and children of their mothers' pride. A relationship is revealed to me between self-worth and intimate bodily, clothing and household practices. I appreciate that the pride of Bermondsey women that Sharon's mum stood for and that Anita is now learning about in relation to the women she has become acquainted with, stands in contrast to all of Sharon's levelling efforts. Taking pride requires a huge effort; it is an amazing act conjured everyday out of the drudgery and sometime financial hardship of life. I do not realise at this stage however that pride often comes before a fall and that many women in Bermondsey are acquiring huge debts in the attempt to maintain a competitive edge on their friends and neighbours.²⁸

Having 'dragged herself up,' Sharon is not a typical Bermondsey woman, then. She is what proud Bermondsey people would call a '*low-life*' and Sharon wouldn't care what they thought. She rebelled against her mum whom some might describe as a

absence of a commitment to new building of council homes, right-to-buy tenants are perceived to be diminishing the supply of affordable housing.

²⁷ Tulips (Name changed for the sake of confidentiality) is an after school church related group similar to Brownies.

²⁸ Catalogue debt is especially prevalent because the catalogue is the means by which the close neighbourhood relations of *working class* women is turned into a discount for the woman running the scheme as a concession from her home.

decent working class Bermondsey woman, meeting the conventions of respectable behaviour. Sharon rebelled, she says because her mum wasn't her friend; she couldn't talk to her about anything. "No one talked in my house," she says, "Especially about sex." Inevitably then Sharon's teenage years characterised as they were by the desire for freedom from the household and sexual development distanced her from her mum. What she means then when she says that she wasn't brought up she was 'dragged up' is that she was brought up first and hated it so vehemently that she determined to drag herself up on the old Kent Road with her teenage friends.

Leaving school at thirteen, Sharon got her first job in an envelope factory, which her mum didn't mind because at least she was working and bringing in some housekeeping money. Sharon resolved never to be like her mum with her own children and likes to think that to her own children she is a friend in need. From Sophie's point of view Sharon has gone too far, become too *common*, knowing no bounds, whilst Sharon's sister, who thinks she's *posh* and is disgusted with and distances herself from Sharon, was always Sharon's mum's favourite. In her mother's eyes Sharon's sister could do no wrong. Sharon explains that since her mother's death the family has fallen apart. Before this, when her mother was still alive, her mother's house was the familial focal point and her mother's brother still lived next door. No one among the sisters has taken on the role that the mother played in keeping everyone in the family together and so the children rarely see their cousins, aunts or uncles who would once have been pivotal people in their upbringing.

Children - Swearing and Learning to be *Common*.

Sharon says of Emma, her youngest daughter, 10 years of age, that it's too early to tell how *common* she's going to be. Tracey responds to this, telling her mum that when she took Emma out this morning to get a drink and some crisps, Emma was swearing at men who drove by because they were eyeing Tracey up. She reports how Emma had called out after them, "What are you lookin' at you cunt?" Tracey tells her mum that she had told Emma to shut up and Sharon rounds on Emma who is sitting next to me in the sitting room, shouting at her, "I told you not to use that

fuckin' word." Paradoxically swearing is ruled by etiquette.²⁹ Elderly men tell me that there was a time when men didn't swear in front of women and women and children were expected not to swear. Grown men tell me that they don't swear in front of their mum and dads as a sign of respect and that being able to swear with people is a sign of familiarity, it all depends on the social situation. Swear words have their own hierarchy, cunt being the most offensive, and shit perhaps the least, but it is the feeling behind the words and the situation that matters not so much the words themselves and swear words can be used as terms of endearment. Some mothers, like Sharon and Jean swear like troopers in front of their children but don't allow their kids to have a foul mouth. Other children are encouraged by certain family members to swear and celebrate the achievement of their profanity as if it is the means by which their identity in terms of their belonging to a particular kind of people is brought into being.

Although they refer to a profane/sacred distinction relevant to the history of the church in England³⁰ swear words are most often used simply and effectively as disparaging adjectives or as markers of emotional emphasis that have more or less force depending on the situation in which they are used. The celebration of profanity that being *common* implies extends in Sharon's case to contempt for all kinds of sacred things like the supposed innocence of children or the piety of priests and sacred spaces such as churches. Sharon expresses this disdain for piety when she tells me that she can't go into a church because it makes her hysterical with laughter. She tells me that she was once asked by a priest at a friend's wedding to leave the church because she couldn't stop laughing.

Old Fashioned Values

Of her mother's *old-fashioned values* what has Sharon retained? Despite her foul language and sexually explicitly teasing, what's clear in Sharon's household is that the development of her older daughters' sexuality does not and must not threaten her authority in the household. She is the matriarch that her mother was but in a

²⁹ Some people explained the prevalence of swearing in terms of a more deep-seated linguistic phenomenon, which is the limitation in the range of *common* vocabulary.

³⁰ The case for a relationship between the rise of particular forms of Protestantism and the development of capitalist economies and *class* consciousness has been argued by Weber (1930), and applied to the English case by Thompson (1966).

different way. Sophie and Tracey's boyfriends must work hard to earn her approval since she places herself at the centre of their world. To gain approval a young man must call round regularly, spend time in the house and whilst there must show respect, consideration and generosity towards family members. He should be financially self-sufficient so as not to be a drain on the daughter's present and future finances and be able to show that he can look after himself now and in the future and take care of his girlfriend in the proper way.

Sharon teases the boys that her daughters bring home mercilessly about the idea of sexual relations that she presumes they are entertaining with her daughters. Because she is so crude Sharon makes it seem as if there is a sexually liberal atmosphere at home but Tracey who is sixteen is forbidden to have sex. Sharon tells me about the first time that Tracey brought her current boyfriend home. Sharon took him to one side and told him, "If you so much as touch her I'll personally tie you up and cut ya' fuckin' dick off mate." Hearing this story again Tracey laughs, and tells me that Rick, her boyfriend, is petrified of Sharon. Later after Tracey and her boyfriend have been going out for about a year Sharon says she can't very well stop them having sex for much longer since they have shown that they are serious and are now engaged. About Sophie who is eighteen Sharon says she's old enough to do what she wants and she is allowed to have sex with a serious boyfriend in the flat in her own bedroom. What she must not do however is fall pregnant because Sharon has made it clear to the girls that if they get pregnant they shouldn't bother to come home. She regrets herself having had her first child at the age of nineteen without the father to stand by her. Sharon explains that nineteen is too young an age for a girl to fall pregnant because a girl that age has had no chance to get started in life. Teenage and especially a single parent pregnancy is perceived to pose the greatest risk to a woman's productivity, seriously limiting her life chances and potentially disrupting the household relations of the girl with her mother. Sharon wants to protect herself and her daughters from this fate. Sharon's strategy has been, unlike her own mother's repressive and ultimately unsuccessful influence, to be open with her daughters about sex, its pleasures and pitfalls. Sophie has been on the pill since she was thirteen and Sharon is reassured that the disruption of an early teenage pregnancy is ruled out.

So it turns out that Sharon is expert at regulating the potentially disruptive effect of sexual conduct in her household. Reacting against her mother's prudish decency Sharon manages to secure the stability of the household even in the face of the potential fissure that sexual relations outside the household represent. Young men must pay their respects to Sharon as the centre of the household and their ideas about their own importance in her daughters' lives are therefore tempered. The future of Sophie and Tracey's life chances depends on Sharon's skill in regulating their developing teenage desires. The transition from being a daughter to being a mother in one's own right and having a household of one's own is in Sharon's eyes the most difficult thing a young woman undertakes in her life. She may be *common as shit*, much to Sophie's dismay but Sharon cares about kinship and couldn't care less about the outward signs of polite respectability. Kinship forms the bedrock of her value system. Whilst her own mother lost her to the Old Kent Road, Sharon retains her daughter's affections by being their friend, making a joke out of sex and considering their future happiness above all else.

Becoming an Adult – Doing As You Please.

Within certain limits Sharon believes that her daughters' happiness depends on her giving them the freedom to 'do as they please,' something which she couldn't do as a child growing up in a strict household. Rules in Sharon's home are kept to a minimum because it is through their relative freedom that she feels she gets to see what her daughters are really like. When their friends come round Sharon is disdainful of children who are in her opinion overly subjected to the rules of their parents. The body and its appetites, apart from the specific exception made for sexual appetite, become in Sharon's home, the location of pleasures, not control. Present desire is not forsaken in the interests of health and longevity in the future. There is no concern for knowledge, which advises about what a healthy diet is or what suitable restrictions on sweets and chocolate might be and Tracey and Sophie have been allowed to smoke cigarettes in the house since they were thirteen. The same 'do as you please' philosophy is applied to education. Sharon says, "If they want to learn they will, if they don't they won't and that is that." Sharon explains that Tracey is the perfect example of this, she has done well at school because she has chosen to learn not because she has been encouraged to do so.

Tracey started secondary school needing remedial teaching. Through self-motivation she has managed to achieve enough to keep her at school until the age of sixteen and she hopes for a career in childcare. Tracey's teachers want her to go to college but Sharon says that as soon as she's sixteen Tracey must bring in a wage to pay her share of the housekeeping. Never having had to pay housekeeping money to my mum in my life, I realise that qualifications gained through further education are for those people who can afford to forego money now whilst making an investment on a larger return in the future. Tracey in contrast will achieve adult status at the age of sixteen in the full time pay packet and will appreciate then that work, not education, is the foundation of *working class* life. So it is that *common* values often conspire against any aspiration that a young person like Tracey may have towards higher education.³¹

A teacher who taught in a Bermondsey secondary school in the sixties tells me that he expressed his surprise to the head-teacher that more children did not stay on for further education. The teacher remembers the head teacher's matter of fact response. He explained that in his opinion the people of Bermondsey have never valued education because what they really value is money. The teacher goes on to explain to me that when *working class* jobs were plentiful and a basic secondary education up to the age of fourteen was adequate to most tasks there was no need to pass school exams or take higher educational qualifications. People routinely left school at fourteen or fifteen, went straight out to work and were valued for the contribution they made to the weekly housekeeping. Bright children more often than not did not take up hard won places at grammar school either because the uniform was too expensive or because it was thought that grammar schools were for people who were going to university. This was a prospect that delayed wage earning to a far distant future when what was needed was a working life now. It doesn't matter to Sharon therefore that Sophie left school at thirteen, just as she herself had done because this is only evidence to her that Sophie wasn't happy and couldn't get on at school. I ask Sophie if she has any regrets about leaving school so early and she says, "As long as

³¹ The levelling force that *common* values exert on children is often the result of parents' fear that their children will do better than they have done and end up looking down on the family. An elderly

I enjoy life I don't mind what job I do." Sophie earns £100 a week from her job at the pie n' mash shop, part of which she gives to Sharon every week for housekeeping.³²

Emma's School

Sharon's youngest daughter, Emma, who is ten and in her last year of primary school education can barely read and write. Sharon's preoccupation with and profound concern for kinship at home does not extend to an appreciation for the value of formal learning whilst in my household, in contrast, learning is part of the way in which I constitute what caring for my children means. I cannot help but be horrified therefore to realise that in the beginning of the 21st Century a child of ten years can leave primary school unable to read and write proficiently. This is a tragic indictment not only of Tenter Ground, Emma's school, but is also indicative of the problems schools in areas like this face with families where formal learning plays little part in the way that caring relationships are constituted in the home. Quite often the demands of what caring implies at home means that Emma wants to take time off school to look after Sharon because she worries when her mother is ill. These problems have greater precedence for Emma than the difficulties she faces with learning at school and she contrives as far as possible to stay at home as often as she can.

During twelve months fieldwork in Emma's class (see chapters two and three) the classroom assistant tells me that she once asked Emma and her friends what they wanted to do when they were grown up. She reports to me in horror that Emma had proudly said she wanted to get married and have babies. I suggest in reply that for most women this is a perfectly legitimate ambition but the classroom assistant looks at me in disbelief and irritated bemusement as if to say - surely the end point of school's trajectory is work not kinship? It is no surprise to me however that one of

woman explained that she wasn't allowed to go to grammar school because her older sisters didn't get places. She said to me, "*Working class* people are their own worst enemies."

³² In an interview with an elderly Bermondsey lady in her eighties she explains to me the importance of the housekeeping money that a mother gets from her children. Remembering her own mother she tells me about the youngest sibling in her family, a boy that was never allowed to marry because their mother wanted to keep him at home. The woman explains that this was quite common for a woman to keep one among her many children to continue living with her, bringing in a bit of housekeeping and

Emma's principal ambitions is to get married and have children. She lives in a household where that most difficult of tasks, choosing the right man to marry, making a household and having children are the primary preoccupations of female kin. To do this legitimately without ruining life's chances, or disrupting the harmony of the mother's household would be the perfect expression of Emma's mother's idea of what makes for a good foundation in life. The classroom assistant's retort to my defence of Emma's ambitions to get married and have babies, was to say dismissively, "That's probably all she's good for anyway."

In fact Emma does have career ambitions, she wants to be a vet, but she is worried that she might not be able to do this because sometimes she would have to put animals down. She wonders if she might not be better off working in an animal sanctuary instead. Of course it doesn't occur to Emma that the odds of her becoming a vet are stacked against her because she lives in a home where caring counts in a way that learning doesn't and she attends a school that has failed her before her education has barely begun. The child, like Emma, who is far behind age related expectations for learning achievement quickly becomes alienated from schoolwork and naturally feels the pull of the caring and relatively rule free home as a centrifugal force. Seeing it as a place of refuge from the overwhelming constraints and demands that abstract knowledge imposes on children Emma often prefers to stay at home with Sharon. This is Emma's problem, for a long time refusing to go to school, she screams about stomach pains if Sharon tries to force her to go. Whilst Sharon gets to her wits end, taking Emma to the doctor to investigate her stomach complaints and being told there is nothing wrong with her, she realises that the school blames her for Emma's problems and she then faces the arrival of education welfare officials. 'The Welfare,' as Sharon describes them impress upon her the legal requirement of parents to send their children to school. Meanwhile the school makes no investigation into the specific learning difficulties that Emma might be battling against and she continues to fall further behind as her age/class mates progress apace. Sharon tells me that she threatens Emma telling her, "If you don't start getting into school they'll take you away from me and put you into care."

looking after her in her old age. I have not been able to verify this suggestion but would be interested to know if such a practice was indeed prevalent.

To me it is ironic that Emma should be threatened with separation from an environment where caring means everything simply because her home is a place where caring and learning are not synonymous. In the end the problem is ameliorated because in exchange for the time that I spend in Sharon's home I begin to teach Emma to read and as she makes progress little by little her confidence slowly improves.³³ I suggest to Sharon that Emma make use of the psychotherapeutic service for children at school through which she can discuss her problems on a regular basis and make use of the assistance that is available to her. Sharon agrees and eventually Emma begins to want to be at school again. The point to emphasise is that when girls from *common* households like Sharon's are not doing well at school it is usually because they are preoccupied with the demands that kinship relations place on them. Often girls like Emma take on a caring role towards their mothers who are struggling for various reasons against the constraints that *common* life presents to a woman trying to raise her family.³⁴ Caring about the family interrupts the trajectory that being at school implies for a child and especially a girl's future in the world of work. In chapter two I will explain why it is often very different for boys.

Sitting by the side of a Bermondsey pool with Anita and some of her new found friends and mothers of young children who are committed to giving their children access to after school activities, we watch our children having their swimming lessons. Discussing the kind of day each of us has had, I explain Emma's dilemma and the discrepancy that I perceive between what it means to be *common* and what doing well at school requires of young girls. One of the mums, Lisa, responds with enthusiasm. "Oh, she's spot on there ain't she? You can't be *common* and clever." She goes on to explain, "My Dad used to work up in Chelsea with a lot of *posh* people and he'd come home and say to me, 'Girl, there's nothing they're doing there that you couldn't do only you'd never be allowed to do it because of the mouth on

³³ When I ask Sharon if she will read with Emma when I am not there she tells me that she doesn't have the patience for it and so when Emma and I read, to avoid her mother's constant teasing, Emma insists that Sharon leaves the room. I know that Sharon can read and write herself because she frequently uses the Internet on the computer in the living room.

³⁴ The case of Jade, the Bermondsey girl from Channel Four's Big Brother programme, illustrates this point very well. She was widely mocked in the media because she showed no signs of having had even the most rudimentary education, but when the show was over it emerged that she was rarely at school as a child because she was looking after her mother who had many and various problems.

you.” We all laugh at her anecdote and the women discuss how being *common* often means that you are prevented from taking a role at work where you would be expected to play a part in creating a good impression. Lisa, who is studying every evening after work to take her accountancy exams says, “All I want now is respect. When I was at school all I wanted was to get married, have kids and an easy life but my mum and dad wouldn’t allow it. In our family you had to do better than your parents as they had tried to do better than my grandparents as I expect better things of my girl than I have done for myself.”

Looking for Trouble

Sharon contrasts what it is like living where her flat is now, in a quiet block in a tiny cul-de-sac street, where ‘nothing ever happens’ to the way life was when she lived on the Aylesbury Estate in Walworth. “It was all right up there, when there was trouble we used to love it, all of us looking out to see what was going on.” To illustrate how she feels about where she lives now Sharon says, “I said to my mate the other day, ‘If only something would happen.’” Sharon then tells me about her experience of living on different estates, “You’ve got Tyers’ Gate [where Sharon used to live] and you’ve got White’s Ground where Gary lives,³⁵ and those boys don’t mix. They are totally different. Gary gets bullied a lot by the older boys [at White’s Ground] and then he comes to [Emma’s] school and takes it out on the kids there.” I ask Sharon if it is only boys who get into trouble on the estates and she tells me that it depends on the child and Emma, referring to her older sister, adds, “Sophie’s a trouble maker.” Sharon then explains that when Sophie was fifteen she was accused of GBH (grievous bodily harm) but the sentence was later reduced to ABH (actual bodily harm). She tells me the story of how Sophie was having trouble with some girls from another estate and eventually they had come round in a gang to wait for Sophie outside the block and below the balcony where she lives. Sharon tells me that she had gone out onto the balcony to see what was happening and warned the girls to go away if they didn’t want any trouble. The girls wouldn’t go away so Sharon told Sophie that she should go down and sort out the girl who was giving her problems. Before Sophie could get down stairs Sharon had phoned the police telling them to make their way round because she knew what Sophie was

³⁵ Gary is a boy in Emma’s class at school (see chapter three).

capable of and that there was going to be trouble. The two girls agreed that they were going to sort their differences out between them without the girl's gang being involved and Sophie and the other girl started to fight. The ferocity of Sophie's temper got the better of her aggressor and, knocking her unconscious, Sophie then dragged the girl by the hair and smashed her head through the windscreen of a nearby car. Not long after the police arrived. Sharon emphasises that girls don't fight as much as boys, but I am shocked nevertheless. I would never have imagined Sophie capable of such brutality because she appears to be gentle and reserved at home, but appearances can be deceptive. Sharon stresses that Sophie certainly didn't have any trouble on the estates again.

'Blacks and Pakis Can't Be Common'

Returning to the subject of Gary, one of the trouble makers from Emma's school Sharon teases Emma, "She came home the other day saying she's got to give Gary an answer because he asked her to go out with him and d'ya know what she says to me?" Sharon looks expectantly at Emma with a smile on her face and Emma answers, "I like to keep my men waiting." We all laugh. Taking her cue, Emma, who, like me, is permanently at the periphery of the conversation, learning the rules about what kind of talk has value at home, begins to speak about her friends at school. She mentions Sita and Sunita, who I know from Emma's class at Tenter Ground School. They are the unrelated daughters of different Bangladeshi Muslim families. Emma tells us that Sita used to be her friend but she hates her now because she is, Emma says, "Always trying to steal friends from her and talk behind her back." She explains in indignant tones how once when she had gone to Sita's house she had been accused of stealing something. Sharon interrupts abruptly, saying, "I'm not *racist* but I can't get on with *Pakis*." When I don't respond,³⁶ Sharon

³⁶ Whilst the aim of ethnography is to develop empathy for the values of the people being studied by living with and trying to make sense of their way of life the people may at the same time have beliefs and practices with which one is in complete disagreement. This presents an ethical dilemma to the ethnographer who must try to make sense of these beliefs and practices in order to be able in due course to go on and explain them. I would argue that it would be impossible to do this if one immediately started disagreeing with what people say and do. This kind of resistance would prevent the ethnographer finding out about the depth and breadth of the existence of such beliefs and practices amongst the people. This means that whilst an ethnographer may have ethical qualms, these must be put in the background of the fieldwork practice so that effective observation can ensue. This does not mean however that the ethnographer has to actually participate wholeheartedly in things she disagrees with such as, in this case, *racist* or prejudicial discourse. In the case of this kind of conversation with Sharon my role as a researcher becomes more one of observation whilst participation becomes less

returns to the subject of life on the Aylesbury and tells me how a family from Bangladesh was living in the four-bedroom-flat above her. One day, Sharon explains, they called the police on her because Sharon kicked their front door down. She tells me how one of their boys had punched Emma in the stomach because he said she had written *Paki* on their door. Sharon says that she went straight up there to try and sort it out and the mother of the boy had closed the door in her face so she kicked it down. When the police arrived Sharon tells me that she said to them, "What are you going to do about these fucking *Pakis*?" The police, Sharon says, tried to explain to her that the family was not from Pakistan and informed her that they were Bangladeshi people from Bangladesh. Sharon tells me, "They're all *Pakis* to me." Because Sharon refused to stop calling her neighbours *Pakis* and the problem couldn't be resolved she was forced to go to mediation but it didn't work and in the end she was threatened with eviction for *racial* harassment. Sharon tells me all this in the light of her grievance about there being no trouble on the estate where she lives now. The story about the Bangladeshi family is told with the full drama that trouble as a form of entertainment presents and I begin to realise that being *common as shit* might also mean looking for and being able to handle *trouble* as a perverse form of neighbourhood recreation.

Sharon continues, "I think they [*Pakis*] should go to special schools where they have to learn to speak English and learn about our *culture* because if you come to our country and we've been here longer than they have, they should take on our *ways*." Emma interrupts her mum now and tells her, "Mum, you shouldn't call them *Pakis*." Sharon ignores her and tells me that when Emma had invited Sita and Sunita to her birthday party at home Sharon had asked Emma if she should, "Dress up in a curtain and put a sticker on my head." Emma, stops talking then and like me, makes her resistance felt through her silence. Later when we are on our own together reading,

emphasised. It is obvious that the people one is working with notice these shifts between observation and participation and Sharon notes my refusal to participate in *racist* dialogue with her as a form of resistance to it. When I tell her that my partner is *black* it does not alter anything between us and she does not modify her beliefs in anyway, it just helps her to make sense of my resistance.

I want to emphasise here that where I present the prejudicial and *racist* opinions of people I have met during my fieldwork, the presentation is made for the sake of its explanatory value. My aim is to note and bring attention to people's beliefs in terms of the social situations in which the beliefs are made manifest. This does not in any way mean that I endorse the opinions of people whose beliefs are presented here and nor does it mean necessarily that I did not in some way make my resistance to such beliefs apparent and therefore open to direct discussion.

Emma tells me, "I hate when people talk about other people behind their back, I can't stand it, I go out of the room when I hear my mum talking about other people." Meanwhile Sharon continues undeterred by Emma's protest, "If you look at Emma's school photos, there's hardly any *whites* now." Tracey who is sitting with us and listening too says it is the same at her school. Sharon tells Emma to go and get her school photo to show me. Sharon then says, "It's like that whole Stephen Lawrence thing," and Tracey explains how in RE at her school all the *white* girls had to write an essay pretending that they were *black* girls. They each had to write how they felt about what *white* people were like and what they were doing to *black* people and they had to learn about the slave trade. Tracey says, "I couldn't do it, slag off my own *race* and after the lesson all the *black* girls were coming out saying, 'Yeah we rules and *white* people are this and *white* people are that.'" Sharon tells me that she went down to the school and told them that she didn't want Tracey doing that class anymore. Tracy states proudly that that was the only lesson she had ever *bunked off*.³⁷

Tracey then goes on to tell me about her friend who looks *white* but has a *half-caste* mum. This girl had said to Tracey that even though she looks *white* she wouldn't do the essay either because as Tracey explains, "She already knew that what they done to Stephen Lawrence was bad and they didn't have to keep going on about it." Sharon says, "There's already enough *white* people and *black* kids with chips on their shoulders, stirring it up just makes it worse." She then tells me that Emma had come home the other day saying that she wasn't allowed to say *half-caste* anymore and I say, "Yes, that was me, I had explained to her that nowadays most people say *mixed-race* not *half-caste*."³⁸ Sharon bristles and says, "*Black* people don't like to be called *coloured* any more now do they either?" and I tell her, "No they don't." Sharon then asks me where my 'husband' is from and I tell her that his parents are from Nigeria and that he grew up in the East End of London. This information brings the conversation to a complete halt. The prospect of a *posh cow* with a *coloured* husband represents a complete breakdown in the possibility of me learning

³⁷ *Bunk off* means skip lessons or skip school all together.

³⁸ I am aware that the history of the semantics of *racial* description is one of constant change and that changing the terms does nothing to dispel the idea of absolute *racial* differences between people which genetic scientists have long since tried to dispel of. I continue, therefore, to refer here to *racial* terminology because they are widely used ethnographic terms.

how to participate appropriately in *common* conversation. Sensing the tension Emma quickly changes the subject picking up my hand and telling Sharon about each of the rings on my fingers, asking me to remind her which members of my family had given each of the rings to me as gifts.

'Keep To Your Own!'

Two weeks later, I am relieved that Sharon still wants me in her home and after my time spent reading with Emma Sharon and I engage in conversation over a cup of tea as usual. Because Sharon knows that I am doing interviews with people all over Bermondsey and she is aware of the prejudices of Bermondsey people, she asks me how people react when they find out that I've got a *black* boyfriend. I tell her that at some point, usually towards the end of the interview, I tell people so that they don't find out later and think that I was trying to hide something. Sharon scoffs at me and says, "You didn't tell me, I had to drag it out of you." I laugh and ask her if she thinks Bermondsey people would talk to me openly if they knew in the beginning that I'm going with a *black* guy. She admits that she doesn't think they would. Sharon then stresses that when she was growing up she was told, "Keep to your own." She explains that she was brought up with the understanding that, "You didn't make friends with and you didn't go out with *coloured* people and that was that, that's what I'm used to." Sharon goes on to tell me that she wouldn't let her girls go out with *black* men. When I ask her why she explains that *black* men don't know how to treat their women properly, and she illustrates her belief with the example of her friend who is a Jamaican woman whose husband used to beat her really badly. I tell Sharon that my partner has never raised a finger to me and treats me very well so whether or not a man is *black* can't be relevant otherwise all *black* men would be beating their women. I then inform her that a number of people that I have spoken to have told me that the incidence of domestic violence amongst *white* Dockers' families was very high and that it isn't *black* men alone who beat their women – it's a tendency that all men struggle against. Domestic violence is best understood in terms of gendered relations in the home not *racial* difference.³⁹

³⁹ During my fieldwork I became aware of the incidence of domestic violence against women in Bangladeshi families. What became interesting to me as time went on are the differences between the different ways in which male violence is exercised among various groups of people. Whilst *white working class* boys have to accommodate the reality of other boys' violence on the street, their situation is very different from Bangladeshi boys who appear to be quiet, peaceful and non-violent. In

My attempts to resist Sharon's *racial* taboo with the reason of experience only serves to make her work harder to shore up the boundaries of her beliefs. As the weeks go by her vehement prejudices become more and more explicit as she protects herself from the possibilities that my relationship with a *black* man and Emma's friendships with Bangladeshi Muslim girls at school present to her.⁴⁰ I realise then that Sharon's prejudice against *blacks* and *Pakis* forces a fissure to open in her perception that all *common* people in South London are the same, 'living on the same housing estates, doing the same kinds of jobs and that's all that matters.' How can they be all the same if *blacks* and *Pakis* are so different because in Sharon's mind they don't share the same *culture* as *white* people who are *common* do? I ask her, "Can *black* people and Bangladeshi people be *common*?" She answers immediately, "No, they can't." I enquire why not and Sharon says, "Because even where they've been 'ere long enough to talk *common*, they've still got their own things in there." I ask, "What kind of things?" Sharon replies, "The way their parents talk." Tracey interrupts to disagree with Sharon saying, "There is a Nigerian teacher at my school who is *common* as anything, she swears all the time and everything."

Sharon, when she insists on the homogeneity of *common* people living in South London, does so to negate the special difference that Bermondsey people evoke about themselves that they are so proud of. The homogeneity of what being *common* means is fractured however by the vehemence of Sharon's prejudice against *blacks* and *Pakis* who have different *cultures* by which she means different *ways* of life learnt in different countries of origin. Anita and Jean's experiences in Bermondsey had already led me to question the idea of unity amongst *white working class* people

the home, however Bangladeshi boys often witness the tyrannical violence that their fathers exercise over their mothers. The lack of involvement of Bangladeshi boys in street violence in Bermondsey is probably due to their relative minority in terms of numbers whereas in other areas such as Whitechapel where they predominate there are huge problems with street gangs. There are also incidences of conflict between groups of boys from immigrant families of different Southeast Asian origins.

⁴⁰ I realise, in relation to the vehemence of Sharon's prejudices that part of my *middle class* upbringing involved the cultivation of liberal ideals. I was never taught to have prejudice against *black* people, and the resistance my parents felt towards my relationship with a *black* man centred around his prospects and lack of professional qualification because, although he is very successful now, he was in the beginning a penniless musician. Growing up in a *middle class* family I learnt the value of tolerance and whilst I didn't learn explicitly how to be *racist* I did accommodate, in relation to the kinds of concerns my parents had, a degree of *class* prejudice. I didn't discover this in myself until I moved onto the council estate.

in South London. Spending time with Sharon I realise that the idea of *racial* and *cultural* difference, enforced through taboos about friendship, dating and marriage choices, further disrupts the idea of the homogenous *working class* in England. The emphasis on *racial* and *cultural* differences forces into the background the similarities between *black*, *white* and *Asian* people struggling under the same constraints on council estates all over Bermondsey to raise their families. This is why when I speak to Emma's teacher at school she hesitates to call the area where the school is situated a '*working class* area.' "It's not that simple any more," she says, "Because of the arrival of people from different *cultures*." *Class* understood as a *cultural* difference becomes a more complicated subject for analysis than an economic investigation would allow. As I have already suggested, the emphasis on *racial* and *cultural* difference makes less likely the solidarity that shared *class* position would seem to make logical.

Sharon's daughter Tracey, who has grown up with the experience of *black* and *Asian* people at school, disagrees with Sharon and insists that *black* people can be *common*. She cites the example of the Nigerian teacher who 'swears all the time and everything.' The generational differences between mother and daughter speak to the differences in their experiences because at school the taboo about 'keeping to your own' is harder to enforce now than it was in Sharon's day (see chapter four part II). The way in which Tracey's opinions differ to her mother's emphasises the likelihood that in Bermondsey and across South London, what it means to be *working class* or *common*, is continuously open to contestation. Whilst Sharon is convinced that her position, being *common as shit*, is something to be proud it is clear that in other cases, such as in Bangladeshi Muslim families, being *common*, is not the predominant means by which people make sense of themselves and others.⁴¹ On the

⁴¹ Although there is not the space here to make a comparative analysis between Sharon's household and that of one of Emma's Bangladeshi Muslim friends, I do have the data to support such an analysis and intend to prepare it for presentation at a later date. Suffice it to say here that spending time in Bangladeshi Muslim households I discovered that what it means to be *common* or *working class* is never explicitly referred to. In contrast other concerns, such as the importance of the regulation of conduct through appropriate religious practice and the necessity for academic achievement, come to the fore. The difficulty Muslim families face is that whilst they value education highly as the means to improve the future opportunities of their children and family in general, they can rarely get their children into the church schools which have the highest levels of attainment in Bermondsey. What becomes interesting about the comparison of households is the way in which in Bangladeshi families there is the sense of a continuous resistance to everything that being a girl growing up in a *white* family on the council estate implies. This includes resistance to the likelihood of failing at

contrary it is something to defend oneself against. In this chapter I have begun in brief to explain how it is that things are very different for girls in Bermondsey and in the next chapter I will compare Emma's case with a more detailed consideration of Tom's, a boy from Emma's class at school.

school, swearing, smoking, making trouble, and being given the freedom to do 'as you please.' Experimentation with having boyfriends is especially prohibited because the means for the inculcation of feminine modesty is of paramount importance in Muslim households. This takes the form, in part, of resistance to liberal Western values and the particular form of economy in the West in which goods become objects of desire through their association with potent and especially female sexuality.

It is interesting that even though the means for effecting the same result are different both Sharon and the mother of Emma's Bangladeshi friends share the same ambition which is to secure the reputations and productive capacities of their daughters against the threat of developing teenage desires.

Chapter Two

Part I

Tom at Tenter Ground School

Gillian (teasing tone):

“Tom, how did you learn to swear? Watching *South Park*?⁴²”

Tom:

“Nah. I learnt to swear in the pub when I was little. My mum used to take me to the pub and her friends used to give me a *five*⁴³ for every swear word I could say. Man, I was rich in them days.⁴⁴”

Tom

Tom is a lively freckled-face ten-year-old boy; he lives with his mum, step-dad and younger sister in a two bedroom flat on an old housing association estate just across the road from Tenter Ground School,⁴⁵ in Bermondsey. Like the estate the school has been there since Victorian times. Facing each other at the top of a crossroad and enclosing a narrow cul-de-sac the two buildings have stood the test of time and many changes. Mrs. Waldman, an elderly Bermondsey woman, now in her eighties remembers growing up on the estate where as a child she shared two rooms with eleven other family members.⁴⁶ There was a kitchen and a bedroom

⁴² *South Park* is an American cartoon featuring a group of young children who are constantly engaged in nefarious activities, they never do as they are told and swear a lot. In every episode one among them dies during their escapades. I often heard Tom mimicking the voices of the characters brilliantly; he could also draw them from memory. Cartoons like *South Park* and *The Simpsons* satirise conventional adult ideas about childhood and family life.

⁴³ £5.00

⁴⁴ When I had the opportunity I asked Tom’s mother if this story was true and she confirmed that it was. Anne tells me that when she had Tom christened when he was five his uncle, Tom’s father’s brother, told Tom he would give him a *five* if he would go up to the man in the black dress, (the priest) and call him a fucking cunt. Tom did as he was told. This story confirms my observations in chapter one that being a certain kind of *common* person means, in part, the cultivation of irreverence for what is supposedly sacred – for example, priests and the innocence of children. I open this chapter with this quote because I want to highlight the discrepancy between the idea that teachers and parents might have about what constitutes suitable behaviour in children. See chapter one for a more general discussion of swearing.

⁴⁵ The names of the school and all children and adults mentioned have been changed for the sake of confidentiality.

⁴⁶ Just one part of the reason for improved living standards amongst London’s poor and for the formation of a Victorian *middle class* was the popularisation of birth control methods, which gave women a degree of control over family planning. Note that whilst Tom’s mother Anne objects strongly to Tom having to share a small bedroom with his sister, the family also have sole use of a living room, kitchen, parents’ bedroom and bathroom/toilet. Mrs Waldman, in contrast, had to share a bedroom with eleven other family members - adults and children. Nowadays parents would ideally like each of their children to have a bedroom, especially when siblings are boys and girls but

and residents shared communal facilities for washing clothes, answering to the strictures of the ever-watchful estate caretaker. Mrs Waldman remembers how desperately poor her family was and how only lucky children attended the ragged school⁴⁷ that was then housed in a smaller building on the other corner of the crossroad. That building has recently been purchased and renovated to house new offices. As such it has become part of the new Bermondsey regeneration⁴⁸ in

the idea of teenage girls sharing with younger sisters is also frowned on because of the idea that teenagers need their space. Emma's (see chapter one) sister told me for example, how her friend when younger had had to listen to her then teenage sister going into labour on the bottom of the bunk bed they shared. The idea of the person as an individual that is characteristic of modern times is increasingly expressed in ideas of space such that each person should ideally have his or her own space in the household. The worst overcrowding I witnessed during my fieldwork was in first generation Bangladeshi immigrant families. In one family, four children, (boys and girls between the ages of four and twelve) were sharing one small bedroom with no hope of a council transfer to larger accommodation. Pressure for council accommodation is extremely high because there is no longer a state commitment to new building. Often the flats that are available are hard-to-let properties in a state of disrepair that have frequently been turned down by prospective tenants. Those families who are currently on the council housing list are classed as emergency cases and are usually housed through referral to independent housing associations, which have higher rents.

⁴⁷ The ragged school movement was established by the churches for the education of the poor and needy in Victorian cities during the era of industrialisation

⁴⁸ The regeneration of Bermondsey began when Terence Conran purchased a huge area of derelict riverside dock and warehousing during the eighties for conversion into a residential and continental restaurant complex. When Butlers Wharf was still derelict it was squatted by a group of artists who did it up and lived there for a long period of time. When the development of the wharf began they were told they could stay but would have to move temporarily so that the roof could be repaired. Alas, once they moved out they weren't allowed back, but the council re-housed them around the area and they went on to form BAG (Bermondsey Artists Group) which now runs the Café Gallery in Southwark Park. They are founders of a housing co-operative in Rotherhithe Street and as opposed to the '*posh yuppies*' moving into the riverside converted wharves as Bermondsey people are. Local people embrace BAG and the group do a lot of creative work in the *community*.

In the early nineties some of the wharves and warehouses were still being used to import spices and on breezy days the whole development was filled with the smell of cinnamon, cloves and other delicious odours. Capitalising on this romantic association the new luxury apartment blocks have been named after the various spices. This property development that has transformed the redundant riverside industrial sites into premium value residential areas has spread slowly into the interior of the borough and along the length of the South Bank. The irony is that these expensive property developments are interspersed in an area that has one of the highest densities of council estates in the country. This means that half-a-million-pound apartments often overlook run-down council estates where tenants pay on average £60 - £80 a week for their flats. People with a vested interest in the regeneration of Bermondsey Street and its environs have got together to organise and conceptualise the development of their new *community*, they call it Bermondsey Village. When I discussed the development of Bermondsey Village with Bermondsey people who have been in the area for generations some laughed and said how typical it was of *posh* people to come in with their money and call the area they have claimed a village. The joke is that a village with its quaint connotations of a quiet country existence couldn't be farther removed from Bermondsey's industrial history and tough reputation (Although it makes more sense in terms of Bermondsey's pre-industrial history). The *posh* people who move into these warehouse apartments are called *yuppies*, which is just one among the many categories of outsiders. *Yuppies* are resented because they bring nothing to the established *working class community*. They don't frequent the pubs, send their children to local schools or spend money in local shops and businesses.

which old buildings of historical interest, having lain vacant and worthless for decades, are now being snapped up by developers eager to capitalise on the property boom. Increasingly fashionable and conveniently located near to the river and central London, Bermondsey is rapidly becoming one of the most desirable areas for wealthy young professionals from outside the borough⁴⁹ to live.

Tom's mother Anne is a proud and handsome woman in her mid thirties who keeps a tidy home. She was born and bred in Bermondsey, close to the Bonamy Estate like Sharon.⁵⁰ Anne's father was an Irish immigrant⁵¹ and her parents now live in Kent, which is the destination of choice for Bermondsey people who have *made good*.⁵² Anne's husband Pete is a dustman; he is the father of her second child, Tom's little sister Mary, who is seven years old. Anne tells me that Pete is the poor relation in his family since all his brothers and sisters are professional people, accountants and the like who drive flash cars and live in Kent. They don't like her she says because they think she is the source of all the troubles in Pete's life. Unlike Tom's father⁵³ Pete is a quiet, law abiding man anxious only to

⁴⁹ Bermondsey was once a borough unto itself but was incorporated into the London Borough of Southwark in the 60s.

⁵⁰ See chapter one.

⁵¹ There is a long history of Irish immigration to Bermondsey beginning when Irish men were brought over to build the docks. Their strength has become the stuff of legend; they laboured by day, drank all evening and slept in the warehouses by night because there was no residential accommodation. The strong Irish contingency on the docks led to the establishment of the Catholic Church in Bermondsey, which remains influential today. At the Dockers' social club an elderly man told me that his father was often out of work for long periods of time because the Irish Catholics controlled the distribution of work on the dock and his father was a Protestant. Sons followed fathers into their various specialisations on the dock and kinship connections regulated employment opportunities as they did for women in the food processing factories.

⁵² *Made good* means made money, got a mortgage and perhaps but not necessarily moved out of Bermondsey. Kent has a romantic place in many Bermondsey people's hearts because they remember going there as children to help their parents with the summer work picking hops. This was as close to a summer holiday as most people now in their middle age ever got as children. The few couples with young children who are now homeowners in Bermondsey mark the changing fortunes of Bermondsey people from a once poverty stricken past to the potential of a prosperous future. They are a few amongst the first generation of Bermondsey people to own their own property. Increasingly however property in Bermondsey is out of reach for first or even second time buyers because of the hyper-inflated market for central, zone 1, warehouse conversions. Decent quality housing at affordable prices is extremely scarce in Bermondsey as it is elsewhere in London and many people who can afford to buy are forced to move out of the area unless they choose the right to buy their council flat. Most first time buyers are forced out of the area even if they would prefer to stay close to family and friends.

⁵³ Anne has had no contact at all with Tom's father for over a year and that's how she prefers it. Middle aged women in Bermondsey many of whom are no longer with the fathers of their children

provide for his family and Anne struggles hard to curb her wilder ways in order to fulfil Pete's desire for her to be a stable homemaker. She tells me about how she used to *like a drink*⁵⁴ and then started taking cocaine⁵⁵ in pubs and clubs but assures herself and me that she is over all that now. I get the impression that Anne is pinning all her hopes for the future on Pete and relying on him to save the family from what she now feels is her dissolute past.

The Street

At home Tom is a complete Mummy's boy, often sitting on his mother's lap for a cuddle while she steals a reluctant kiss from him. They share a joking relationship in which he plays teasing games with her, cheeking her back when she tries to give him instructions and corrections. He knows how to go as far as he dares before she chases him in good humour with her hand raised, threatening to clout him. Laughing loudly, he often runs from the room to escape her clutches and when her nagging gets him down he runs freely outside onto the streets which demand from him an entirely different disposition. Described as *mean*, inner-city streets are the playgrounds where children and especially boys learn to grow up tough and Bermondsey is no different. As soon as Tom is on the street his demeanour changes and he begins to *bowl*, to walk in a way that means business, that shows he can't be pushed around. The street is a place where tough kids rule and these

recall their parents' generation for whom marriage was still a sacred institution keeping couples together until death. Their parents weren't necessarily happy but they stayed together because they were married. Many women told me that it would be a rarity now for me to find in Bermondsey a middle aged couple that are still married with children living at home. This change in kinship relations and household organisation is of course not unique to Bermondsey and many sociological trends mirror those in England more generally. Children's perceptions of family relations usually include now their understanding about what step-relations mean to them. Tom for example can't stand his stepbrother who is his step-dad's son from a previous marriage. Other children spoke happily about how having two families means you get two birthday celebrations, one at your Mum's house and one at your Dad's.

⁵⁴ *Likes a drink* is a phrase used to describe people who drink a lot and regularly. It can also be a polite way of describing someone who verges on, has actually been or could become an alcoholic.

⁵⁵ Cocaine is widely available in Bermondsey but you would have to know which pubs to go to to get and take it without recrimination. The joke amongst women is that men used to think that women went to the toilet together because they liked the company but of course now it might be to *powder their noses*. Whilst men used to laugh at women going to the toilet all together the joke is on them now because they are just as likely to be doing it as well. Younger people are more likely to *be on the puff* (smoking marijuana) and people using cocaine are more likely to be in their

are usually older boys who move in gangs. When Tom is out of the room Anne tells me that when they first moved to the estate and didn't know anyone Tom got badly bullied by the older boys to the point that he was often too scared to go out. Not liking to stay in however he'd go back again and again for more punishment. One day someone had run to her to tell her that Tom had been put upside down in a wheelie bin and couldn't get out. That night Pete made Tom tell him who had done it and learning which group of boys was responsible and who the ring leader was - Shane, a local fifteen year old, Pete went out to look for him. When he found him Pete took Shane by the scruff of the neck and told him that if anything ever happened to Tom on these streets, he would hold Shane personally responsible even if Shane had nothing whatsoever to do with it. And then he emphasised that if any harm should come to Tom, he, Pete, would go straight out to find Shane and kill him. With that warning issued Tom never had any trouble on the street again and peace-loving Pete never had to worry himself. Knowing that his parents are fiercely protective over him, a Bermondsey boy *bowls* because his parents and older siblings or cousins' reputations are intact behind him. Tom proudly tells his friends at school one day about what a good fighter his mum is. If she ever lost a fight at school, he says, her older brother would wait until she got home and then beat her up again for losing. She toughened up pretty quick. Anne shows me Tom's boxing gear that she and Pete bought for him, leather boots and gloves and shiny shorts and she tells me that the boxing coach above the Thomas A' Beckett pub on the Old Kent Road said Tom had shown promise. "He didn't keep it up," she lamented, "Tom gets bored easily, he can't settle to anything." Bermondsey boxers are famous and the tough reputation of the men and the area in general is legendary⁵⁶ and it is in relation to this reputation that Bermondsey boys make sense of their developing masculinity. Whilst the women that men desire for their wives are expected by men to be more gentle and peaceable, Bermondsey

thirties. Because cocaine is more expensive than *puff* it requires a certain level of income to sustain a habit.

⁵⁶ Boxing is a legitimate means to transform a tough reputation into a high wage-earning career. Boxing is as much a way to contain violence as it is to promote it since once a boxer applies for his licence he can no longer fight on the streets without risk of losing his licence. Bermondsey's notoriety as a tough area of London meant that even up until ten or fifteen years ago black cabs from the West End wouldn't take a fare to Bermondsey and Rotherhithe.

women are no push-over either. Anne admits that she used to fight when she was younger but explains that once you've got a reputation you don't have to fight anymore you just walk like you mean business and that's enough.⁵⁷

Anne tells me that she's happier now about Tom playing out because he has made friends with Gary, a boy a year older than him from the White's Grounds Estate⁵⁸ just on the other side of Bermondsey Street. Gary is in year six at Tenter Ground, sharing a class with Tom's year five cohorts. He has a small crew of his own that he moves with outside school and an older fifteen year old brother who is a *bod*⁵⁹ with a reputation so he and Tom won't be bothered when they're out and about. Anne hopes that Gary will be a good influence on Tom; she knows that Tom is restless and wishes he would settle down a bit because she knows he's heading for trouble otherwise. She laughs telling me how she has had to come down hard on him lately because last year he was going too far, *bowling* down the road with a *fag*⁶⁰ hanging out of his mouth. When she saw that Anne says she took Tom inside and bruised his pride, making him feel bad for *digging out*⁶¹ the family, telling him what an idiot he looked. She's confident that she humiliated him and managed to convince him that it's not *big* to smoke when you're still a kid.⁶² Despite his young years however Tom is already aiming for manhood, he knows how to hold himself, how to act *big* and is full of a self-confident bravado in the place where his charisma comes into its own - on the street.

⁵⁷ Whilst the boys and young men *bowl* when they walk, women like Anne who have had to be tough in the past also have a distinctive body posture that is upright and proud, shoulders back and chest forward, something like a fighting stance. This is as much about pride and resilience as it is about self-defence.

⁵⁸ Children from one block of flats tend to hang together and may pit themselves against other groups of children from other blocks on one estate. Otherwise children from one estate might gang together against other estates but more established teenage *firms* (boys that move together) might be antagonistic towards *firms* from other areas inside Bermondsey's boundaries but will come together if a group of enemy boys from outside Bermondsey threatens them.

⁵⁹ A Bermondsey *bod* is a tough boy with a reputation – *bods bowl* (walk tough).

⁶⁰ A *fag* is cigarette.

⁶¹ '*Digging out*' means to have a go at, moan at or threaten someone or something. So for example a person might say, "He was digging me out," (Someone was having a go at him). "I dug him right out when I see him," (Having a go at someone). "She was digging me new shirt out!" (She took the piss or said she didn't like it.)

Anne speaks to me hopefully about Tom's friend Gary's step-dad who takes the boys fishing sometimes. The problem she says is that there's nothing for the kids to do so they get into trouble. A boy like Tom needs a firm hand and knows how to put on his best manners when it suits him but he can also be free of his mother's restraining influence as often as he pleases. Despite her best efforts to contain him he does not have the kind of relationship with her in which finding constructive things for him to do, like boxing, is enough for him. Trying to maintain a consistent vigilance over young boys in Bermondsey is a full time job for mothers and the commitment to keeping them *on the straight and narrow* requires unceasing resourcefulness and devotion. At the same time boys are encouraged to be tough and enjoy a teasing relationship with older boys and men in which mock fighting plays a large part in what is seen as the necessity to toughen a boy up. In general things couldn't be more different for girls.⁶³ Tom's sister Mary is not allowed to play out unless she is safe in the garden square at the back of the flats and she is quieter and more serious than Tom, spending more time at home playing close to Anne and Pete's company. Mary is extremely feminine, immaculately turned out with waist length straight brown hair lovingly tended by Anne. She enjoys reading and writing and is at least three years in advance of Tom's reading ability even though she is three years younger than him. Anne comments on the difference between her two children, saying, "Tom's *common* as muck, he's got a mouth on him no doubt about that, he's like me really not like Mary, she's gentle like her Dad and well spoken." Anne then goes on to tell me about her sister who teases her when she hears Mary talking, saying, 'Blimey Anne where'd she learn to speak like that?' But Anne says there's nothing wrong with speaking nicely so she leaves Mary alone. Mary, who is her teacher's favourite at school because she is pretty, well behaved, gentle and good at her work, often teases Tom at home because she can read better than her older brother who is always in trouble at school.

⁶² Both Anne and Pete smoke in front of the children *indoors* and it was often mentioned to me that the majority of Bermondsey adults and teenagers smoke.

⁶³ See chapter one for a description of the differences between *common* girls. Emma's older sister for example has a reputation for being able to fight. These kind of girls like Tom's mother Anne

Learning and Caring

After a year's fieldwork in Tom's class I visit Anne to conduct an interview and we agree that if I come to the house once a week to help Tom with his reading then I can also spend some time with the family.⁶⁴ Anne is glad of the offer telling me that she has tried to help Tom with his schoolwork but she doesn't have the patience. When he gets things wrong she loses her temper and they always fall out so she feels as though it's no good her trying anymore. I have made a good relationship⁶⁵ with Tom at school, so he is keen for me to come to his house and is excited about my visits. We begin with reading material aimed at six-year-old children and he insists during the time that we are reading that both Anne and Mary leave the living room because he is embarrassed about making mistakes. I witness the other side of Tom's personality, the insecure ten year old that knows that he's no good at schoolwork, the boy who worries that he can't do it because he's *dumb*⁶⁶ and covers his fear with complicated avoidance strategies. During the time that I am with him at home Tom applies himself well and I have the chance to observe over the weeks in what ways his reading skills have been left undeveloped. His concentration span is small because he has never learned to apply himself to mastering symbolic work with letters and numbers; his confidence is low and when the words are too difficult he gives up completely. He doesn't know how to work with the alphabet phonetically and cannot therefore tackle the basic principles of reading three letter phonetic words like jug. As he begins to master this skill his abilities improve quickly and his reading vocabulary expands gradually. Tom's mind is lively and quick and so week by week he makes progress with me through the series of books that I choose for him and one Saturday morning Pete comes home from work and finds Tom reading to me on the sofa. He sits down quietly and watches us. Tom doesn't dare ask him to leave

who grow up tough, learning how to fight and stick up for herself, exist in contrast to *nice* girls like Tom's sister Mary.

⁶⁴ This is an example of just one among the many gift exchanges through which the development of fieldwork relationships are made possible.

⁶⁵ In chapter four I explain the transformation in my relationship with the disruptive boys at school.

⁶⁶ Children taunt each other about being *dumb* when they mean stupid. This is an Americanism learnt from television and film.

the room⁶⁷ and so Pete listens and observes, hearing me encouraging Tom and witnessing Tom's application to the book. When we have finished he tells me that this is the first time he has ever seen Tom sit down with anyone and read a book cover to cover without getting bored or having a temper tantrum. He calls Tom over and pulls him proudly onto his lap filling him with praises. Pete tells me that he's really happy about Tom's reading and he calls Anne in from the kitchen to reinforce to her how proud he is of Tom. Anne then tells me that Tom has got a series of classic children's books on his shelf and she asks Tom to run and get them. Tom brings and shows me a boxed set with titles like *Treasure Island* and he emphasises to me how small the writing is and how big some of the words are. Anne says that he gets them down every now and again and says to her, "Mum, why can't I read these books?" and she says it breaks her heart because she knows that he thinks boys of his age should be able to read them. Presenting to me the challenge of what they feel he ought to be able to achieve Anne and Pete look expectantly at me. I turn to Tom and tell him that if he practices enough he'll soon be able to read those books but stress to him that he would have to practice reading every day not just once a week.⁶⁸

Anne and Pete's reaction to Tom's progress reinforces what I learn in almost every home I visit and that is that most parents want more than anything for their children to do well at school because they believe that it will lead to a better livelihood in the future. When I ask parents⁶⁹ why they think it is that some children do well at school and others don't they often explain the difference in

⁶⁷ Although I had less time to observe Tom's relationship to Pete because Pete was most often at work, the parental relationship seemed to be one of respect and I didn't witness the same degree of joking as Tom enjoyed with his mother.

⁶⁸ Anne tells me that he won't pick up a book unless I am there. In the beginning reading is an inter-personal skill and is internalised as a pleasing and self-preoccupying activity only after a degree of self-confidence with appropriate reading material is reached. Unfortunately, for various reasons I will discuss later Tom and I never had the chance to get to that stage of achievement. Children as young as fifteen to eighteen months can reach this stage of self preoccupation with books repeating back to themselves the words they have memorised from time spent on their parent's or carer's knee. Other children discover this pleasure at school and bring it into the home as a pleasurable activity to share with a willing parent.

⁶⁹ I conducted interviews with parents in at least a third of the homes of children in Year Five/Six and undertook six preliminary case study investigations and three in-depth case study observations in which I exchanged reading assistance for time spent with the family.

terms of children's *naturally* different abilities. In other homes parents explain how highly they value education as an aspiration for their children's futures and how far they encourage the child to have a positive attitude to school. Some children are encouraged whether they want to or not to continue with formal learning activities at home and this was especially the case in the first and second-generation immigrant families from West Africa and Bangladesh.⁷⁰ Even in families where the mother speaks little English and may have only a very basic education even in her own language, as was often the case in the families of Bangladeshi origin, mothers push their children towards education as the source of future opportunities in England. The important point to note, however, is that rarely if ever are parents themselves actually engaging with their children in activities that would constitute formal learning tasks. Children may regularly be told to pick up a book but parents are much less likely to sit down with their children to read it. In *common* households like Anne's, for example, an appreciation of the value of formal learning does not take the form of shared activity during the early relationship of caring between mother and child. Learning and caring are not considered to be synonymous and therefore the ability to learn is not thought of as a social skill that parents can influence directly but rather is considered to be a heritable quality.⁷¹ In *common* homes the child is either thought

⁷⁰ In an informal conversation with a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator who has been at the same secondary school in Bermondsey for twenty years, she informed me about the trend that she has noticed. The children of first and second-generation immigrant families, usually those of West African backgrounds were tending to surpass their peers' achievements at school and it was often the Caribbean and *white working class* children who were being left behind. Another head teacher of a local primary school said that she often gets *white working class* parents coming in to school worrying about the bad influence that they believe *black* boys pose to their children. In fact, she says, her greatest concern is for the often-chronic low achievement of *white working class* boys, which she feels arises from generations of disregard for education in local families. In discussion with Patrick, a Bermondsey man, (see chapter six), he suggests that older generations had the belief that teachers were almost superhuman, highly intelligent people who should be able to teach children without parental help or influence at home. He has no recollection of boys misbehaving so badly in class when he was young because in those days teachers still had authority. At home parents' respect for teachers was second to none, but the idea was that learning is what takes place at school not at home. Nowadays it would be called 'bad parenting' because parents are supposed to do more but this idea was unheard of years ago. Patrick remembers hearing fathers say, "I can't read or write and it ain't bothered me."

⁷¹ In *middle class* homes, learning with and caring for children are normally synonymous. The caring relationship between mother and child is nearly always constituted in relation to play oriented towards formal learning and mastery of *symbolic capital* (Bourdieu 1977). This means that children of *middle class* parents are predisposed to formal learning before they ever reach

of as being naturally clever or not. A mother of a particularly able girl in the class says when I interview her, “I dunno where she gets them brains from ‘cos me and her Dad are thick as shit.” If a child does well at school parents don’t generally credit themselves. At the same time if a child doesn’t do well parents feel there’s little they can do about it except try their best to enforce respect for the value of education and hope the child will do better.⁷²

Children like Tom who come from *common* households, are well cared for at home but are not necessarily well prepared for, and are more likely therefore to resist, the kind of participation that formal learning at school requires of them. On the other hand children from households where learning and caring are not synonymous who nevertheless go on to do well at school, like Mary, are those children whose disposition for various reasons suits them for formal learning. These children are more likely to be girls because they do not usually have the same degree of freedom to play on the streets, as their brothers do. They are not therefore participating in peer groups in which being tough, looking for trouble and resisting authority are ways to gain prestige. Gender is always going to be a problem in schools in areas where boys enjoy a large measure of freedom to compete for

primary school and more often go on to love learning. It follows that children of even mediocre ability are likely to at least reach their potential whilst exceptionally talented children are pushed to the limit of their capabilities. I would argue that more *middle class* children reach their learning potential because the quiet concentration that formal learning requires stands in the most intimate way for the synonymous relationship in the home between caring and learning. *Middle class* boys, in contrast to *working class* boys, do not usually have the same tough style of masculinity to aspire to because their fathers have had their boyish violence contained in sporting or bookish pursuits. Violence is frowned upon in *middle class* families rather than confronted as an aspect of human existence that has to be dealt with. Tom’s teacher Christine describes the education specialists who are brought in to assist the disruptive boys in her class as ‘wet *white men*’ because their *middle class* backgrounds do nothing to prepare them for what being a *working class* boy means. She finds their intervention for the most part ineffectual.

⁷² Discussing my work with the head teacher of a private selective school that gets excellent results I try to explain that *middle class* children’s academic achievements might not necessarily be because they are ‘naturally’ more intelligent. Perhaps, I suggest to him, the idea of the child in *working class* households is different to that in *middle class* households because learning and caring are not necessarily synonymous. This difference means that *common* parents tend not to have the idea that they could play a crucial part in the formation of a child’s intelligence via shared activities that nurture conceptual development. Finding this idea challenging he asked if I had neglected to consider whether or not *working class* children do less well at school because they are genetically less intelligent. It is interesting to note how nature/genetics is used in different ways to legitimise *class* differences. I wonder how prevalent this idea is amongst people who have benefited from an elite education.

prestige on the streets. Tenter Ground school is no different. When things go wrong and children like Tom fail for many different reasons to behave at school and/or to learn what is appropriate to their age group, parents like Anne often lack the skills to challenge the school or rectify the problem at home. The kind of intervention that I was able to make with Tom was possible only because I was prepared to visit him at home. The work we did could not have been achieved at school because in the eyes of his peer group he would be shamed by his need and desire for special reading assistance. The school is rarely in a position to give children the individual assistance their learning difficulties require and by the time the problem is noticed it is usually too late to do much about it.

When Tom runs across the road in the mornings to school, often late, as is usual for children who live closest to school, he leaves behind a loving home where he is apparently safe to be a vulnerable ten-year-old boy. At school he adopts the posture that his developing reputation demands and he *bowls* into the playground to meet his peer group. Some of these are boys and girls he knows and hangs out with on the street and others he meets only at school. Here are different sets of boys⁷³ in relation to whom he can test his mettle; but the school is not like the street; it occupies an intermediary position between the household and the street. At school, unlike on the streets⁷⁴, children must accommodate to adult rules that are differently structured to home and familial regulations. Tom cannot run out of

⁷³ Anne was thoroughly schooled by her parents in what she sees as the conventionally prejudiced Bermondsey views about not mixing with *coloured* children, but she refuses to do the same to Tom and Mary. She is not *racialist* she says because even though her parents were *racialist* she went to school with *coloured* children and therefore got to make her own mind up about different people. She tells me that if she ever hears the children being *racialist* she comes down hard on them. Tom, she says, was distraught when he was forced to leave his old school because he was leaving behind a best friend he was really tight with - Max, a *mixed-race* boy.

⁷⁴ On the street, children's activities are mostly constrained by other children. Usually older children enforce rules about appropriate behaviour and occasionally watchful adult neighbours or in extreme circumstances the police intervene. The formation of a firm group of friends who hang out together on the street doesn't usually happen until the teenage years; until then the peer group is more fluid. Sometimes if children's play on the streets veers towards law breaking they elicit the intervention of *the old bill* and the long arm of the law. Tom, for instance, tells me how on one occasion he had seen Gary and his friends throw bricks through a shop window and then run away in case *the old bill* came. When I asked Tom why he thought they did that he said, "For a laugh, I s'pose." Notice that he takes care to distance himself from the prank when he tells the story because he knows that it was a *bad* thing to do. This doesn't mean that he wasn't also a protagonist.

the classroom or the school when he is sick of the teacher nagging so his freedom to seek the street when he pleases is limited. At the same time the peer group counts a lot at school, not as it does on the street but certainly in a way that it never can at home. The care of kinship relations gives way at the school gate to the camaraderie and competitiveness of the peer group,⁷⁵ the importance of which is mediated now by teachers' responsibilities for the social organisation of school life.

Christine, Tom's Teacher

Tom is in year five at school sharing a classroom and teacher with the older and less numerous year six children. Christine, Tom's teacher is a woman with local roots who grew up in Peckham and whose grandparents were from Bermondsey. Even though she now lives in the leafy streets of Richmond in order to be closer to her partner's workplace and could claim *middle-class* status if she wanted to, she will, she says, always think of herself as a *working class* woman. Christine is one of education's success stories but refuses to turn her back on the struggle of her parents, which is what being *working class* means to her. She can recount the history of her family's involvement with the now defunct economy of the docks and associates herself with, and is proud of, the resilience that surviving and overcoming poverty entails. Part of Christine's relationship to her background means that teaching in a school where she will encounter the children of *working class* families has become a personal commitment. She says of the children, "I understand them, I know what they're going through."

Christine explains to me that Tenter Ground isn't a typical Bermondsey school because most Bermondsey people wouldn't send their children there. The school

⁷⁵ On the street children quite often form groups of disparate ages within a range of a few years either side of the average age for each group but at school classes are formed on the basis of mixed gender same age-set organisation. At Tenter Ground School children can begin in the nursery class at age three and formal school proper starts in a class of five to six year olds who progress through primary school together year by year until the age of eleven when they leave for different secondary schools.

has a bad reputation⁷⁶ and doesn't get good results and the pride of Bermondsey parents means that even if they didn't do well at school themselves they still have high aspirations and want the best for their children. Bermondsey people would be more likely, she said, to favour the stricter church schools with more exacting discipline, greater formality and neat uniforms, even if they had to attend church once a week out of the instrumental desire to secure places for their children. So Tenter Ground is a Bermondsey school because it lies inside the spatial boundary of West and Northern Bermondsey but it is marginal to the desires of *traditional* Bermondsey people. The children the school attracts live mostly on the surrounding council-housing estates but not many of them, with the exception of a few like Tom and Gary, know much about the legacy of Bermondsey's exclusive past.⁷⁷ Most of Tenter Ground's children are residents of Bermondsey, but they're not what would be thought of as *real* Bermondsey. Anne tells me that she doesn't instil in the children any sense that they *are Bermondsey*. She doesn't she says, "Put any religion or culture on them." She just lets them get on with life. Pete tells me that the closely-knit *community* that Bermondsey once was is dead and gone anyway. Tenter Ground school is therefore more like the future, more like what Bermondsey might become.

Some families desperate to secure school places for their children and ready to take anything that is available, travel to Tenter Ground from further afield in South London, from Elephant and Castle or Nunhead and Peckham for example. Many pupils are children of first and second-generation immigrants from West Africa,

⁷⁶ At the time of my fieldwork in the school a recent inspection had labelled the school as having 'serious weaknesses.' Such schools are known in popular parlance as *sink schools*, they are literally going down the drain, which doesn't say much for the prospects of their pupils and reinforces the metaphors that associate being *working-class* with waste products.

⁷⁷ The achievement of a conscious awareness of being a Bermondsey *bod* doesn't occur until the teenage years anyway because it arises out of the territorial conflicts that Bermondsey youths have with outsiders from Peckham, the Walworth Road and Tower Hamlets to the north of the river. It is in the course of these conflicts, either at secondary schools or on the streets, that Bermondsey children find out who they are because others give them the ascription that they *are Bermondsey*. This means that young children whose parents are new to the area and know nothing about its industrial history or the genealogical precedence of key families can still become more like *Bermondsey*. These marginal youths often try harder to prove themselves in the peer group because of the self-conscious desire for acceptance from a group of young people that hang out together in Bermondsey.

Bangladesh and the Caribbean.⁷⁸ Christine explains to me that a lack of confidence in the school amongst parents in the local area has affected the school badly and led to year five and six having to share one teacher and classroom. There simply aren't enough children to make a single age-set class and not enough money therefore to have one teacher per year group.⁷⁹ The negative perception locally is that only children of parents who don't know any better, or who can't get places at other schools are to be found at Tenter Ground. The predominance of boys in year five/six, a ratio of just over two boys to one girl, is thought to be a result of the head teacher's policy of accepting boys, like Tom, who have been excluded from other local primaries.⁸⁰ She can hardly turn them away since she is trying to secure funds for the school, but because these boys are for one reason or another usually troublemakers; the reputation of the school is difficult to turn around. Over the years parents reluctant to keep their children (especially girls) in a deteriorating school, pull them out and find places elsewhere, usually in the church schools to the north of the borough. Christine emphasises that unless the school can improve its reputation the chances of attracting children of ambitious parents from local and other housing estates further afield in Bermondsey are slim.

So the school that Tom runs to in the mornings is not a straightforward place to be. It is blighted by low educational standards, has a reputation for troublesome boys and a lack of funds and therefore low teacher/staff morale. But no matter, Tom knows little of these things and runs in because this is where he can have fun and find his place in the peer group. Occasionally he is reluctant to go to school because there has been too much trouble for him to handle either with other boys or with the teacher because of his behaviour. Every now and again Tom is suspended which means that he is forced to stay at home because the head teacher is unprepared to keep him at school while he is misbehaving. This always means that he's then in trouble with his parents too and will probably be grounded – i.e.

⁷⁸ Eight out of ten children in year six and thirteen out of nineteen in year five are children of first or second-generation immigrant families. This doesn't include the children who have one parent who is a first or second-generation immigrant from Ireland.

⁷⁹ School funds are allocated on the basis of pupil numbers.

prevented from going out to play. Whilst Tom certainly has more freedom to do as he pleases at home⁸¹ he quickly gets bored and lonely. Anyway, all being well Tom has to go to school five days out of seven in term time whether he likes it or not because it's the law.

So why does Tom get into trouble at school and how does he fit into the boy's peer group there? To answer this question it is first important to understand how the classroom is organised socially and what constraints the value system that education embodies establishes for children.

The Classroom

The social organisation of the classroom is characterised by a distinctive spatio-temporal rhythm related to the teacher's attempts to manage the children's comportment. Stillness, quiet attention to what the teacher says and concentration on working through designated tasks within a specific time, signify children's application to formal learning. The tranquillity required of children involves the suppression of their desire to move about, engage with each other and objects around them as they please and to make noise as they move from one space and activity to another⁸². As children's movement and language is constrained at school, so they learn in time what kind of participation is required of them at particular times in specific spaces. This requirement is first of all a bodily disposition, a restraint that embodies order and readiness for concentrated

⁸⁰ Tom was excluded from his last primary school because of persistent altercations with the classroom assistant.

⁸¹ Most of Tom's time at home is spent on his Sony Playstation, which is a cult activity amongst the boys, or watching TV. Tom has to share a small bedroom with his sister and so has to go outside to get any space for himself. Many children and especially teenagers who spend a lot of time on the street do so in part because they need to escape overcrowded housing. Despite examples of excellence in youth club provision in Bermondsey, such clubs are still scarce and under funded.

⁸² Piaget's theories of child development have established (1968, 1972) that the foundation of mind, as the condition for human knowing is sensori-motor action. Before children use language they embody the physical, spatial and temporal properties of an inter-subjective world via sensori-motor engagement with objects and other people in the world. Mind cannot usefully be thought of as what happens *mentally* since the achievement of internalised conceptual development is arguably a transformational development of material engagement in a peopled world. (Toren 1990, 1999 Merleau-Ponty 1962) I have explored these ideas in depth in ethnography of a pre-school nursery classroom. (Evans G. (1999) MSc thesis. Brunel University.)

application to work that demands thinking – here understood as a conceptual mastery of abstract symbols.⁸³ That this requirement is difficult for some children to achieve is clear to see in the frequent interventions of the teacher who devotes a large measure of her energies to trying to manage their bodily comportment. It is significant that the children who have most difficulty with this kind of restraint are boys and particular boys are the worst offenders.⁸⁴ Their inability to participate appropriately in the classroom means that these boys are quickly labelled as badly behaved and are said specifically to have emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is the individual boy who has a problem; he is rendered pathological while the peer group as a social phenomenon and the problem it poses to teachers is never considered. Therefore the form that classroom participation takes and the discrepancy between this and the kinds of participation that boys require of each other, are never considered problematic. The whole of the school day as it unfolds in the spaces of the building becomes a virtual battle ground in which the fight to inculcate in children a disposition towards formal learning is waged against their more fundamental desire to play, move, interact freely and competitively and make noise. The extreme expression of this more general conflict is witnessed in the teacher's continuous focus on managing the comportment and misbehaviour of the most disruptive boys. Tom is by no means the worst offender, but he struggles to get through a school day without getting into trouble and the amount of time he devotes to learning anything through schoolwork is minimal. As a result he is far behind the age related expectations for academic ability in his class and finds himself in the lowest ability group for both numeracy and literacy.⁸⁵

⁸³ The focus on formal learning as a means to increase the child's conceptual abilities prioritises the differentiation of internalised knowledge schemes – symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1977) - over bodily schemes and practical abilities.

⁸⁴ Because of the disproportionate number of boys in this class it would be easy to overemphasise the subversive effect of gendered relations in the classroom. The more important point to note is that a particular group of children will often come to assert its dominance over the wider peer group by refusing to meet the requirements for appropriate participation that teachers and schools establish. This phenomenon is just as likely to be found in an all girls' school. Children and staff at an all girls school in Bermondsey confirmed informally that in exactly the same way as I describe a core group of girls tries to dominate classroom proceedings at the expense of other children's desire to learn.

⁸⁵ Because children's education is organised on the basis of age-sets children move through the system together regardless of whether or not they have achieved the expected level for their age group. This means that a child like Tom who has not yet mastered some of the rudimentary

The School Day

Tom's school day begins in the playground, which is reached by entering the gate in the walls that mark the school grounds off from the streets and surrounding housing estates and park. In the playground children congregate five or ten minutes before school begins at nine, playing freely whilst they wait. Parents and carers say goodbye to the younger children, transferring responsibility for them to the school until it is time to pick them up again at half past three. Older children often make their own way to and from school sometimes having responsibility for younger siblings too. Whilst children are synonymous with play, their youth is also associated with the desire and necessity to learn and tension is continuously created between these two aspects of childhood as the school day unfolds. The playground is the antithesis of the classroom. It is a place for free play, loud noise, rapid movement and games, where children can run about and do as they please within certain limits. There is a large concrete area outside with a football pitch marked in white lines and a goal at either end. There is a basketball pole, a roofed but open sided shed for shelter and a large garden area restricted for educational purposes only. Some small climbing frames and other fixed objects are clustered close to the nursery and infant classrooms.⁸⁶ Children are not supposed to bring playthings from home into school, so they must either smuggle in small things, in their pockets, or make their own amusement, playing chase for example. Girls might walk about chatting in small groups whilst boys play football with a smuggled-in tennis ball or surreptitiously act out WWF⁸⁷ wrestling bouts.

academic skills such as reading falls farther and farther behind. His learning difficulties are not addressed adequately and meanwhile his peers are moving further and further away from him as the curriculum differentiates in each new academic year.

⁸⁶ The younger children are expected to learn through play and they do this in relation to particular kinds of play objects in the classroom and in the playground where they have their own climbing apparatus. As children mature they are increasingly expected to transcend the material world of playing with things and make their own amusement out of their bodily and language capabilities. In the playground when there is no ball to play with there is just the empty concrete space for the children to conjure a distracting game, they have only their bodies to work with. In the classroom the use of objects for play becomes increasingly restricted as children move through the school so that in Year Five/Six children are expected to preoccupy themselves with task based work using only pens, pencils, rulers and other equipment for formal learning. Access to fun objects for play in the classroom is restricted to free time/free choice periods only.

⁸⁷ The American wrestling television show called World Wrestling Federation

Younger children and some older ones too make-believe and bring to life in the playground scenarios and characters from favourite television programmes and cartoons. Fighting and bullying are prohibited, but happen nevertheless.

Children's Comportment

Out of the apparent chaos of playtime, the order of entry into the school buildings is marked by the arrival of teachers who take designated places in the playground expecting the children to line up in class sets in single file in front of them. When each line is orderly and relatively quiet, the teacher leads the way into the classroom through the corridors and up the stairs of the huge and ageing Victorian building. From the freedom of play to the relative restriction of orderly conduct, movement and noise is constrained further and further until stillness and silence are achieved under the watchful gaze of the teacher who waits for the children to settle down on the carpet ready for registration. The surveillance of children's comportment is at its most pronounced when they must gather together like this, under the teacher's eyes, either for registration or instruction in the classroom, or for whole school meetings in the assembly hall. In these moments, by virtue of her ability to hold children's attention, to keep them still and quiet, the teacher's power and capacity to impart knowledge is recreated on a daily if not hourly⁸⁸ basis. Children who fail to attend to what the teacher has to say because they are more interested in interacting with those sitting next to them, or in moving about and making noise, are punished first through verbal admonishment and then by spatial exclusion from the group. Disobedient children are moved to the margin of the group and if that separation is insufficient to quell disruptive behaviour then the spatial exclusion is emphasised further. A disruptive child will be moved towards the edge of the classroom or assembly hall and if that fails to curb defiance then s/he is sent to the deputy or head teacher's office. In extreme cases children might be suspended from school for the day, which means their parents will be called to come and collect them and take them home. Exclusion from the group is supposed

⁸⁸ Lessons are divided into hour-long, task-based instruction and exercise sessions and children's movement and noise level rises and falls as a function of the beginning and ending or interruption of each task.

to induce shame and encourage conformist behaviour. The idea of the child that is legitimated in didactic practice makes children who don't conform seem somehow abnormal. It becomes impossible within the parameters of the school to conceive of what it means to be a child unless s/he is well behaved. This means that s/he should be able to demonstrate proper comportment, desirous of acquiring more knowledge and respectful of the authority of adults who have knowledge to impart and know what's best for children. By implication, children who cannot manage to adjust their demeanour to school requirements must have something wrong with them - as if it is not normal for children to resist the extraordinary constraints that are put upon them at school.⁸⁹ Ideally a child's misbehaviour and suspension, because it involves the school telling of the child to the parents, brings to the foreground the parents' will for the child to be at school, to be good and to learn and emphasises this will as the permanent possibility of the teacher's authority over the child. Sometimes, however, the exclusion has the opposite effect and serves only to highlight the child's parents' opposition to the school's authority over the child, which is backed up by the power of the state.⁹⁰ Conflict between parents and teachers then ensues. The necessity to temporarily suspend a child from school can stand in parents' eyes for a failure of the school to constrain a child's behaviour adequately. Parents often express frustration about inadequate discipline at school and teachers are limited by the power of exclusion, which is the only means they have for restraining children.⁹¹

⁸⁹ I do not condone the misbehaviour of children at school, but I do seek to understand how the social organisation of school life legitimates a particular idea of the child, making other ideas seem deviant.

⁹⁰ There are a disproportionate number of *black* boys excluded from school at any point in time in London. I would argue that my research provides ample evidence of the need to consider these exclusions in terms of the intersection between *working class* values, *race* and *cultural* classification, rather than simply as a *racial* or *ethnic* phenomenon.

⁹¹ The problem of what teachers should do about disruptive boys and in particular their violent behaviour is at the top of the educational agenda in this country at the moment. In England there is a campaign to end parents right to physically punish children whilst corporal punishment in schools ended many years ago. This development is commensurate with differentiation in the extension of rights, which is characteristic of modern political change (E.P.Thompson 1966). It is a fallacy however to suppose that success in formal learning rises in direct proportion to children's tranquil comportment hard won by teachers through strict discipline. When corporal punishment was at its highest level in Bermondsey secondary schools, academic results were no better, but life must have been easier for the teacher in the classroom. Children who wanted to learn were not as disrupted as they are now by a small minority of badly behaved boys who are often virtually out of control. The

Disruptive Boys

The opposite of the learned disposition that teachers require of children in the classroom is the playful, rowdy, intimidating, sometimes violent, apparently frenetic movements of particular boys. They assert their presence to each other and to other children in ways that enables the reconstitution on a daily basis of the pecking order of their physical, as opposed to intellectual, dominance.⁹² The dynamic of this volatile process works alongside and periodically interferes with the pace of the teacher's rhythm for curriculum delivery. She must then intervene to restore order to the learning process. Each child is preoccupied everyday with trying to accommodate the demands of the different dispositions required for play, peer group and classroom interaction. Some boys manage to do well in their work and be part of the pecking order of disruption whilst other children behave beautifully, draw no attention to themselves and still struggle with the learning tasks assigned to the class. However because quiet children pose no disruptive threat to the rhythm of the teacher's timetable their learning difficulties are more likely to be overlooked but are no less serious than the problems badly behaved boys pose.⁹³ A large measure of the teacher's and children's emotional and physical resources are preoccupied by having to cope with the heightening tension and challenge to authority that disruptive boys' distraction from their own and other children's learning creates.⁹⁴ Whilst Tom proves the point that streaming of

point is that children learn well when they are willing to learn and the problem teachers face is how to encourage children to love learning

⁹² Physical dominance is not just about size or strength but also about daring. The child who dares to go furthest in his pranks and in the way he intimidates other children, risking the teacher's wrath and other children's fury is the child who dominates in any moment. This pecking order is in a constant state of flux since it is reconstituted and open to contestation in every hour of every school day.

⁹³ For example very quiet, shy children pose no disruptive threat to the teacher but may learn very little in one day as their specific needs are overlooked whilst the teacher focuses consistently on quelling the disruption of particular boys.

⁹⁴ Willis (1977) characterises this disruption as an act of resistance to authority learned in relation to *working class* boys' observance of their father's resistance to shop floor management in the world of work. This may be true at secondary school, but I would argue that at primary school the resistance of particular boys relates more to their reluctance to relinquish both bodily freedom and the prestige and freedom they enjoy on the streets. They emulate older teenage boys, whose brushes with *the old bill* they admire as they have fun with increasingly daring and often self-destructive pranks. For example, in Bermondsey, during 2002, boys as young as eight have been

ability within classes encourages subversion because children at the bottom level of ability react against the demeaning position ascribed to them (Hammersely 1990), it is also true that the worst offenders among the disruptive boys are some of the most able academically. It is the cleverest amongst the tough boys who quickly become peer group leaders when the climate amongst them is one of ruthless domination. It is not simply a matter of brute force and much more to do with personal charisma. Gary excels in this domain. The really difficult thing for boys to do at school is to work relatively well in class when it suits them and still be able to demonstrate their subversive edge to peers when need be. These kinds of boys, of whom there are a few in year five/six, will not excel at school since they lack the necessary focus but do well enough to get through the system and keep their parents happy.⁹⁵ Others like Gary, who could do well academically play the game of peer group leader all the way to its final conclusion spending many days either absent with parental consent or excluded from school and struggling to catch up with work. Whilst Gary is relatively protected by his teacher Christine's support at primary school,⁹⁶ she knows he will not be cosseted at secondary school where, she says, boys like him are quickly and permanently

playing a dare game called Roast Chicken in which they get inside a car, set it alight and see who is brave enough to be the last one to jump out before they get fried – like chicken. If you're one of the first to jump out you're laughed at, mocked for being 'chicken.' I will argue in chapter three that the formation of children's peer groups depends on conflict for the development of solidarity and this is certainly the case in boys' peer groups in Bermondsey, where a degree of self-destructive bravado is paramount. At this young age, the peer group is more about competitive individuality than it is about group solidarity in the sense of the self conscious and united group action that Willis describes for 'the lads' (1977).

⁹⁵ In Tom's class these are the boys of West African parents who value education as a means for social improvement above all else and are often themselves engaged in further education courses.

⁹⁶ Christine has a soft spot for Gary because he has health problems and attributes a lot of his behavioural problems to his struggle to come to term with his illness. Rochelle, the classroom assistant, is on the other hand constantly infuriated by what she perceives as Christine's favouritism for Gary, which prevents her taking the hard line Rochelle feels he deserves. Many of the classroom assistants who bear the brunt of Gary's influence can't stand and have little sympathy for him.

excluded.⁹⁷ It seems that Anne's hopes that Gary will be a good role model for Tom will not come to fruition.⁹⁸

Within the first two weeks of the school term children in year five/six face the realisation that their formal learning abilities are to be tested and quantified and that this is what the value system at school implies for children. The following data from participant observation presented in detail support the hypotheses about social organisation in the classroom that I have introduced above. Tom's situation at school is clarified and the stage is set for the trajectory of the final year of primary school education, which is the sitting of Standard Assessment Tests. It is according to these tests that both children's abilities and schools performances are measured.

⁹⁷ When this happens boys like Gary have to attend a certain number of hours a week at a pupil deferment unit where of course they will meet another peer group that is even more hard-core than the one they left behind at school. The drop out rate at these units is extremely high, which means ultimately that the street has then claimed the child.

⁹⁸ Gary, like some of the more academically able boys in the tough peer group, was offered a place on a summer school at one of the local secondary schools. Gary was expelled after a week's attendance. He started the same school in September of that year and was permanently expelled in the first term.

Part II

September 1999

Christine, the teacher, sits on her large comfy chair overlooking the large carpeted area of the classroom at the top of the school and waits for the children to come in and sit down. Year six children⁹⁹ are distinguished because they sit around the carpet on wooden chairs whilst year five children sit cross-legged on the carpet. Today there are ten year six children, seven boys and three girls¹⁰⁰. There are nineteen year five children, thirteen boys and six girls.¹⁰¹ Christine addresses the class:

“Right, only one person let us down coming up the stairs, I’m not going to say who it was, but it’s not fair when everyone else is trying so hard. Someone is talking. (Pause) Excellent. Everyone in and everyone on time.”¹⁰²

Numeracy

Christine takes the register greeting each individual child by name, for example “Good morning Tom.” To which each child replies, “Good morning Christine,” addressing her in informal terms,¹⁰³ and she then marks their attendance down. Christine then explains to the children that they have to start preparing for their

⁹⁹ Year six children are aged between ten and eleven and year five children are aged between nine and ten.

¹⁰⁰ In the footnotes that follow I use the categories of *ethnic* description that I made informal use of in my field notes. They are not supposed to represent the ethnographic categories that children use for such descriptions. I consider in depth in chapter five the relevance and formation of the categories that children use to describe differences in their physical appearance. Of the year six boys four are *black* with parents of West African origin, one is *brown* with parents of Bangladeshi origin and two are *white* with parents of British origin. Of the year six girls one is *brown* with parents of Bangladeshi origin, one is *black* with parents of West African origin and one is *brown* with parents of Caribbean origin.

¹⁰¹ Of the year five boys two are *brown* with parents of Bangladeshi origin, four are *white* with parents of British origin, three are *black* with parents of West African origin and two are *black* with parents of Caribbean origin. Of the girls three are *brown* with parents of Bangladeshi origin, two are *white* with parents of British origin and one is *black* with parents of Caribbean origin.

¹⁰² There are a few persistent offenders like Tom, who are consistently late for registration and this is one of the ways in which the rigid parameters of the timetable are disrupted. Christine rarely makes any comment about this lateness, leaving it to the home-school liaison officer to chase up the problem with the parents of individual children. School staff perceive not getting children into school on time as symbolic either of particular parents disrespect for school rules or of specific familial difficulties, such as complicated morning childcare routines. With this in mind the head teachers began a breakfast-club so children could be dropped off at school as early as 8.00 in the morning and also enjoy a healthy breakfast.

SATs and that they will be doing sample tests all morning so that she can assess how much work they have to do during the year. She instructs the year six children to sit at the tables whilst year five children wait to sit down until they are given their year four assessment tests. They do these so that Christine can get some idea of where they stand in relation to the work they should have covered in the previous year's classes. The year six children move to their tables, four or five children at each cluster of tables of which there are five in the classroom. Staring menacingly at a boy who is moaning loudly, Christine fixes her attention and the boy, realising that her gaze is upon him, stops. This is one among many comportment management techniques that Christine utilises to quell inappropriate behaviour. She then explains to the children that she cannot give them any help because they must work under test conditions and tells them they have forty-five minutes to do as many questions as possible. Most of the boys react to the test with sulky looks and slumped body postures, heads often held in hands as they struggle to get through the questions. For the most part the children work in silence, punctuated only by persistent requests for help from Gary¹⁰⁴; Christine repeats that she cannot give advice to anyone.

The test conditions set a benchmark for the children's ability to work individually in complete silence and despite their depressed demeanour it is significant that they are able to sit through and apply themselves to the test even if they don't finish all the questions. This capacity for completely focussed attention exists at one end of a spectrum that encompasses the different ways in which children work in the classroom. Silent, individual concentration is rarely seen except on the occasion of tests, and the ability of the children to meet examination conditions is testimony to Christine's authority in the classroom. She is the only member of staff who can induce this class, with its high proportion of disruptive boys, to apply itself to schoolwork. This authority is a function of the trust she has nurtured in her relationship with the children in general but in particular with the

¹⁰³ Each primary school varies in the degree of formality in which the relation of respect between children and teachers is constituted; it is popularly thought that schools without uniform in which children are allowed to call teachers by their first names have less discipline.

core group of badly behaved boys.¹⁰⁵ It would be easy for a teacher to form an antagonistic and resentful relationship with the boys because they are so often disruptive of the aims and objectives of classroom activities. Christine, however, is quick to defend them remarking that the boys are sensitive to the dislike for them that many members of staff have developed. She explains that hating the boys does nothing to remedy the situation since their own anger and resentment is only inflamed resulting in increasingly differentiated forms of disrespect towards staff members.¹⁰⁶ In contrast to other staff Christine feels she has no choice but to empathise with the boys, patiently and consistently addressing the inappropriateness of their behaviour and secretly admiring their charismatic individuality.

Generally the children don't work individually in silence; they work in small groups, five or six at one cluster of tables, and as long as they appear to be getting on with their work a permissible level of good-humoured chatting prevails. In reality, however, the acceptable parameters governing noise levels is used by many children to engage furtively in the kind of interaction that largely distracts them from their work. This distraction takes many forms - from messing about with the few permissible objects on the table, pencils, pens, etc. to talking about football, computer games, television programmes and life outside school in general. Unless it escalates into a greater degree of sensori-motor action - getting out of seats, tussling or fighting and higher than acceptable decibel levels - the children's surreptitious disruption of formal learning goes largely unnoticed as Christine endeavours to focus on as many children's individual needs for assistance as possible. During the tests, for example, some of the year five children who are not under the same pressure as those in year six, begin to whisper amongst themselves, looking at each other's work. Christine calls out an individual offender's name in a loud severe tone, "Anthony!" and he falls silent. Within minutes, as Christine's

¹⁰⁴ Gary is Tom's friend from White's Grounds that Tom plays with outside school.

¹⁰⁵ Christine taught the year six children for six months of the preceding year after their teacher left halfway through the academic year.

¹⁰⁶ One young male teacher who refused to accommodate the boys' behaviour was their particular enemy and they made his life very difficult indeed.

attention is distracted elsewhere, Anthony's companion soon begins to whisper to him again. Christine turns to him once more and tells him to move away from Anthony at the table to sit on the carpet. When there is five minutes left for the year six children to complete the test Christine calls out to let them know. Many children have lots more questions that they haven't attempted and they let out groans and sighs of defeat.¹⁰⁷ When the test is over Christine collects the papers, praises the children for the serious way in which they approached the test and concentrated throughout, and encourages them about learning to keep to the time. She teases them about their miserable faces and says she wants to see their smiles back before they go into assembly. Christine instructs them table-by-table to line up in single file by the door and, although this means an increase in sensori-motor action and a rise in decibel level, it remains orderly enough for Christine not to have to intervene. This is the kind of transition from one activity to another that teachers expect children to be able to manage amongst themselves such that their comportment facilitates orderly progression through the spaces and times of the day. The older children in year five/six are expected to set an example to the younger children in the school. Much to Christine's dismay, however, a consistent level of application to the work in the classroom and to orderly conduct in the other spaces of the school such as the stairs and lunch hall are a rare occurrence for her class.

Assembly

As the children file class by class into the hall, little children sit at the front beneath the watchful gaze of Eileen. She is the deputy head who prefers to be friendly and approachable with the children but today she is stern as she leads the assembly. While she waits for all the children to settle down, year five/six completing the rows of classes at the back, she confidently tells the teachers and

¹⁰⁷ Many of the children in the class are far behind the age appropriate levels of academic achievement in relation to which national curricula are set for each subject. Christine and the deputy head devote a considerable amount of time after school to a SATS group for year six children so they can prepare them for their forthcoming tests. As a result of this dedication the children who are capable of doing well manage to pass the tests and one or two achieved level four/five in some subjects which is the national expectation for that age group.

classroom assistants that they don't have to stay and they leave for a break in the staff-room. This ability to hold the whole school's attention is a function of the security of Eileen's authority and she turns and welcomes me to stay, "I'm sure you will be impressed by the way the children are able to behave sensibly during assembly." She begins to tell the children a story about Mohammed and spells out the lesson of the assembly, which is about doing the right and wrong things and resisting temptation.¹⁰⁸ Her story is punctuated by the necessity to manage individual children's comportment:

"Sit up and **behave** yourself!"

"You don't talk in assembly!"

One child is excluded from the gathering and told to go back to his classroom and wait for the teacher, "I'm ashamed of you," Eileen announces angrily.

"Show me you know how to sit please, everyone should be sitting legs folded, arms crossed, looking at me."

Eileen explains to the children that she wants to be able to give them some of her smiles which, she says, mean "I'm pleased with you," rather than her miserable face. She then singles out individual children she's really pleased with and emphasises to them the *big smiley face* she gives to them as a gesture of her pleasure. The embodiment of the highly specific spatio-temporal rhythm that characterises classroom and school activity is mediated by the emotional tone of the relationship between the teacher, other members of staff and the children. Appropriate participation is evinced in children's correct bodily disposition at the right times in the right places and elicits the pleasure of teachers and the rewards of praise. Children's resistance to the suppression of what they do by choice, which

¹⁰⁸ Whole school assemblies always take the form of moral instruction through the presentation of myths or stories from different religious traditions. Once a week certificates of achievement are given out to individual children who have either achieved well in the curriculum or otherwise made significant improvements in their work or behaviour. What sense children make of these moral instructions is never assessed in lessons after assembly time but this would in itself be an interesting study to undertake.

is to interact with each other, move about a lot and make noise is tempered by their desire to please the teacher and by implication do what their parents expect of them, which is to be *good* at school. For the most part children accommodate the highly specific participation that classroom learning requires of them but it is a form of participation that strains against the freedom they enjoy in other domains. The reward of achievement in formal learning and growing confidence in the performance of classroom tasks inspires some children to focus quietly on the gradually differentiating tasks that increasingly abstract conceptual development demands and they become happy to learn and glad to please the teacher. Others, who struggle with the work but behave beautifully, progress silently through the day whilst their difficulties go unnoticed as they blend into the background of good behaviour that teachers and staff are glad of.¹⁰⁹ The disruptive boys on the other hand often resist the constraint that participation requires, rebel continuously and risk the deterioration of their relationship with other children who are trying to concentrate, and the teacher as she becomes displeased with the disruption that distracted activity presents. In time, children begin to manage each other's comportment too, telling tales and reacting against the infringement by others of rules they have themselves learnt to accommodate. The classroom emerges as an extremely rule-governed domain for cultivating in children the correct bodily disposition for formal learning. The presence of quiet unobtrusive children who struggle to learn demonstrates, however, the fallacy that good behaviour means effective learning and highlights the cost to the class of the teacher's focus on disruptive boys, which demands most of her energies.

Literacy

After the break for outside play the children return to the classroom and Christine explains the next task they face which is an English comprehension test¹¹⁰. David

¹⁰⁹ Christine has the opportunity to pick up on these children's problems when she marks their work but what she can realistically do to assist them is limited by the proportion of time she must devote to handling the disruptive boys. The failure of the school to pick up on these problems has implications for the future education of quiet children like this that go unnoticed in the classroom, because meanwhile they continue to fall behind with their learning.

¹¹⁰ Literacy and numeracy take up the major part of the school day, supplemented in the later lessons of the day with science, humanities, art or music.

the independent psychotherapist who is from an organisation that provides psychotherapeutic services for children in school comes in and explains the service that is on offer to the children. He says that they can come to him and talk about anything that they like that might be on their mind and whatever they talk about will just be for him and he won't tell anyone else. If they want to come and see him, he says, they must put their name in the book and then come and see him on either Tuesday or Wednesday lunchtime.¹¹¹ When David leaves the classroom, the distraction from the English test that his interruption presents is marked by an increase in the sensori-motor action of the children and a rising level of noise as they begin to talk and interact amongst themselves. Each distraction from formal learning takes the same form to a greater or lesser degree and Christine is repeatedly forced to manage the children's comportment. The beginning and ending of spatio-temporal shifts are marked by the frequent interventions of the teacher's comportment management techniques as relatively still and quiet concentration give way to a degree of freedom to move and make noise. In this way, time and space become inscribed in a bodily disposition that formal learning requires¹¹² and free time easily undoes. Children at school are seen to be in a constant state of flux between what the institution demands of childhood and what being a child means to children. Part of adults' demand of children at school is that they should be happy and have the desire to make their teachers and parents happy by being good and doing well. The presences of the psychotherapist intimate that children who are unhappy do not learn well and misbehaviour is just one sign of unhappiness.¹¹³ Certain kinds of misbehaviour attract more attention

¹¹¹ When I interview David at the end of the fieldwork period he admits that none of the boys in year five/six who pose the most significant problems in the classroom and in the playground at playtime have ever come to talk to him voluntarily. Those who do go to see him go because they have to go as part of the mandatory enquiry into their special needs when their behaviour is being investigated as part of the assessment towards preparing a needs statement. The parents must give permission for these therapeutic investigations and they do not always agree.

¹¹² This is a disposition towards work that lends itself to the preparation of the child for the future world of adult labour, which also requires an appropriate disposition, and application to task based assignments under the direction of a person in authority. Children by this age know that they must by law go to school because they must learn and they appreciate that they must learn in order to stand a chance of getting a good job in the future.

¹¹³ Damasio (1995) has explained the necessary relationship between rational behaviour and the neurological functioning of normal emotions but his argument is marred by an unexamined idea of the person. For example, he posits as normal the person who doesn't swear or behave violently,

than others, but whilst disruptive boys demand attention, other boys and girls who might be abnormally quiet and withdrawn can easily go unnoticed.¹¹⁴ The boys' behaviour places untenable levels of stress on Christine and as the year progresses this begins to take its toll. She must plan her lessons, organise an ideal strategy for curriculum delivery and made it look good on paper all the time knowing that only a fraction of the knowledge she wishes to impart will be learned by children in her class. The level of disruption Christine has to endure undermines the possibility that she will fulfil her plans and meet the formal requirements of her job. The management within the school of children's behavioural problems is seen to be the responsibility of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator and the head teacher who between them¹¹⁵ are supposed to manage the code of practice for children with educational, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Many of the children in the class - both disruptive boys and other children like Emma, who Christine feels have a special educational need - will however be leaving school in a year without a statement from an educational psychologist. Budgetary constraints and the high level of commitment required by the SENCO managers conspire against the children to prevent their problems being formally recognised. Meanwhile teachers like Christine struggle vainly on, trying to contain a classroom of 30 children, at least six of whom pose a permanent threat of disruption to formal learning.¹¹⁶

which would make it seem that boys who learn to be tough and talk tough on the street are neurologically abnormal. Thus Damasio disregards what is obvious in mine and others' work (e.g. W. Foote Whyte's *Street Corner Society* 1955 (orig. 1943) that meaning can be made through violence.

¹¹⁴ The psychotherapist was well aware of the fact that introverted and withdrawn children often pose a much greater danger to themselves than the attention seeking behaviour of loud disruptive boys. If brought to his attention these children (who are more often girls) present far more difficult and often suicidal tendencies, which are harder to resolve.

¹¹⁵ Half way through the school year the SENCO retired and was not replaced, the head teacher took on the full responsibility for SENCO work because of budgetary restrictions.

¹¹⁶ Christine's class was particularly difficult because of the mixture of two year groups in one, the disproportionately high number of boys and a high level of disruption, but other teachers also complained of the same problems in their classes. Staff morale was very low for the entire period of my fieldwork and teachers felt unsupported by, and lacked confidence in the senior management and especially the head teacher. The deputy's power to instigate changes was limited by the power of the head teacher and the discretionary power of the governing body was impotent in the face of their ignorance about the day-to-day realities of school life. The main discrepancy between teachers and senior management was that because management had little or no teaching responsibilities they could not empathise with the impossible task teachers faced and were therefore incapable of initiating effective support strategies either for staff or children. Of course

‘Good Enough’ Parenting

Christine speaks to me often of her desire to leave Tenter Ground and move to another school where there might be less stress, where she imagines she would be able to do her job, which is to teach the curriculum not to teach children the social skills required for learning. She is, however, loyal to the overwhelming needs of the boys and so perseveres. She wonders what will become of them and, like other education professionals in the school she interprets their failure to behave and to concentrate in class in terms of an emotional deficit at home. David, the psychotherapist, explains to me, “The problem in this school is that children don’t get good enough parenting.¹¹⁷” Christine likens herself to being the boys’ mother because to her mind their own parents are failing to establish an adequate parental relationship with their sons. She thinks that what the boys lack is consistency in their familial lives and that lacking this constancy they are unable to trust adults and so fight for their needs to be met, craving attention whilst pretending that they need no one. Christine does her best to provide what she feels the boys need which is a firm and fair relationship to an adult that they can depend on and having given herself this role she is loath to withdraw from the stress that being at Tenter Ground places on her. Not only is misbehaviour interpreted as a sign of a child’s problems and possible abnormality, these abnormalities are characterised specifically as emotional difficulties resulting from deficient kin relations in the household. It is important to emphasise that inappropriate kin relations between parents and children in the household are held to be responsible for the failure of certain children to participate appropriately at school. Notwithstanding real cases of child abuse in the home, the pervasiveness of this projection, by teachers and staff, of misbehaviour in school onto a deficiency in the home is astonishing. Despite the fact that Her Majesty’s Inspectors at the time of my fieldwork labelled the school as having ‘serious weaknesses’, staff rarely held the social organisation of the school and the education system itself to be responsible for the failure of individual children to learn successfully. Even though Tenter Ground had a tainted

teachers found it difficult to have empathy for the equally stressful and difficult constraints within which schools have to be managed.

reputation both officially and locally in the *community*, the legitimacy of the school as a national institution and the ultimate authority of the head teacher sufficed to conceal a multitude of problems. Poor results and boys' behavioural problems are projected onto the unseen damage that poverty is said to inflict on families and as long as inadequate learning at school implies inappropriate care at home the implications of the school's failings needn't be seriously considered. The question that was never adequately addressed at Tenter Ground and which I raise here is - what about good enough schooling?

Schools are not, by definition, good places for children to learn in the same way that homes are not necessarily good places for children to be cared for. The problem is that formal learning and caring are posited as inseparable variables in the equation that education establishes for child development and therefore when children fail to learn, this is blamed on inadequate care. Because the domain for the care of children is thought of principally as being the home, teachers easily blame parents for children's misbehaviour at school. But when parents and carers hand over responsibility for their child's academic welfare to teachers and other staff members they also expect their children to be cared for. So what kind of care for children is constituted in the social relations of the school?¹¹⁸ Perhaps it might be the case that the care children receive at school is also at times inadequate. If so, the school could also be a source of the so-called emotionally deficient relations that are said to be responsible for the failure of children to behave properly and therefore to learn well.

A chaotic school in which a minority of disruptive boys dominate proceedings is a high adrenaline environment where both children and staff must cope constantly

¹¹⁷ Good Enough Parenting is a concept taken from the work of D.W. Winnicott, who came up with the idea of the 'good enough mother.'

¹¹⁸ There are many differences between a child's relationship to a teacher and a child and a parent in the home. For one thing, the adult to child ratio in the home varies between one-to-one and one-to-six, whereas in the school it is one adult to thirty children. Another obvious difference is that parents are expected to love their children whereas teachers are not, and whilst parents show physical affection towards their children teachers are not allowed to. Parents have a minimal expectation that their children should be safe and feel secure at school, but this expectation was not necessarily met at Tenter Ground.

with the threat of intimidation and violence. This is a far from caring atmosphere for children to be in and can at times be an exhausting and dangerous place, both emotionally and physically. Her Majesty's Inspectors supposedly represent the requirement for schools to be held accountable but what parents can do about inspectors' findings is limited to their power to withdraw their children from school. During the week of the last inspection before my fieldwork ended in December 2000 all of the disruptive boys were excluded from school so that the disruption to formal learning would be minimised and a better impression created. There was therefore no legitimate means for the reality of teacher's experiences to be witnessed, their need for support was lost and the failures of senior management were effectively concealed. When I asked Christine why she was prepared to go along with this deception and not tell the inspectors exactly what was going on at school she said that the failure of the school's inspection wouldn't do the children any good. If the school was put on 'special measures' it would then be run by outside agencies that in Christine's opinion would make matters worse and the school would then be forced to close. The children would then have to find other schools and the disruption to their education would be catastrophic. She emphasised to me that teachers' first commitment must always be to the children and in the face of the paramount power of the head there is little that teachers can do except to go on maintaining their dedication to the children. If they were to go so far as to bring in the unions, which makes morale amongst teachers even worse and the relationship between teachers and management deteriorate further, it would make little difference to the children. Change, she explained, can only really come about as a result of a change in the head teacher and the review of management procedures that follows. Meanwhile, as dedicated teachers like Christine endeavoured to stay the course, staff turnover in the school remained exceptionally high as time after time new teachers, alienated by the impossible task of managing the behaviour of disruptive children and trying to deliver a carefully prescribed curriculum, handed in their notice.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Christine finally admitted defeat and resigned in December 2000.

The main difficulty that Christine faces with the boys is that whilst her authority over them is relatively secure in the classroom and their behaviour manageable under her watchful gaze, they immediately start to mess about in the other spaces of the school where different staff members supervise behaviour. Almost all of the disruption Christine faces in the classroom is the result of conflict between boys that was begun either on the stairs, at lunch play in the playground, at wet play in the classroom or at lunchtime in the dinner hall. The problem, she explains, is that she cannot be with them every minute of every day. In each period of time that follows their time away from her she is left to pick up the pieces after incidents that have occurred under the supervision of staff who have no authority over the boys. These staff members are usually the classroom assistants whose job it is to supervise lunch play and dinnertime whilst teachers retreat to the staff room for their breaks. The problem is that in the spaces of the school where authority is weak, disruptive boys rule. This highlights what I would argue is the central problem in the school, which is the mismanagement of differential power relations. The projection of boys' misbehaviour onto their apparently deficient kin relations ignores the possibility of, and therefore hinders, the creative solution of a more immediate problem, which is the reality of certain boys' quest for influence which other boys must learn to accommodate whilst they are at school.¹²⁰ One solution in response to the recognition of this problem would be first to ask the question of how the power and authority of the classroom assistants might be increased? Dominant boys have no respect for adults without power and it is only when the boys' respect has been won, as Christine and I learnt, that they will moderate their behaviour towards one another. Only then will they attempt to participate in a way that meets adults' expectations about the way that children should behave at school.

¹²⁰One boy of Nigerian parents whom I visited several times at home was renowned in the staff room for an angry and aggressive disposition that led him into many confrontations with other boys. At home he lives under the stern rule of his mother where I saw nothing from him but boyish good humour and no trace of his anger which teachers presumed was a result of the way he was being brought up at home. I could only surmise that the mean expression he donned at school was a necessary mask to confront an aggressive peer group that he meets only at school.

The point to note is that the school cannot care for children adequately when the problem of disruptive boys is mismanaged. There is every possibility that these boys are disruptive precisely because they find at school the opportunity to wield power. The boys who manage to do this most effectively and who provide a model of subversive behaviour for their less experienced peers to compete with, are precisely those boys who enjoy a large measure of freedom to become competent at competing for prestige on the streets. It may be that this is an equally if not more important factor in determining which boys become disruptive at school than the teachers' and psychotherapists' hypothesis about deficient kin relations in the home. Of course individual pathology in particular families might play its part in driving boys to the street more frequently and for longer periods of time but I would argue that it is the thrill and efficacy of prestige seeking that makes certain boys such a problem for teachers at school. The very fact that Mary behaves angelically at school whilst Tom is a trouble maker points away from the idea of the *problem family* in general and towards gender and prestige seeking in particular. These are the most important variables in the equation that coming from a *common* household and neighbourhood establishes for Bermondsey children like Tom's progress at school.¹²¹

Wet Play

At lunchtime play it is raining and this means that children's time for free play must be constrained in the classroom with a classroom assistant supervising whilst the teacher goes to lunch. As soon as Christine leaves and Fatima¹²² one of the classroom assistants from year four arrives the noise level rises dramatically and sensori-motor activity increases as children move about looking for fun things to do. The classroom instantly divides along gender lines as some boys sit down at one table to draw, play noughts and crosses or hangman and a large group of girls

¹²¹ I am not suggesting that these variables pertain only to education in Bermondsey but make use of the local case to investigate the broader sociological trend. The crucial relationship between gender and educational achievement is highlighted by recently published (August 2002) GCSE results in which boys continue to fall behind girls' achievements.

¹²² Fatima is a woman of Bengali Muslim descent who lives locally and is married with no children.

sit down at another table to draw. The girls are quieter, move around less and focus more readily on their chosen activity.¹²³ At another table, a group of boys take out the construction bricks and make guns with them and begin to shoot each other. They run around the room chasing each other and the assistant intervenes, “Don’t play guns, you don’t have any other work to do? You have work to catch up on?” The boys ignore her attempts to make them settle down to what being in the classroom implies, which is focussed activity and work. The classroom assistants have little power compared to the teacher; their complaints to senior staff about children’s behaviour carry none of the weight of teacher’s grievances and their differential status is thus reinforced to children and consequently the situation never improves¹²⁴. Fatima’s increasing attempts to control the children are frustrated and the disruption that is typical of wet play begins to escalate out of control. She takes the self-styled gun from one of the boys and he runs out of the classroom breaking the spatial boundary of control that classroom rules imply and disrupts therefore the possibilities that a single adult’s surveillance in a contained space conveys. She responds angrily, “Not outside the classroom please.” She then attempts to praise other children who are behaving appropriately in order to set a good example to the disruptive boys. “Very good Anthony, Anthony’s doing something creative, he’s making a dinosaur.” The boy she is attempting to control responds, “A dinosaur gun!”

Meanwhile on the carpeted area Gary and Tom begin to play kick touch. The idea is to avoid being kicked by the other person and it’s boisterous because they are kicking hard and moving fast to steer clear of each other. Fatima forgets about the other boys and goes over to the carpet to intervene. She pulls Gary by the arm, forcing him to sit down on the carpet and turns to Tom, saying, “You are pushing

¹²³ Because of the disproportionate number of boys in the class there is a marked increase in solidarity amongst the girls and there is very little of the bitchy peer group exclusiveness and verbal character assassination that Christine is used to in other classes she has taught.

¹²⁴ Classroom assistants do not have teaching degrees, or any formal educational qualifications, although they have the option of training courses. It is a low paid job usually taken by young women or mothers with young children, recruited from the local area, who are looking for flexible work that fits in with their children’s school hours. The assistants are often assigned specifically to the group in the class in most need of special educational support, but they have no qualification that prepares them for this.

it. I am not smiling.” Whilst the general level of movement and noise increases those children who choose to concentrate quietly continue to do so, they are adept at ignoring disruption. Some other boys who have made paper aeroplanes make them fly around the room. There is great hilarity amongst all the children when one plane gets stuck on the pipe that runs high along the ceiling. Disruption by badly behaved children becomes periodically a source of entertainment for children who are *good* and who sit quietly and this encourages the entertainers to perform more daring pranks. Tom and Gary begin to leap about again, shouting out at each other, competing for attention. Wet play with year five/six becomes the classroom assistant’s worst nightmare. After lunch Christine, who as usual has had her supposedly relaxing break spoilt by a bad report about her class’s behaviour admonishes the offenders and privately she is frustrated that classroom assistants cannot control the children. Meanwhile classroom assistants are frequently enraged with the boys and with teachers and senior staff who ignore their pleas for a unified support network backed by the head’s authority. In all the moments of the day where classroom assistants are in charge - at lunch, in the playground and at wet play - the potential for sensori-motor action to escalate into disrespectful and dangerous comportment amongst the children is high.

Home Time

At the end of the day Christine reads to the children and as they settle down to listen under her watchful gaze, acceptable levels of fidgeting ensue. Children’s inclination to movement and to engage with objects and each other makes the achievement of completely still attentiveness to the teacher virtually impossible. Some children play with their hair, nails, mouth or inconspicuous objects like tiny bits of wire from paper clips and elastic bands. Some shift about moving feet and legs and hands, putting head in hands, playing with their noses or picking eyes, occasionally flicking or shoving the person next to them which risks attracting Christine’s attention and disapproval. At 3.30 Christine stops reading because time has run out and she addresses them, “Lets see if we can get this home time

problem sorted out.” She watches them, waiting for them to settle down, because the concentrated task of listening to her reading is over and of course they have immediately started moving about and making noise again. She waits and watches, “This is why we never get to go home on time.” Christine manages the children’s comportment, calling out the names of individual offenders and then waits again. Not until they are still and quiet are they dismissed again to the freedom of the playground, the streets outside and the different participation that being at home requires of them.

In part I of this chapter I have begun to explain how in year five/six at Tenter Ground School disruptive boys struggle constantly against the constraints that appropriate comportment for formal learning places on them. When the staff or teacher’s authority is weak, the dominant boys assert their presence and push persistently at the parameters of acceptable classroom comportment. Their behaviour disrupts the rhythm of formal learning and declares the reality of their subversive power as a potentially and sometimes actually violent force. This is a kind of comportment that evolves in direct opposition to the silent and obedient tranquillity expected of well-behaved children disposed towards formal learning. The pecking order of the daring prank, the loud and boisterous gesture and the wilfully antagonistic but playful jibe all aim towards the declaration of a physical presence against which boys measure each other. This is a competitive system, without formal or written rules, which boys either resist or participate in, declaring to each other their desire to be contenders in the system by daring to resist classroom constraints and intimidate other boys and members of staff. It is in relation to the degree of resistance to participation in what the classroom requires of children that a boy’s developing masculinity is defined in practice. It will be seen in part II of this chapter how as a result of this struggle between boys, which manifests first as individual acts of resistance, a pecking order is established in which disruptive boys discover one another’s subversion as a competitive form of exchange. It is only through the consolidation of these exchanges that a peer group could be said to form over time, but because the principal dynamic of group formation is aggressive competition, there is little impression of solidarity amongst

the boys. What friendship there is between them at school has as its background a tension born of the high adrenaline, antagonistic and potentially intimidating physical exchange. Success in this system inevitably implies the destruction of a boy's chances of doing well at school and quite often jeopardises the opportunities that being at school presents to his peers. In the end, a disruptive boy's resistance has no effect on the value system that education establishes for children because it remains intact long after he has been excluded. On the surface of things such a boy appears to sabotage his own and others' potential for success at school and to contribute in his actions only to the making of his own failure. For a while, when the boy is still young, the trajectory of his progress may upset and frighten him as teachers and other staff members enforce the negative outcomes for children of failing to do well at school. A group of boys returns sulkily from the head teacher's office filled with fear and loathing because she has told them that if they continue to misbehave they will end up on the streets or in prison. This interpretation that children who resist schooling are nothing but self-destructive presumes that there is only one value system in relation to which children can define their worth and this, as we have seen, is short sighted. Life outside school presents children with other possibilities for defining value as we have seen in chapter one.¹²⁵ In becoming an integral part of an aggressive peer group at school, a boy proves himself to be capable of a particular kind of competition that wins him a specific reputation. He can make good use of this elsewhere in a place where reputations matter – on the street - and in time he may also learn that a livelihood can be made there, - but more of that in chapter five. In part III of this chapter my hypotheses about the boys' peer group are substantiated with more detailed ethnographic data, comparing and contrasting Tom's resistance to, and

¹²⁵ Other children who are not disruptive but still achieve relatively little at school also know from their own experience of their parents' lives that it is perfectly possible to find work, raise a family and lead a successful life without having done well at school. At this young age any kind of work holds a distant fascination and even low wages appear to be vast sums. One boy proudly declares to me that when he grows up he wants to lay pavements like his dad because you can make £100 a week doing that. Other boys who are determined to become professional footballers talk of the six figure sums that top footballers make and dream of driving fast cars. There is plenty of evidence for children that doing well at school is not the only route to success in life.

failure to accommodate formal learning with that of Gary and other disruptive boys in the class.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ There are a core number of boys who are persistently disruptive and regularly in trouble and at least six others who find the antics of the subversive boys appealing enough to distract them from their work and to take part in disruptive pranks when it suits them. These are the boys who make a more earnest attempt to balance their desire to have fun with disruptive antics against their desire to do well at school and please the teacher and their parents.

Part III

September 1999¹²⁷

Supply Teacher

The next week on the first day I am in school Christine is away and a supply teacher has been brought in.¹²⁸ As the children come in and sit down on the carpet the teacher, who has probably been warned that this is a difficult class, nervously attempts to use positive compartment management techniques. “Well done, it’s Richard isn’t it? I like the way Richard is sitting this morning, that’s another name on my list.” Her attempts are in vain, however. The behaviour of a key group of boys becomes increasingly silly as she takes the register¹²⁹ and Rochelle, the classroom assistant, attempts to take a more authoritative role because Christine is not here. The supply teacher, Helen, introduces and explains to the children the numeracy task for the morning and, anticipating the disruption of their movement to the tables she finishes, “I wonder how quickly and quietly the three maths groups who sit at the table can go and sit down?” Unsurprisingly the children’s movement is neither quick nor quiet. As the morning proceeds children’s unchecked sensori-motor action begins to increase commensurably and fights between certain boys begin to break out. Helen intervenes and sends Martin,¹³⁰ one of the culprits, to go and explain himself in another teacher’s classroom. Martin, a chubby boy, is no favourite amongst the disruptive boys; he is often bullied by them and finds himself frequently in trouble as he fights back

¹²⁷ I have chosen data from an early period of fieldwork to illustrate social organisation that I came to understand over fifteen months in Year Five/Six. Many other aspects of the detailed analysis of the classroom must be omitted here for the sake of brevity but it would be possible for example to draw up precise comparative and quantitative data about the amount of time that is wasted as a result of disruption by individual children during task related work periods.

¹²⁸ The supply teacher today is one among many of the supply teachers in London who come from New Zealand, Australia and South Africa; they increasingly supplement the severe shortage of teachers in inner-city schools.

¹²⁹ Christine allows children who speak different languages to answer the register greeting in their own language as long as they are sensible. Given this latitude in acceptable responses, there is considerable leeway, for children to create jokes out of trying to copy other people’s responses or replying with nonsense language greetings in order to try and raise a laugh. Many disruptive antics begin as strategies for entertainment in the class and when the teacher is unable to quell the disruption things begin to escalate from there.

¹³⁰ Martin is often teased for being a mummy’s boy because his mother still brings him into school and they are often seen walking hand in hand.

vehemently and in doing so learns how to bully others. As the prospect of Martin's humiliation before the teacher raises itself, Ade¹³¹ (another among the troublesome boys) and his friend Mark leap up from their seats and move swiftly across the classroom to endorse Helen's decision and taunt Martin, trying to wind him up further. Martin, who has been hurt in the fight, begins to cry outside the door where he has taken refuge from the boys' laughter and the teacher's admonition. The sight of Martin's tears sends the boys into a frenzy of victorious uproar and Helen claps her hands emphatically declaring; "All eyes are to be on me!" Furious, she ignores Martin and gives curt instructions for tidying up the classroom. The numeracy task disintegrates into full-scale compartment management. Ade, feeding on the heightened tension in the room begins to rant, "Martin's a fucking bitch, man. Martin's a fucking bitch man." On and on he repeats his chant. Mark giggles and another boy tells Ade to be quiet. Each boy varies in the extent to which he will go to exploit a serious disruption depending on which member of staff is present. Helen asks each table to line up by the door and then calls them back because Ade and Mark are talking. They both collapse laughing into their chairs and Ade starts rapping again, "In' it nigger," in the language of *black* American gangster rappers and leads himself into a fully rehearsed rap. All is chaos as the other children line up, falling over each other noisily. Eventually they file out into the assembly hall where Eileen contains them. Waiting for the children to settle down she exclaims, "That took about ten minutes, I had to turn the music off because it was so noisy. And still people carried on talking." She asks a persistent offender to move to the edge of the hall.

¹³¹ Ade's parents are Nigerian of Yoruba descent; they are recently arrived immigrants and Ade still struggles with some language difficulties even though his English is fairly good. He still has a Yoruba accent when he speaks and this is sometimes a source of embarrassment to him when other boys, including boys of African descent, make him the butt of teasing jokes. In the class there is ample need for special attention to children who speak English as a second language, but only the Bangladeshi children are given specific additional assistance. There is a Bengali club organised by Fatima with the SENCO manager. In this club, children are encouraged to develop confidence in speaking English in front of others, because children with language difficulties are often reluctant to speak out in class. The children of Bangladeshi immigrant parents are often the quietest in class and rarely pose any disruptive threat to the teacher. Like many of the other children in the class, they have an obvious need for intensive work to bring their numeracy and literacy skills up to the age appropriate standard in Year Five/Six. It is however impossible for a teacher to meet this need when she has to spend the majority of her time managing the behaviour of disruptive boys.

When the children are relatively quiet she tells another story about Mohammed and how the world was made.

Literacy

During the chaos of the children's progress up the stairs after outside play Martin for some reason thumps Kevin - one of the quieter, well behaved boys - hard in the groin. Kevin struggles to hold back the tears whilst he tries in vain to catch up with Martin and vent his vengeful fury. The disruption of the morning spills into playtime and is prolonged and extended throughout the day as one incident after another leads to a spiralling cycle of revenge-seeking amongst the boys. Helen, the supply teacher, resorts to positive compartment-management techniques and tries to explain the literacy work. Ade continues his antics (much to Rochelle the classroom assistant's fury) and Helen tries to continue to introduce the task, which is to make up riddles to describe objects. Well-behaved children endeavour to ignore the disruptions. When Helen has finished explaining the literacy task the children move to their tables and I join table five where six children are sitting. This group has some of the lowest ability children in it: two boys including Tom and four girls including Emma. The task is written on the table on a sheet of paper and all of them except Kevin ignore it. They begin to talk about who their worst enemy is and they all agree that it is Martin. I try to engage them¹³² asking them about the first part of the task in which they have to think of an object and describe it in riddle form for others to guess. They settle for a little while trying to think and I begin to engage one-on-one with Kevin. He happily begins to write in his

¹³² The kind of participation I engaged in, in the classroom varied. Some of the time I sat at the tables with the children and observed their interaction and behaviour, making notes in my notebook without intervening directly at all. Other times I engaged in the kind of more conventional zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1986 orig. 1934) that is expected of adults in a classroom situation, assisting children to engage and progress through a learning task. I became in time more like a friend to the children in the classroom because even though I observed disruptive behaviour directly I never told of them to the teacher. At the same time I was supportive of children in distress and encouraged children who wanted my help when they were struggling with their work. It was a difficult balance to strike but I was very lucky to have Christine's full support for my research because she understood my intentions and didn't expect me to take on the role of classroom assistant no matter how much she could have done with the extra help. Because Christine didn't treat me like a classroom assistant the children didn't expect me to behave like one and they tolerated my note taking because I never divulged what was written in my notes to anyone.

book while the others persist in discussing who their worst enemy is. Tom declares, "Martin needs to get beat up today." Kevin, who had been punched by Martin earlier replies, "In' it though." Emma says, "My worst enemy is a knife." This idea rapidly becomes incorporated into the enemy scenario and they talk about how Martin ought to be stabbed. They begin mock stabbing each other's hands with hastily sharpened pencils. Tom shouts across at Martin, "Watch out! After school I'm gonna break your nose." I ask Tom why Martin is his worst enemy and he says, "Because he said bad things about my little sister, he kicked her." Martin feigns fear in response to Tom's threats and says, "Ooh, I'm so scared." Tom continues, telling the girls about his intent towards Martin, "I'm going to beat him, bash him after school," and the girls reply enthusiastically, "No, no, do it in PE." Tom shouts across the room again, "Martin you've got no friends at school, 'cept for infants and they can't fight." Tom then tells the girls how tough his mum was when she was little and how if she ever lost a fight at school her brother would beat her up. I ask him if he is scared of his mum and he says yes but laughs telling us how he pushed her in the swimming pool on holiday. Meanwhile Kevin has finished his first riddle and moved on to another one. The others have barely begun. Tom asks the girls to arm-wrestle him and then calls to Martin again, "What are you looking at you little fat pig, you look like your mum, *innit*¹³³?" The girls all throw their hands up in horror and cry, "Ooh," since all the children know that cussing someone's mum is the worst possible disrespect that children can give each other. It is an unequivocal provocation for a fight. The girls begin to plot how they can get hold of Martin's pencil case. One of the girls suggests, "He's probably so fat he can't get in the car." Meanwhile Emma opens and shows me what's in her pencil case.¹³⁴ Tom takes one of the pens and asks her where she got it and then calls to Martin, "Oi fat boy slim!" Finally Helen tells Tom to stop shouting out and he replies defiantly, "I'm not shouting out man, I don't know why you're getting on at me." Helen ignores him and calls the children to the carpet to mark the end of the numeracy task before lunchtime play.

¹³³ *Innit* derives from several phrases (Isn't it? Hasn't it?) and is now used by some kids merely to end a sentence.

Everyone on Tom's table except Kevin managed to mess about for the whole time that the task was in progress in the classroom – forty minutes. Helen waits for the children to settle down before she lets them go out to play and threatens them with not doing PE after lunch.

PE

After lunch boys and girls change in separate rooms ready for PE and then line up in the corridor. Once the children are outside in the playground Helen attempts to get them to sit quietly and calmly on the bench ready for instruction. She becomes infuriated as boys begin to tussle and fight on the floor and she immediately makes them line up again ready to go back upstairs. The freedom of movement that PE presents compared to the constraint of classroom learning is always a welcome relief to the children and presents an opportunity for disruptive boys to let off steam. Because they misbehave, however, and refuse to listen to instruction, the whole class suffers as Helen cancels PE and orders them to line up again ready to go back up to class. Amidst the widespread rebellion her decision provokes, boys begin to fight at the back of the line. Ade pushes another boy who pushes Ade back and they fall on to the ground, forcing Helen to come and separate them. As the children finally begin to walk in single file behind Helen across the playground towards the door that gives entry to the school building and the stairs to the classroom, Martin remains behind unnoticed, crying in the sheds. I go back and ask him if he is coming upstairs with us and he replies, "No because I am sick of these boys picking on me and they keep picking on me and I don't know why." I tell him that I have noticed that they pick on him and reassure him that when Christine returns things will settle down. Martin tells me that he just wants to go home. I reassure him again and ask him if he wants to sit next to me in the classroom and he agrees. On the way up the stairs he stops at the boys' toilets to wash his eyes and face so that the boys cannot see his tears as evidence of his defeat and we enter the classroom together, sitting quickly down. The children are working at a literacy task.

¹³⁴ Because the objects from home that children can bring into school are strictly limited, the items

On the next table two of Martin's friends Anthony and Adam, are whispering together in animated discussion, which escalates to the point of attracting Helen's attention, "Anthony!" Boys like Adam and Anthony are often reprimanded for not concentrating on the learning task that has been assigned, but they do not form part of the tough boys' peer group. The distraction they present to each other takes the form of imaginative excursions into the world outside school through drawings and conversations. Even though the distraction they pose is minimal in comparison to the disruptive boys and never involves physical intimidation or violence, it nevertheless forms part of the spectrum of distractions that interrupt the flow of concentration that formal learning requires. Often the significance of the children's lives outside school, their toys and pastimes, favourite television and cartoon characters puncture the constraints that formal learning places on their interests. Adam shows me the drawing he's made of the crime scene he's supposed to describe as a witness. He is lost in the detail and drama of describing the drawing to Anthony. Meanwhile, the other boys on table three, who are normally distracted by the amusement that Gary's antics present to them, have nearly finished the task because Gary is away from school today. Anthony and Adam continue with their picture commentary spinning a detailed yarn about it that involves James Bond, famous footballers, Superman and Jackie Chan but never getting round to writing anything down. Anthony and Adam are two boys in a friendship group of three including Kevin and sometimes incorporating Martin. They oppose in their demeanour and physical disposition everything that the disruptive boys take to be a valuable demeanour for boys. These are imaginative boys, hopeless at football, no good at fighting, brilliant at drawing, often lost in their daydream world of dinosaur fantasies. They are not embarrassed to act out cartoon adventures in the playground and are often at the receiving end of taunts and jibes from the disruptive boys about their babyish behaviour. Surviving this attention from the dominant boys requires that the weaker boys like Anthony¹³⁵ and Adam become

like pens that children can bring in take on a heightened significance.

¹³⁵ Bearing in mind Bermondsey's reputation for tough masculinity being one of these gentler more imaginative boys is not easy. I once heard Anthony's step-Dad (who had come to pick him

skilled at avoidance and submission which keeps them out of trouble. All those boys, like the imaginative but relatively weak Anthony, Adam, Kevin, and the over-weight and often bullied Martin are defined, in relation to the boys' pecking order of violence, as less than boys should be. They are demeaned as being more like babies, girls, *bitches* and *gays*. Meanwhile these physically weaker boys whose peer group coheres around a different, gentler kind of participation do their best, like girls do, to ignore the oppressive and disruptive antics of the violent boys. Martin is the exception; he defies the openly aggressive onslaught that is waged continuously against him and fights back both physically and verbally as much as possible. In turn, he learns expertly how to cause a violent disruption in the classroom although this does not endear him to the other boys and only isolates him further. At the same time he regularly vents his fury on others, even his so-called friends like Kevin, but especially on younger and weaker children in the playground. This breaks the boys' code of conduct that protects younger boys and all girls from older boys' violence so Martin is further alienated from the disruptive boys and they are never impressed with his violence.

February 2000

Supply Teacher

When I enter the playground in the morning there is a rabble of Year Five/Six boys outside the steps leading inside the school. Some of them are wrestling on the ground. I presume that the rest of the class must have gone inside because it is already after nine o' clock and the playground is otherwise deserted. I approach

up from school) tease him mercilessly in front of his (the step-Dad's) friends. He said to them, "David's got a part in the school play, guess what he's going to be? "The Fairy God-mother." To which they responded with raucous mocking laughter. Not surprisingly Anthony blushed and was silent, withdrawing his physical presence from the men as much as possible whilst still appearing to be with them just like he does in class. Anthony's mother was born and bred in Bermondsey but is the exact opposite of, for example, women like Sharon or Anne. Sharon, who knows her, says Anthony's mother is *posh*, she is obsessively house-proud, doesn't let the children out beyond the square by the flats where they live and thinks she is *upper* because she has got a good job. Anthony will never have the freedom to become a *bod* as do other boys in Bermondsey like Tom and his mother's desire to protect Anthony from trouble on the streets rather than to prepare him for it means she wants to move out of Bermondsey to the countryside.

them and ask, “What’s up?” They tell me that Christine is away. I ask them what is going to happen and Nathaniel¹³⁶ responds, moaning and groaning that they are going to be split up and put in other teacher’s classes. I persuade them to come upstairs with me and on our way up we meet Minajur,¹³⁷ who is crying, being comforted by his friend Shan. I stop to ask him what happened and he tells me that Victor¹³⁸ kicked him in his bad leg. I take him by the arm and lead him up the stairs distracting him from his tears by talking about his number one passion, Manchester United football club. We reach and enter the classroom and the head teacher Mara is taking the register. After the register she explains to the children that they are going to have a supply teacher for the day and while they wait she begins the numeracy hour with mental maths challenges. She fires times tables and other maths questions at individual children whom she calls by name. As soon as she does so, sensori-motor action amongst the children increases and the noise level rises as the boys taunt each other when they get the maths wrong or don’t know the answers. Mara stops the questions to manage the boys’ comportment and when they don’t listen to her she responds loudly, “Shut up!” They find this rudeness hysterical and cover their mouths feigning shock. Mara gives up on the mental maths and gives them instructions to proceed to their numeracy tables where the numeracy task for the morning is written on sheets. Tom saunters in

¹³⁶ Nathaniel is the son of first generation immigrant Ghanaian parents. He is the most able child in the class academically but is also friends with Gary and is therefore often distracted by his antics. Nathaniel manages to skilfully negotiate his desire to have a laugh with Gary and do well at school in order to please his parents who place a high value on educational achievement. Nathaniel is one among three other children of African parents all of whom are friends in Year Five/Six who are capable and manage to do well and also flirt with the misbehaviour that Gary pushes them towards. Ade and another boy of African parents Obi have recently arrived from Nigeria. They are differentiated from the other boys of African descent by their lack of familiarity with the English language and the kinds of things that boys are expected to know about in England, like television programmes and Sony Play Station games.

¹³⁷ Minajur is one of the boys of Bangladeshi immigrant parents in the class. He, like Shan and other boys of Bangladeshi parents, rarely pose any disruptive threat in the class and does not form part of the pecking order of intimidation. But Minajur manages like some of the other boys who don’t fight to prove his worth on the football pitch where he is valued by the disruptive boys as a capable goalkeeper.

¹³⁸ Victor is one of the boys of West African descent among Nathaniel’s friends; he gets into more trouble than Nathaniel does because he gets into more fights.

fifteen minutes late and Mara makes no comment. I join table one where Nathaniel, Gary, Daniel,¹³⁹ Kevin and Anthony are sitting.

Gary is intent from the very beginning on having a laugh, making good the opportunity that Christine's absence presents. He tries to distract Nathaniel who has started working on the numeracy sheet. In a tone indicative of their friendship, repeatedly calling his name, "Nat, Nat," Gary begins to jibe Nathaniel, attempting to stop him from working, "Don't start Nat, you're just copying that lot." Then the supply teacher walks in. He is small and slight, dressed formally in suit trousers with shirt and tie and he looks scared. Every teacher knows that the impression they create is formed within the first few minutes if not seconds of their entering a classroom. Mara introduces the teacher Chris,¹⁴⁰ to the class. Gary immediately takes up the bait and begins to entertain the boys at his table, "Kray, did he say Kray? Yeah look at him, he looks like one of the Kray twins, don't he? Is it Ronnie? Is it Reggie?" Chris reinforces the task that has been set and Nathaniel makes a vain attempt to manage Gary's comportment showing his irritation, "Just get on with your work man."

Mara leaves the room and immediately the noise level begins to rise. Ade gets out of his seat and comes over to Gary's table. Gary says to him, "Chris is coming. You scared in'it?" Mark joins them and begins to jibe Nathaniel, "Nat, you better give me the rubber, man." When they manage to get the rubber Ade and Mark go back to their table. Gary gets up and follows them saying to Ade, "Give me the rubber you fat head." Ade playfully refuses. Gary goes on taunting Ade in a teasing tone, "Just give me the rubber before I bang your face in." Changing tack, he adopts the Jamaican accent he is trying to perfect, "Hey Rasta." Mark calls across the class to Nathaniel taunting him, adopting a mock fighting posture, "Nat, Nat, just watch out right!" Kevin responds sarcastically, "Oh right Mark!" Daniel joins in the tease, "Nat, he's gonna stab ya." Daniel then turns on Kevin who has

¹³⁹ Daniel is a *white* boy, the son of a strict Bermondsey father. He is another boy like Nathaniel who skirts around the edges of disruption sometimes finding himself at the centre of trouble as he tries to impress Gary.

taken the risk of making his presence felt and asks him accusingly, "Do you believe in Santa Claus?" Kevin ignores him. Daniel then attempts to get Gary's attention out of having teased Kevin, "Gary, I just asked Kevin if he believes in Santa Claus and he just stared back at me." Gary responds, "Yeah course he does, that's why he puts his milk out and prays, 'Please Santa'" Gary continues to taunt Ade, posturing and making mock fight challenges. Then he turns to Kevin and says disdainfully, "Get a life." Kevin retaliates quietly, "I've got a life." Ade approaches the table again, "Give me the rubber!" Gary replies, teasing still, "Go away dog! Don't start boy!" Ade walks away swearing under his breath. Anthony whispers under his breath to Kevin something about Gary. Gary flicks the numeracy task paper and declares, "I'm not doing it anymore." Daniel leans back on his chair and Gary turns on Anthony, "You're a baby man, you even *cuss*¹⁴¹ babyish." He then turns to Nathaniel trying to provoke him and says, "Anthony said you know a slut and it's your mum." But at that moment Gary and Daniel are distracted by Martin who is making loud sheep noises on the other side of the classroom. Gary joins in even more loudly and he and Daniel collapse into giggles. Nathaniel meanwhile is still trying to concentrate on his work. Gary picks up some pencils and starts to throw them across the room at other boys. Kevin says calmly, "Where's that man, Chris?" Anthony replies, "Probably being beaten up by Winston."¹⁴² Gary states, "Ronnie Kray, he's a legend," and then resumes throwing pencils. The classroom descends into chaos. Victor, who is good at gymnastics, is doing a handstand in the book corner. Anthony and Kevin get up and leave the table, try to join a different table and Rochelle sends them back. Suddenly Obi and Victor who are up and out of their seats, start fighting, violently pushing, shoving and attempting to punch each other, bumping into other children, tables and chairs as they tussle. Rochelle the classroom assistant attempts to separate them but can't manage it; Chris intervenes and makes the boys sit down. Kevin retreats to the book corner and sits alone reading. Nathaniel is still trying to

¹⁴⁰ Chris is Australian.

¹⁴¹ A *cuss* is a kind of verbal put down of which the children have many, for example *cussing* someone's mother is the worst possible *cuss*.

¹⁴² Winston is one among the most disruptive boys; he is the son of Jamaican parents and lives at home with his mother and other siblings.

complete the numeracy task. The tension of Gary and Ade's slowly developing teasing exchange erupts suddenly into a full-scale fight and Daniel picks up his chair and raises it threateningly over his head. The noise of the children's shouting attracts Fatima from the neighbouring classroom. Rochelle tells her, "All hell is breaking loose in here." Fatima tries without success to calm the class down. She raises her voice in angry tones, tries to shame the children into behaving properly, attempts to make them feel guilty, reprimands individual children and threatens them with exclusion from the class. The noise and movement subsides temporarily and when she leaves the room explodes again. A teacher from another class comes in to tell Chris that it is time for assembly and assists him to get the children out of the class into the assembly hall and from there to outside play.

After play time during literacy hour a similar chaos ensues. Gary gets up and leaves the classroom. He climbs up on the gym equipment stacked outside the classroom and bangs on the windows at the top so that everyone can see him through the glass. Ade, Winston and some other boys run out to join him. Chris sends someone to get Mara, who comes back into the classroom, reprimanding the children about their behaviour and threatening to tell their parents. She tells the boys that football club has been cancelled because of their misbehaviour. Meanwhile Gary, Ade and Winston wreak havoc outside the room. Mara tells the other children that Gary is going to be sent home and she leaves the class again. Tom starts up a chant, "We want Christine, we want Christine," and several children join in. Rochelle who confronts Tom about his behaviour is now at her wit's end. She tells Obi to be quiet and in exasperation and close to tears she tells Tom and the others on his table that there is no point in her telling them how to behave when this is what they get up to as soon as Christine is gone. She reminds them that they've got SATs test in a few months time. Rochelle turns to me then and tells me that she feels like walking out of the class because the supply teacher gets paid £100 a day, is completely hopeless and is still relying on her to try and get the class under control. Later, before lunch, Kofi, the home school liaison officer who would ordinarily have to take boys who are to be suspended for the day home, comes into the classroom. Kofi also runs the football club and he tells

the children that he has decided that there will be football club after all today but only because Danny has promised to behave for the rest of the day. Danny comes back into class with a victorious smirk on his face.

In the staff room during the lunch break Alison, the year three teacher, sits despondent in the chair moaning to another teacher and to Mara that it is impossible for her to teach her class because she spends 20% of her time teaching and 80% dealing with behavioural problems. She says that the children do not respond to any of her strategies for reinforcement of positive behaviour and she just doesn't know what else to do. Mara looks at her glumly and offers no encouragement. Eileen the deputy comes in listens and offers nothing either in the way of solace or practical suggestions of support. Alison remains in her chair looking distressed and uncomfortable. Chris says that, being a supply teacher, he is used to this level of disruption in classrooms and that even though this morning was a nightmare he has taught in schools in Hackney that are far worse. He says, "Being a supply teacher, you are basically a zoo keeper." Steve, the SENCO manager says he thinks the problem in the school is the dominance of alpha-males amongst the boys. It is interesting that when formal learning breaks down and children's behaviour makes teachers despair, children are likened to apes, they are wild like animals because normal human children don't behave like this. Disruptive boys are said to behave just like apes because adults cannot conceive that children are capable of struggling for and competing for prestige in a violent and aggressive manner that is destructive of every value that education holds up to children. This desperate analogy, between schools and zoos, while telling, does nothing to reassure Alison who leaves the staff room unsupported.

No wonder when the boys discuss amongst themselves who is the ruler of the school, Obi dismisses Mara outright. They argue about which of them rules the school and Gary tries to dismiss Obi's desire to be a contender for leadership by saying, "You're tough Obi, but you haven't really got any friends." Being the ruler is not just about being the toughest; it is about using toughness to integrate a group of boys within a hierarchy of fraternity. That is why so much good humoured

teasing precedes the fighting and why the fighting might possibly be more about a display of bravado than it is about actual bodily harm. I will return to this point in chapter four.

In the face of Gary's dominance Tom's antics recede into the background of classroom disruption. Gary leads the escalating cycle of exchanges between the boys that leads to the intimidation of weaker boys and fights amongst the bravest and strongest. Through these exchanges in which the disruptive boys' peer group is constituted a particular kind of participation is established amongst them. He who dares wins and Gary's daring supersedes that of other boys. He opposes and challenges the tranquil participation that being a child in a classroom implies. In Christine's absence he destroys the authority of Mara, Rochelle, Fatima and Chris, the supply teacher. On this day Gary rules the school.

Over the next few months Gary and Tom fall in and out of friendship and Anne despairs of Gary's parents who, she says, allow him too much freedom to do as he pleases. She worries that Gary is leading Tom into trouble. By the end of the school year, Gary has to report once a week to the local police station because he has been in trouble on the street once too often. No stranger to trouble herself, Anne, having now got to know me tells me of the problems she's facing that cause her to cling desperately to the stability that Pete presents to her as an opportunity for their future as a family. It turns out that, having taken cocaine in the past, she had decided to become a small time supplier to friends as a way to raise a bit of extra money to buy things for the kids. She never told Pete. Using too much of the drug herself, however, she got into debt to the supplier and couldn't repay. Calling in the debt which he knew she couldn't afford, he demanded instead that she bring in a shipment for him from Amsterdam. Anne was forced then to tell Pete what was going on and he gave her a final warning. He would help her bring in the shipment and help her to repay the debt on condition that she *go straight*, come off the drugs, stop drinking and behave herself. She agreed. They brought in the shipment, the supplier squealed on them to customs and used the distraction to bring in a bigger shipment. Pete and Anne were arrested and Pete took the rap for

Anne. This meant that he was waiting, even as he was listening to me reading to Tom that day, to hear about a date for his prison sentencing. Because it was his first offence and the drug was marijuana not heroin, he was hoping for leniency and no more than eighteen months inside.

Once Pete went into prison Anne spent every weekend with the kids at her parents' house in Kent and it became impossible for me to read to Tom anymore. Six months later I bumped into Anne in the road and she had a letter in her hand. When she saw me she burst into tears. "What is it," I said, "What's the matter?" She told me that she was on her way to post a letter to Pete telling him that she couldn't have him back when he came out of prison. She was distraught because she knew that it wasn't right, Pete *doing time* for her and she couldn't stand by him. She tried to explain to me that the person he was trying to make her be wasn't the person she is and she couldn't pretend to him anymore. I tried to comfort her as best I could and asked after the children. I never saw her again and heard that a year later when Pete came out of prison she had tried to take him back but it hadn't worked. On Mothers' Day Pete, who couldn't live without Anne, hung himself in the flat. Anne came home and found him there. He was dead and she, punished beyond measure, moved out of Bermondsey to live with her parents in Kent.

Tom's story ends tragically then and many people will say that disrupted and irresponsible mothers are obviously the cause of their children's misbehaviour at school. But I would persist with the argument that this is still only part of the story. Despite the fact that all of the most disruptive boys in Year Five/Six have mothers with disrupted lives, many of the girls in the class who face similar difficulties at home don't misbehave in the same way. Tom's sister Mary, you remember, was good as gold. What the most disruptive boys do share in common is an unusual degree of independence, what Christine described as an 'unhealthy' level of independence. They know how to fend for themselves, often on the street, in a way that girls never have to because girls with that much responsibility are close to home, either keeping their mothers company or looking after the home and younger siblings. Focussing on the pathology of disruptive boys' family lives

ignores the developing relationship between gender and prestige that those boys like Tom must accommodate in *common* households, on *mean* streets and in *sink* schools. Teachers who cannot conceive of children, and especially boys, as aggressive and intimidating prestige-seekers ignore the violent dynamic of peer group formation amongst these boys at their peril. Feeling sorry for their family circumstances is enough to enable a teacher to persevere in the most stressful classroom situations, but it is not enough to get the problem disruptive boys pose under control. Only a head teacher who wields proper authority can achieve this. She must ensure that her authority consistently supports every adult member of staff responsible for the supervision of children, not just teachers, and this authority must extend through the spaces and times of every school day. Only then could it be said that all the children at school are being properly cared for. Otherwise the children, like Nathaniel, who want and are capable of learning, who want to compete academically, will pay the price for boys like Gary's power. Knowing full well how this power dynamic works *real* Bermondsey people, as Christine explained, send their children to church schools, with neat uniforms and strict discipline. Their worst fear is that their sons and daughters will fall prey to peer groups like Gary's, either as full participating members or as victims on the receiving end of the disruption that jeopardises the opportunity that education is supposed to present to children.

Schools exist, and children's attendance at them is compulsory, because equal opportunity for social improvement is the hard won right of every child in England. But if education is the rational means for getting more knowledge and a better job and livelihood in the future why are the children most likely to benefit from it so often the least likely to do well at school¹⁴³? Either many of the schools in predominantly *working class* areas are not functioning properly or *common* values represent an alternative means for gaining social status that conflicts with the apparent necessity for educational achievement. Or perhaps, as I have argued,

¹⁴³ This question has been addressed most famously by Paul Willis (1977) but has not to my knowledge been addressed adequately in the context of the development of a particular *working class* locality and how people there make sense of what it means to be *working class*.

here both factors are relevant. What is clear is that formal education exists as a system for transforming the value of children through particular practices. It is a system that establishes an equation between academic ability and the idea of intelligence as a heritable quality. This equation leaves those like Tom, who do badly at school, with a permanent question mark over their heads about the value of their abilities and because the question is quantified in terms of examination marks the answers appear to be objective. Primary school children's value as developing persons, quantified in terms of examination marks, is measured by the standard of secondary school they can gain competitive entry to at the age of eleven.¹⁴⁴ It is in relation to this system for the creation and transformation of value in childhood that children are seen to resist and struggle to assert amongst themselves alternative means for the appreciation of one another's merits. The chapter that follows moves away from the competitive exchange of verbal and bodily gestures to consider the way in which boys' preoccupation with particular objects from their lives outside school facilitates the creation and transformation of their personal prestige through the medium of gift exchange. The ethnography describes the Pokemon phenomenon.

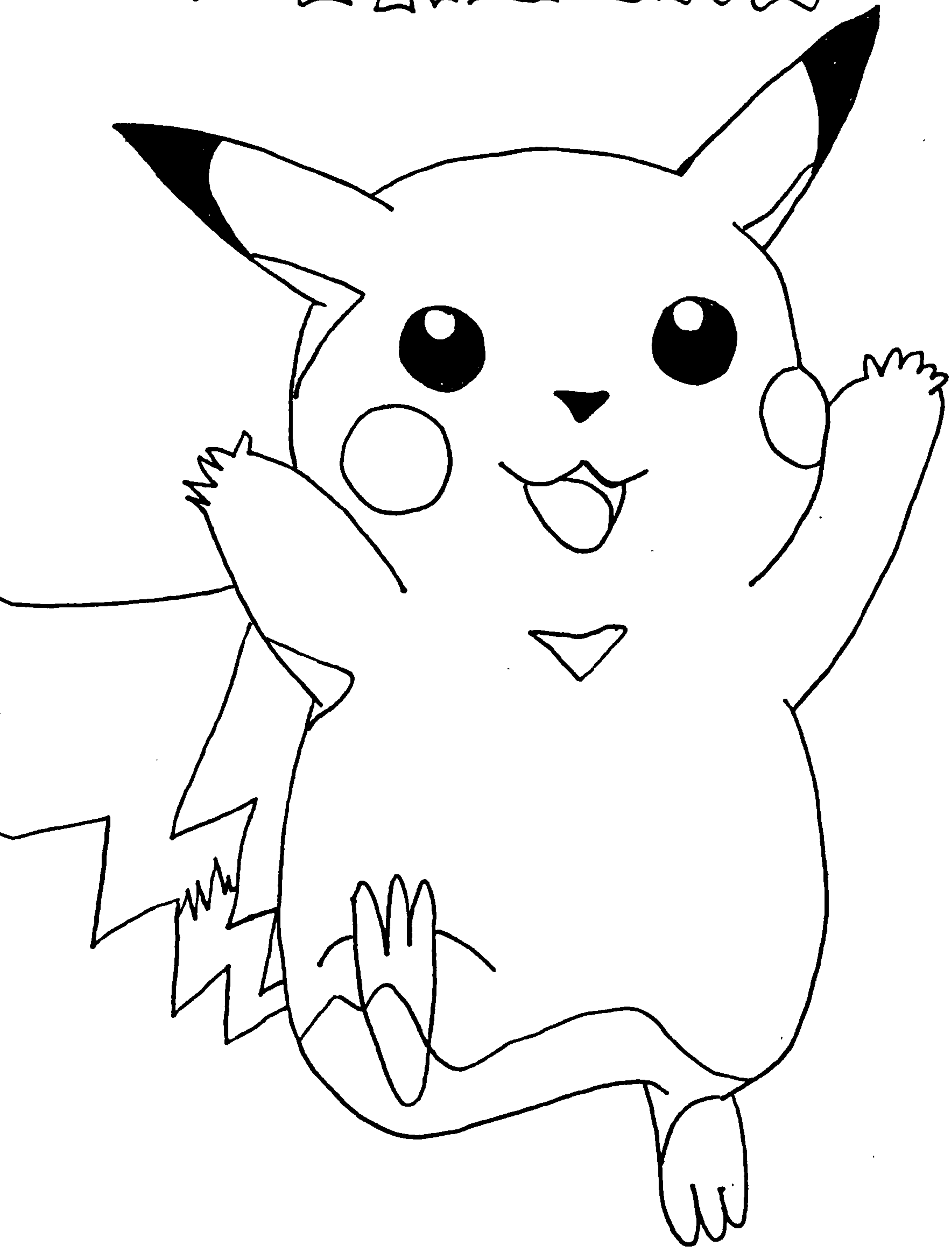
¹⁴⁴ I would argue that the education system is a two tier (primary and secondary) initiation system based on age set organisation, in which children are initiated into the kind of participation that work requires of them later in life, but these are not the terms in which people understand schooling.

Chapter Three

Pokemon, Peers, Place and Prestige

Part I

PIKACHU





Trainer
Ash

Pokemon and Peers

‘There are two kinds of people in the world.
Those who battle to catch wild Pokemon and work hard to raise them
well.

And those who try to steal Pokemon without working hard at all.
Of all the Pokemon thieves in the world, the members of Team Rocket
were the worst.

Jessie had a mean streak as long as her red hair.

James was pure trouble – and proud of it.

And their Pokemon, Meowth, was the perfect pal for a pair of
Pokemon poachers.

Team Rocket searched the world for rare Pokemon to steal. They
wanted to capture one of these amazing creatures to take back to their
boss, Giovanni.

But there was one Pokemon they wanted to steal more than any other:

Pikachu – an electric Pokemon that looked like a yellow mouse.

Pikachu had shocking powers.

Of course, there were thousands of Pikachu in the world,

but there was only one that Team Rocket wanted:

the Pikachu that belonged to Ash Ketchum,

a Pokemon trainer.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ **Pokemon: Team Rocket Blasts Off.** (P. 1-2) Scholastic. USA. (2000) (Adapted by Tracey West)

Gary is not an easy boy to get to know. He, like many of the children, is sulky, reticent and reluctant to be in the classroom where application to schoolwork is expected. The children's reluctance raises the problem of my own participation. I am careful not to involve myself in the classroom in a way that renders me like a teacher or her assistant and yet I am obviously not a child either. So what do the children make of my presence? For the first three months I am largely an adult person who observes and makes notes.¹⁴⁶ I do not challenge bad behaviour¹⁴⁷ or tell on children to the teacher and it is easy therefore for the children to ignore me if they choose. In particular I struggle to find a legitimate periphery¹⁴⁸ from which to get to know the more difficult boys better. For obvious reasons I cannot participate in the pecking order of disruption, which dominates social relations in the classroom, and I cannot play football, which is the boys' main preoccupation in the playground.¹⁴⁹ I am, therefore, a marginal and largely irrelevant person to them. Gary is particularly surly, he resists any attempts on my part to get to know him, I smile at him he ignores me, I greet him, he ignores me. I am insignificant to him.

¹⁴⁶ During the first three months of my fieldwork I was in Year Five/Six one day a week because I was also doing fieldwork in another infant class with much younger children, aged five to six. After three months, beginning in January 2000, I spent two days a week in Year Five/Six for the next twelve months. In the beginning, apart from my desire to record data verbatim, I observed and took notes in order to distance myself from the kinds of adults that children generally find in school classrooms. These are teachers and staff members who constantly tell children what formal learning requires of them and what they should be doing in any time or place.

¹⁴⁷ I would only intervene directly in children's interaction with each other if I felt that what manifested between them posed an actual danger of harm that the teacher or classroom assistant hadn't noticed.

¹⁴⁸ Legitimate Peripheral Participation is the term Jean Lave (1991) uses to describe the way that particular kinds of learning take place via practical involvement in specifically structured social situations. Legitimate Peripheral Participation situates the differentiation of novices' knowledge in relation to the practice (Bourdieu 1977) of knowledgeable experts. All learning is posited, in this model, as a highly specified form of participation in social practice rather than just a certain kind of conceptual achievement. I argue in this chapter that learning, understood as a participative, historical and generative process, is intrinsic to all social practice, (including ethnography) and furthermore that all social practice substantiates human mind. This leads one to ask in any social situation – what form of participation is required here? How is participation made possible, by whom and how is participation constrained or resisted? The question I bring to this model of mind as a learning phenomenon is – does participation necessarily take the form of an exchange relationship? The idea of participative learning does not contradict, but is illustrative of Vygotsky's 'zone of proximal development' in which psychological concepts are understood to be inter-personal events before they are ever intra-personal thoughts (Vygotsky 1934, 1936) (Wertsch J. V. (ed.) 1985).

¹⁴⁹ The boys who play football take it extremely seriously and a novice must prove his/her skills quickly or s/he is intimidated off the pitch. Never having played football in my life, I was reluctant therefore, to risk making an idiot of myself and thereby earn the boys' disrespect.

He is intimidating to me. All this changes on a single day in December¹⁵⁰ before the children break up from school for the Christmas holidays.

Pikachu

The children have endured a week of inspections in which they have been expected to be on their best behaviour. Christine is proud of them because they tried really hard, which she takes as a sign of the children's regard for her. They knew that it was important to Christine that they behave and work hard during the inspection. She laments that the inspector didn't get to see any personality in the children, but at least disruption was minimised, so Christine is pleased. The good news is that the school hasn't been demoted from 'serious weaknesses' to 'special measures' but it remains a school with serious problems and the stress that an inspection creates has taken its toll. As a reward for good behaviour Christine suspends formal learning for the whole day and declares that they are going to do fun tasks followed by free time in which children can choose what they want to do. The children are excited and in jubilant mood.

In the morning the children begin work on the backdrop for the infant classes' Christmas nativity and they work at their numeracy tables in small groups. I join table one where Gary, Anthony, Kevin, Nathaniel and Daniel are sitting. The task is to draw stars on card and to cut out the best one to make a stencil. This stencil is then to be used to make lots of stars from silver paper. The boys are dissatisfied with the wonky stars they have drawn and I show them how to make a more uniform one using two regular triangles. Anthony, who is the most competent artist at the table, is not interested since he is taking great pleasure in making his stars as irregular as possible. Their lack of uniformity delights him. Gary, seeing the stars Daniel and Nathaniel manage to make with the stencil I made for them, reluctantly accepts a stencil for himself. All of us begin to make silver stars. Every now and again I write a couple of notes down on my pad. Gary turns to me and engaging me for the first time asks inquisitively, "Do you have to write everything that we do down," and I tell him, "No, I just try to write down as much as possible that I think is interesting about the way that children learn." He then asks me if I am going to be in the classroom with them until they leave for secondary school and I let him know

¹⁵⁰ December 1999

that I am. Suddenly animated, he asks, "Ain't it that Pilgrim's¹⁵¹ is a rubbish school?" I say that I know nothing about that school. He looks at Nathaniel and teases him, taunting him about Pilgrim's.¹⁵² Gary, aware that his friend Nathaniel is a contender for academic achievement because he works harder and focuses more constantly tries to distract and involve him in having fun when they should be working.¹⁵³ There is friendly rivalry between them. I ask Gary which secondary schools he is applying to and he replies abruptly, "I dunno, I ain't even filled in a secondary school transfer form yet." I ask why that is and he says, "Cos of my mum, I've asked my Dad but he just..." and he mimics the way his Dad mumbles into his chest. Gary gives up trying to explain. We continue with our stars.¹⁵⁴

Later Gary points to my notes and says to Nathaniel, as if he is feeling left out, "She never writes anything about me in that book." I turn the book towards him and show him where his name is, "Look, your name is written down there more than anyone." Seeing that it is true he asks, "Why?" and I tease him saying, "Because you do the most talking, that's why." Gary smirks and concentrates on his stars again, happily singing the lyrics to the latest chart topping songs as he works. Anthony works quietly on his own, every now and again directing conversation towards Kevin. He says, "You know what Kevin? I find numeracy confusing." Laughing, he explains to Kevin how he had once completely misunderstood a maths problem. Kevin titters and asks, "Is that why you're a bit slow in numeracy?" Anthony says matter of

¹⁵¹ Pilgrim's is the secondary school that Gary and many of the boys in the class end up going to in September, but like Tenter Ground it has a bad reputation locally and officially it gets poor results. The name of the school has been changed for the sake of confidentiality.

¹⁵² At the beginning of year six children have to decide which secondary schools they are going to apply to so that by December in any academic year these decisions will already have been made. Children will already have visited some schools with their parents and Nathaniel has obviously put Pilgrim's on his list. Other parents, like Gary's, do not engage with the extreme competitiveness of secondary school entry and often accept the closest school to home that their child can get into. Usually the teacher has to chase these parents up about secondary school applications. For motivated parents, the decision about which secondary schools to apply to, is made on the basis of a child's expected SATs results, religious preferences, behavioural record and distance from home. The most desirable schools with the best reputations and results are extremely difficult to get into, even if a child has all the requisite personal and objective qualifications. Boys like Gary and Tom, with poor behavioural records, actually have very little choice about which secondary they will go to and usually move straight from *sink* primary to *sink* secondary.

¹⁵³ Some of the other children commented on how in previous years Nathaniel had been, with Gary, one of the naughtiest boys in the class and remarked that now he has settled down to his work.

¹⁵⁴ The motivation and support of parents for a child's education and progress through school is important and without it a child is unlikely to do very well unless exceptionally self motivated. Parents who do not place a high priority on their child's education are in my experience rare, as I explained in chapter two, but teachers and children like Gary, for example, are frustrated by their parents' failure to support their child's and the school's efforts.

factly, “Yes.” During the star-making activity, as with any task in the classroom, there is constant comparison between the boys of how each of them is coping with the task and a running commentary on the various conversational exchanges that take place between them. Nathaniel, who is pleased with the stars he is making, addresses me for the first time in three months by my first name. I am surprised to hear my name after having been ignored for so long and pleased that the relaxation of formal learning has allowed the terms of engagement between myself and the boys to shift, if only slightly. Gary, noticing these signs of developing familiarity, looks up from the star he is making and scrutinises me, staring closely. I ignore him, continue making stars and wonder whether he is feeling encouraged or threatened by these signs of budding intimacy between himself, other children and me.

As we work, Kevin and Anthony begin talking about *Pokemon*. Kevin brings out of his pocket a small poster with about thirty cartoon characters that I have never seen before, drawn on one side. On the other side a single character takes up the whole page. This, they tell me excitedly, is *Pikachu*. I ask the boys who these characters are and they introduce me to *Pokemon* - cartoon creatures that feature in a television programme they watch on Sky and ITV on Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings.¹⁵⁵ Kevin and Anthony begin to discuss the new *Pokemon* balls they’ve got at home and explain to me that they are balls that you throw on the ground to make little *Pokemon* characters fall out. I am intrigued. Suddenly Gary interrupts, changing the subject, attempting to engage me again asking, “Have you got a car?” I let him know that I have and he asks me what kind. “A Mercedes,¹⁵⁶” I tell him and he’s impressed, “*Rah*,” he says in admiration and this sparks a conversation amongst the boys about what cars they like and what cars their Dads have got. Anthony, bringing the conversation back to himself, tells Kevin about his birthday, which was the day before and lists some of the things he got as gifts. He speaks proudly about the ten-pound note he was given and tells Kevin that he’s going to buy two *Pokemon* balls with it. He lifts up his school shirt to show Kevin his *Darth*

¹⁵⁵ *Pokemon* was first an electronic computer game on the Nintendo Game Boy hand held computer games console developed in Japan, but most of the boys heard of it first through watching television. Part of the extraordinary success of *Pokemon* is due to the exploitation of multi-media international marketing opportunities. Most of the children’s parents subscribe either to satellite or cable television systems.

¹⁵⁶ I don’t mention the fact that my Mercedes is 20 years old and can’t go faster than 20 miles per hour up hills.

*Maul*¹⁵⁷ Star Wars T-shirt that he is wearing underneath. Kevin admires it and Anthony goes on to talk about the *Action Man*¹⁵⁸ things he received. Daniel intervenes, saying disparagingly, “Hello, which planet do you come from if you still like Action Man?” Gary joins in and starts teasing Anthony about how childish it is to still be into dinosaurs. Noticing this differentiation, that Gary and Daniel emphasise, between the kind of things Anthony is passionate about and the things they like to discuss, like cars, I come to Anthony’s aid. Distancing myself from Gary’s disparaging remarks I ask Anthony if he’s been watching the *Walking with Dinosaurs* series on television. He has, so we talk about the awesome sea dinosaur that it features. Losing interest and probably disgruntled because I resisted the humiliation of Anthony that Gary and Daniel were trying to effect, Gary gets up and leaves the table. He joins some other boys who are now playing board games in the book corner.

The problem I face is how to engage and interact with Gary as one among the dominant boys in the class, without participating in what he does to gain influence which, in part, involves intimidating and antagonising other boys. Some boys, like Daniel for example, face the same difficulty and, trying to impress Gary, often participate in intimidating and antagonising behaviour. Witnessing the constant challenges Gary makes to boys whom he perceives to be weaker and more childish than he is I resist the temptation to protect the weak child and to antagonise the bully back. This is the route that many members of staff have taken with Gary but I am not there to discipline, but rather to understand social relations between children in the classroom. Of course I am pushed against my own ideas of what constitutes acceptable behaviour in children and it is difficult to observe disruptive boys without becoming infuriated. I note the ways in which Gary attempts, on a daily basis to wield his influence in the classroom and also how other children, like Anthony for example, skilfully resist this influence. There is a constant state of flux between the children (and especially in relation to the capacity for intimidation and/or violence for the boys) which consists of attempts to win or resist influence, and this mediates the formation of different peer groups among them. The problem

¹⁵⁷ *Darth Maul* is a *Jedi* knight fighting on behalf of the dark side in the Star Wars movie called *Phantom Menace*.

¹⁵⁸ *Action Man* is an action figure designed for boys’ play, it is the equivalent in boys’ affections to what *Barbie* is for girls.

for me is how to participate in these complex relations in a way that takes me beyond the more passive observations of the past three months.

As Christine approaches our table Daniel tries to tell of Gary because he abandoned the task and went to play games. Daniel does not dare, as Gary does, to do as he pleases in class so he is disgruntled. Coming to Gary's defence, Christine tells Daniel that Gary probably got bored with making stars. She instructs them all to finish the star they're making and then to choose what they want to do. Daniel finishes his star quickly and goes to join Gary and the other boys in the book corner. Kevin and Anthony ask Christine if they can stay at the table and do drawing and when she agrees I stay with them. Martin joins us and sits next to Kevin. As they settle down to begin drawing Martin asks Kevin if they should make up for yesterday, Kevin acquiesces and they shake hands. I enquire as to whether they were fighting yesterday and they explain that they fell out. I decide to do some drawing too and ask Kevin if I can borrow his *Pokemon* poster. He gladly agrees. I start to copy *Pikachu* using a black felt tip pen on A4 white paper and after a few seconds I realise that Anthony is staring at me, focusing intently and with complete surprise on my drawing which is an almost exact replica of *Pikachu*. He pulls Kevin by the arm and tells him to look at what I am doing and within seconds all the boys have been alerted to my achievement. The table is suddenly crowded with boys praising my drawing of *Pikachu*, "That's *bad man*."¹⁵⁹ "*Rah man, that's bad,*" "She's a good *drawer man,*" "Can you do one for me?" "Can you do one for me?"

¹⁵⁹ The children use a street slang when they talk to each other which, although they are not aware of it, is derived from Jamaican Patois and *Black* American language use. It is what was once thought of as '*black talk*' but is now commonly the slang of young people - *black, white* and *Asian* - growing up in the city. Even the quietest children whose first language is not English quickly pick up and learn this peer group language that they may never use in any other context. It is the prevalence of this slang as well as the broader *cultural* influences of *black* street style that Ali G's popular satirical persona draws on. Whereas before *white working class* people in London could be distinguished on the basis of the differences in their dialect, nowadays their children are more likely to be influenced by this so-called *black* street slang. Patrick, the ex-armed robber who we will learn more about in chapter five recalls being shocked when, in prison, if he couldn't see the young men with his own eyes he couldn't tell by their voices alone anymore whether they were *black* or *white*. In the past, listening to young *white* men from London, he would have been able to hazard a guess as to what *manor* they hailed from. Patrick laments that these *white-working-class* London dialects are rapidly being lost. In the dialogue quoted here when the boys are saying things like, "That's *bad,*" where *bad* obviously means good, I am interested in the linguistic inversion of adjectives referring to value so that things that are bad become good and things that are good become bad. *White-working-class* language traditionally includes rhyming slang and this is mixed and matched with outside influences in an ongoing creative synthesis that extends beyond language use to other *cultural* borrowings. For example in a youth club a young man says to me, "I haven't *chatted* for beers," which means I haven't *chatted* for years where *chatted* means talking/rapping lyrics into a microphone, a musical style that is derived from Jamaican *toasting* and *Black* American rap music. I give an ethnographic

Realising with amazement what a stir I have caused with my *Pikachu* drawing I stay calm as if it is nothing and say, "This one is for Kevin, but I could photocopy it for other people." Suddenly and without warning the *Pikachu* drawing is hot property and this means that I am for the first time the focus of the boys' attention. When Anthony sees the reaction from all the boys he teases Daniel, "I thought you said *Pokemon* were boring and now you're carrying on like they're *bad*." Anthony's preoccupation with drawing and cartoon characters from children's television programmes, so often frowned upon by the tough boys as being childish, are the source of this furore. He feels vindicated. Unwittingly, and to Anthony's surprise, I have created an object that is of specific significance to all the boys, not just Kevin and Anthony's imaginative and creative friends. I am as surprised as he is by the immediacy of the effect my creation has. (*Pikachu has shocking powers.*)

Because of what I can do and what I am able to produce - this object that matters to the boys - I become, in a single transforming instant, a person of significance. This is not a note in my fieldwork diary, about which they couldn't care less; this is a drawing of *Pikachu*. Quite by accident I have found a way to participate that makes a difference to the boys. Suddenly they are all calling my name, asking each other if I am an artist, and dominant boys, who up until now have been physically removed and reluctant to engage me, push closer. They shove other boys out of the way so they can sit next to me at the table and watch me draw. Even Mark, Ade's sidekick, who never speaks to me and is often silent and withdrawn in the classroom, asks me quietly and politely if I will make a copy of the drawing for him. I experience directly what I already know from observation alone and that is - **popularity and indeed friendship in the classroom is predicated on a shared and finely differentiated mastery over bodily, linguistic and object exchanges of specific significance.**¹⁶⁰

description of the UK Garage music phenomenon in chapter four. There is a considerable degree of innovation amongst the boys in this specific slang use such that, as another specific form of exchange, there is prestige in introducing a new term that becomes widely used in the peer group. For example during my fieldwork new words were introduced about once every three to six weeks. These were usually introduced by boys, like Gary, with access to an older teenage peer group through older siblings and street experience. One of these words for example was *buff* which supplanted the use of *wicked* to mean the best or excellent.

¹⁶⁰ When observing children, what is consistently surprising is the way they accommodate transformation in social process via the crucial mediation of objects. The same is true for adults too of course, but the process is often more difficult to observe because adults are more likely to be

engaged in linguistic exchanges in which the mediation of objects appears to have been transcended. In children it is easier to see how the objects they attend to become the bridges over and through which they encounter and make sense of each other in particular ways. It is children's bodily competence in relation to specific objects in certain environments that makes the difference between them. Social structure is to be understood therefore as an embodied accommodation of the specific kind of participation that is required in particular situations (Lave 1991). Clear examples of this were given in chapter two in which, children were seen either to meet or to resist the requirements of formal learning experienced first as the necessity to have the correct bodily disposition. The appropriate comportment of the body as a form of participation precedes and is inseparable from the achievement of *mental* operations – such as maths.

The data presented in this chapter suggest further that the specificity of the objects that mediate peer group formation in any situation, is the key to discovering social significance and the potential for transforming social relations. What interests me in particular is the way value can be created and transformed between subjects and objects in such a way that it becomes impossible to separate subjectivity, and by implication inter-subjectivity, from particular object relations. This chapter demonstrates how, through exchange relations, the value of persons, practices and things is created and transformed as an ongoing and mutually specifying process. It shows how the constitution of relative value that a process of exchange implies depends itself on an inherent comparison between sameness and difference between persons as participating subjects. Sameness and difference are seen to be varied aspects of one structuring principle that both governs exchange operations in practice and makes possible the development of classificatory schemes of persons and objects from simple concept formations. This process, of creating and transforming value, is observed as a continuous spatio-temporal flux such that children constantly move and reach out to make sense of the world, its objects and other subjects. Children learn to accommodate constraint in this process, in relation to the material conditions of the immediate social environment, in the classroom under the control of the teacher, for example.

This argument about the form that participative learning takes is derived from ethnographic observation and supports Toren's (1990, 1999) broadly phenomenological analysis of social relations. She is inspired, in part, by the work of Merleau-Ponty (1962), and argues that, '*Mind is a function of the whole person constituted over time in inter subjective relations with others in the enviroing world*' (Toren 1999 P. 12). Toren's reference to the whole person is a reference to Merleau-Ponty's assertion that mind is an embodied phenomenon, the workings of which cannot therefore be separated from an analysis of *bodily praxis*. Mind is not to be understood as the limited capacity to produce sets of mental representations, such as occurs when children learn maths, because all so-called mental representations are transformations of prior learning through bodily engagement with the material world (Piaget 1968, 1972). It is this that makes Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology compatible with Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice which, in Toren's model, (1990) is nevertheless criticised for the implicit assumption that children are socialised, i.e. that they are the passive recipients of adult knowledge. Toren argues in contrast (1993a) that children's learning about the key concepts which, characterise adult knowledge, must be understood as a transformational and therefore historical process. The implication of this theory of childhood learning is that history cannot be located outside of and as something that happens to the person. Rather history must be understood as the process through which children bring meaning into being in relation to the meaning that others have already made before them.

Toren's argument for a particular kind of historical analysis, one that aims to move beyond analyses that render social structure as implicitly external to the constituting subject, places child development at the centre of ethnographic enquiry. This is because children, as particular persons, are seen to accommodate social structure in terms of their embodied, transforming understanding of what different social situations mean over time. Children in each new generation must make sense of, and can therefore assist the anthropologist to understand the development of and relations between, concepts which adults already take for granted as given aspects of the world they live in.

It is impossible, as I discovered in the classroom, to predict the often-surprising ways in which children make sense of the situations they find themselves in. This is what makes participant observation such an invaluable methodological tool. Even if it may appear at first that they are conforming to adults' expectations of them, children may well have some entirely more engaging preoccupation on their minds. It is the transformation of these preoccupations in different situations and over time that concerns me in this thesis. Whilst my analysis of subject/object relations explores a broadly phenomenological perspective, my intention is not to preclude the relevance of a psychodynamic analysis of child development which, for the sake of space, I have not considered here.

Popularity and Friendship

Keenly aware that I have stumbled, thanks to Kevin and Anthony, upon a significant discovery, an object – Pikachu – and a means of production – drawing – that matter to the boys I am astonished. The transformation in social relations that bodily competence with respect to particular objects can effect astounds me. Surely this discovery must have implications, not only in terms of the material design of the classroom environment and its learning tools, but also for teacher training. The effective engagement of children's minds and productive harnessing of peer group competitiveness cannot be separated from the specific material world with which children are passionately engaged. Mind and materiality are inseparable (Toren 1999) and childhood is situated historically, not just in relation to changing ideas that adults have about children, but also in relation to the kinds of objects that mediate children's interactions with each other.¹⁶¹ Perhaps, therefore, the things children are passionate about outside school could be made use of to increase the likelihood that children are happy, motivated, and therefore more inclined to engage with the highly specific and seemingly abstract requirements of formal learning. I will come back to this point but want to emphasise that, apart from the children's and especially boys' physical resistance to classroom participation (described in chapter two), the material environment of the classroom is itself alienating and out of touch with children's lives. Things have literally moved on for children while the classroom has stayed basically the same for perhaps the last hundred years. This can only increase the probability that the pecking order of physical intimidation and disruption amongst the boys will *not* be transposed into academic competitiveness.

Startled by the dramatic change in my popularity, I promise the boys that I will try to photocopy the drawing at lunchtime, and after I have eaten my lunch I make my way to Eileen's office to ask permission to use the photocopier. I am wary of asking because I worry that she might tell me that it is nothing to do with schoolwork, not 'educational.' Christine's choosing day and my discovery of the significance of *Pokemon* has punctured the seal that formal learning places on children's interests

¹⁶¹ The emphasis on materiality counteracts the tendency of cultural studies to treat the ways people make meaning as ideational systems devoid of an analysis of social relations. Similarly Toren's model should not be confused with a *material culture* approach in which the emphasis on objects is given at the expense of an adequate appreciation of the way that relations between subjects and objects are mutually specifying and historically situated – processes which must be accounted for in analysis.

outside school and it is me now who worries about being perceived by the teachers as disruptive. Outside the office I find a gaggle of boys waiting for me, asking if I have copied the picture yet. I tell them no and knock on Eileen's door. As I go in Ade follows as if he has picked up on my reticence and is checking to make sure I won't let him down. I explain to Eileen that we have done some *Pokemon* drawings and would she mind if we photocopied them. She notices the boys crowding eagerly round the open door, smiles and agrees gladly. At her favourable response the boys rush into the office and crowd around the photocopier. I make twenty-four copies, one for each child in the class. I thank Eileen and the boys and I, filled with excitement, rush back to the classroom together. I feel for the first time the thrill of the camaraderie that competitive access to a difficult peer group grants me. Reaching the classroom and having to settle down again for the register, I begin to appreciate the irksome restraint that the comportment required in the classroom places on other kinds of participation. Exchanging excited glances and gestures, the boys are eager to get their photocopies and find it difficult to concentrate on afternoon registration. Christine, having taken the register and sensing the excitement, allows us to go on drawing in the classroom and boys rush to sit next to me at the table. I give out photocopies to the sea of hands and the girls, seeing that something is being given out, become interested for the first time and take their copies gladly.

Immediately the boys differentiate between the value of the original drawing and the photocopies.¹⁶² The original becomes the hottest property and I give it to Kevin because he let me copy his poster. Christine asks us if we mind moving to the library (adjacent to the classroom) because she needs to get some children she can trust to work in the classroom on the large backdrops for the nativity. She leaves Rochelle in charge in the classroom and joins me to supervise the boys in the library. She is amazed to see how focussed the boys are on colouring in the Pikachu drawing and quietly asks if I mind her leaving me to get on with it while she goes back to the classroom. Astonished myself by the change in the boys' behaviour I agree to be responsible for them for the first time. As we colour Pikachu in, Ade gets frustrated because he looks at my colouring in and can't make his look the

¹⁶² Differentiation between kinds of things and kinds of persons is the fundamental basis of what makes the creation of a complex value system possible. I will come back to this point later in the chapter.

same. My Pikachu is dark yellow, with strong vibrant colour and even tone. His is pale, uneven and dull. He moans and is despondent. I show him how to affect the tone by pressing harder or lighter with the coloured pencil and advise him to work on small areas at a time. He applies himself, manages to make progress and is pleased. But he is also impatient, wants immediate results, makes incessant demands of me even if I am in the middle of helping someone else and shoves children off his chair if he gets up for a second to get to me. When he realises time is running out and other children are finishing before him he starts to panic and gets demoralised. The other boys ignore him and continue to concentrate. The competition amongst them to achieve something and to complete a task happily rather than to disrupt it or to endeavour sulkily not to have to engage with it makes a welcome and significant change.¹⁶³

Eventually Christine comes in and tells the boys it is time for PE and jumping at the chance to play bench ball, which is one of their favourite games, they rush off. Physical freedom and competitive sport take precedence over all other priorities for the disruptive boys.¹⁶⁴ Kevin and Anthony ask if they can stay in the library with me and draw. Christine agrees. They fill me in on everything I need to know about *Pokemon*, what a Nintendo Game Boy is, how much the games cost, when *Pokemon* is on television, where to buy the toys and how to say the characters' names. Some of the girls who had been working on the backdrop in the classroom join us and begin to colour in their Pikachus. Chetana says, "All the girls have taken copies of *Pokemon* even though they don't care about them like boys do." Temi disagrees and says she does care about *Pokemon*. Chetana insists that girls don't care about them like the boys do, "Boys really care about them," she emphasises.¹⁶⁵ Like the

¹⁶³ This is exactly the discrepancy that Bernstein (1977) noticed amongst *working class* men at further education classes. In the classroom where formal learning was supposed to take place the men failed to concentrate, were demoralised, and achieved very little but in practical classes in car mechanics there was no limit to the amount of time they could happily devote to learning. This alerted Bernstein to social class as a variable in the equation that formal education establishes for the under achievement of *working class* boys/men.

¹⁶⁴ This makes it all the more lamentable that sport was relatively under valued and unsupported as part of the school curriculum at Tenter Ground. Again the opportunity to transpose peer group competitiveness into other activities that are equally as relevant to boys as fighting is lost. In general the aggressive competitiveness that top level sportsmanship requires exists in abundance but is not channelled effectively in inner city areas.

¹⁶⁵ Gary and Daniel chastise Anthony and Kevin for their 'childlike' interests and promote their own more grown up preoccupations for adult computer games, which they play on various consoles, Sega, Sony, Dreamcast or Nintendo. These computer games are largely the preoccupation of boys and, whilst some girls do play them, it is not to the same extent or with the same obsession.

capacity for violence and intimidation, a passion for *Pokemon* and computer games differentiates certain types of boys from others and also girls from boys. Gender is therefore constituted on a daily basis out of the perceived preoccupation that boys and girls have with different kinds of bodily competence and object relations. Boys like Anthony who resist the stereotypical preoccupations of tough adult-like boys are said to be more like girls and demeaned for it, whilst girls, like Sally, who can play football and always wears trousers, are said to be Tomboys and admired.¹⁶⁶

After PE, the tranquil time enjoyed by Anthony, Kevin, the girls and I, is shattered as the disruptive boys return and abruptly reclaim their seats. Ade pulls the chair out from under Temi, "Get off my seat man, get off my seat man, I said move!" He shoves her off and since Christine has left the children in my charge I intervene, make sure Temi is ok and tell Ade that what he is doing is dangerous. I ask him to sit down quietly and he does. He gets on with his colouring-in and even though his outburst creates tension and reminds me that the risk of intimidating exchanges between the boys remains constant, it is contained for the moment by their desire to participate in this activity. Because they are impressed with and acknowledge me as the expert in this domain, they have respect and do not attempt to challenge my authority. The sphere of competition between them centres in this moment on the ability to colour-in properly. Gary's colouring-in is the best; it is neat, vibrant and carefully done so he is pleased with himself and begins to show off but also to encourage the others.¹⁶⁷ Meanwhile the boys' focus proves to me that they are capable of composure and application to a task when it suits them. I begin to appreciate that apart from the constraints that classroom comportment imposes on

Computer games manufacturers continue to struggle to design a game that will bring girls, as consumers, into the games market. Martin shows me at school one day a very sore blister on his thumb. I ask how he did it, and he tells me it is from playing on his Sony Play Station. He must have been playing for hours to get such a sore blister. Recent research has shown that the first anatomical adaptation to computer technology has been observed in young people who are now using their thumb as the primary digit as a result of hand held games which require finely tuned thumb control.

¹⁶⁶ By the end of the school year Gary and Sally are going out with each other.

¹⁶⁷ I didn't find out until I visited Tom at home that he was colouring-in his pictures. He kept his folder at home and coloured them in using pens his mother had bought for him especially. His care and attention to the colouring-in was amazing. The drawings were beautifully coloured-in and he said, when Anne had asked him to show me his folder that he kept his folder at home because he didn't want the drawings to get ruined at school. Unfortunately the focus on bringing remedial numeracy and literacy skills up to or at least close to the average expected for each year group means that in schools like Tenter Ground art, sport and other subjects that children like Tom might flourish in are under developed. For boys like Tom and Gary who are obviously capable and confident in basic art techniques, art is a valuable subject, in which they could excel, improve their

children's bodily actions, the tasks they are forced to do often give them little pleasure. They are alienated therefore from what being in the classroom comes to imply, which is tedious work. Their resistance becomes comprehensible.

Part of the solution to the problem of boys' alienation from school work must be to find a way of making such work more appealing, and perhaps this could be achieved in part by redesigning the classroom environment. What is needed is a classroom, which in its material design can accommodate the kinds of preoccupations boys like Gary, Tom and the others have outside school. Their passion for vivid graphics, cartoon heroes and computer games technology could surely be made use of in the classrooms of the future. Boring and outmoded instruments of literacy and numeracy – desks, books, pens and pencils – might be updated to account in their design for the things that children are passionately involved with in their lives outside school. The first challenge is to enthuse children about formal learning and to achieve this it seems short-sighted not to make use of the things that children are already enthusiastic about. Computer technology and graphic design point us in the right direction. Why not make use of boys' obsessions and at the same time begin to incorporate information technology skills into the means for accessing numeracy and literacy skills and thereby provide children with the opportunity to acquire competence that is highly valued in the employment marketplace?¹⁶⁸

self-esteem and regard for formal learning in subjects other than numeracy and literacy, but art remains relatively unexplored.

¹⁶⁸ During this period of fieldwork an engineer from Dell Computer Corporation comes to repair the CD-ROM drive in my computer. He is amused and surprised to see *Pokemon* figurines; Pikachu, Raichu, Meowth and other icons of the *Pokemon* world occupying pride of place on top of my computer monitor. I explain to him that I am doing research with nine, ten and eleven-year-old children in a local primary school and that's how I came to know about *Pokemon*. He laughs and says his younger brothers, aged nine and eleven, collect *Pokemon* and they go crazy for them. I ask him (a young *Asian* man in his mid-twenties) how he came to work with computers. He tells me that he got kicked out of school when he was thirteen because he was messing about, "Swearing at teachers and stuff." He tells me he used to collect Nintendo Gameboys, that he had all of them and the games in their sequence of development. He used to spend his time taking the Gameboys apart and putting them back together and then he started on computers. Eventually he went on a computer course for three years. He tells me that he never worked hard for anything in his life before, but he worked really hard on this course and, he says, "Now look where I am – from nobody to somebody."

From nobody to somebody – just like the transformation of my popularity in the classroom. How does that transformation in self value happen? I would argue that it happens because of a transformation of competence with respect to a specified form of materiality. Specificity is important because it holds the key to social significance. The guy from Dell couldn't get on at school, but he could get on with computers. The problem is that often, boys' specific social and material engagement operates at odds with, or at least in parallel to, the idea of the child that is

As we colour in, concentrating happily, I begin to realise what Christine knows already: that to judge the boys on the basis of their brooding, sulky dispositions in the classroom would be to misrepresent them. Their personalities, suppressed during formal learning and in order to meet the requirements of classroom participation, emerge all of a sudden, not gradually but in a single transforming moment of significance. This moment is the point at which the bind of formal learning is removed in order to allow the terms of participation, for me and the boys, to change dramatically and in this case quite by accident. Their eager happy faces make all the difference. Nathaniel takes photocopies for Victor who is off school today and says, "Victor is not going to believe it when he comes back."

On my way home that afternoon I drive to Toys R Us as Anthony advised me to do and I search for *Pokemon* merchandise. I have no idea what to look for and ask an assistant who points out the display to me. With great excitement I begin to familiarise myself with the characters, choose a pack of trading cards and some *Pokemon* figures to buy. From there I pick up my two daughters aged nine and six from their school and introduce to them the new characters that I have learned about from the boys at school today.

Pokemon Club

After Christmas the emphasis on formal learning is firmly established again. With the prospect of SATs tests looming Christine is determined to deliver as much of the curriculum as she can manage. All the year six children voluntarily attend the booster club after school that she and Eileen organise to give them extra assistance. During the usual school day, however, the disruptive behaviour of particular boys continues to thwart Christine's best intentions. Without the freedom to choose what we do, and with the constraints of task based work, my participation in the classroom reverts to a balancing act between observation and assistance as children who now know me better are eager for me to help them with their work. At the same time this school term is different because now the children know that I am

substantiated in didactic practice. Until the reality that boys like these live is recognised, they will continue to resist the kind of participation that being in the classroom requires of them. The disruption to formal learning that this resistance creates wastes everyone's time and functions only to enhance the pecking order of intimidation those disruptive boys dare each other to enjoy.

capable of much more than observation and note taking. Whilst we work they struggle to make surreptitious conversation with me, want to find out if I have done any more *Pokemon* drawings and if so which ones. During numeracy Anthony lifts up his school jumper to show Kevin and I his new possession, a *Pikachu Tamagotchi*,¹⁶⁹ and the way he has it tucked away out of sight symbolises for me the way in which children must keep their own interests concealed beneath the uniformity of school requirements. Like the *Tamagotchi*, which is hidden away, the specific participation the children now require of me threatens to disrupt their concentration on formal learning tasks. Not wanting to jeopardise Christine's efforts I am careful therefore not to encourage *Pokemon* discussion in the classroom. I know now about the significance to children of specific objects and experiences from outside school and am mindful of their capacity to accommodate expectations that simultaneously exert different influences in their lives. They must make sense of the kind of participation adults expect of them at home, of how that differs from school and also of how this exists in parallel to what they as children expect from each other. Childhood is not a simple matter.¹⁷⁰

The only free time I have to continue with *Pokemon* drawings is in the playground where I bring out my pad in the shelter of the open shed. Each day a large gathering of about thirty children of all ages crowds round to watch me draw. Classroom assistants who supervise playtime look on curiously. Disruptive boys who are preoccupied with football send emissaries over every now and again to find out which *Pokemon* character I am drawing.¹⁷¹ If it is a *Pokemon* they are particularly

¹⁶⁹ Tamagotchis were a craze for children in the late 1990s. They are little, hand-held, Japanese made electronic pets that must be fed and looked after in various ways otherwise they fade and die.

¹⁷⁰ For a comparison between this and other historical and sociological work that investigates the historical specificity of childhood see, for example, James A. 1997 (ed.), 1998 and deMause L. (1976). For a review of the emerging field of the anthropology of childhood see Evans G. and McLoughlin R. (2001)

¹⁷¹ Football takes the highest priority in the disruptive boys' choice of what to do with their time. They are extremely competitive about football and the rivalry between them often provokes violent altercations that spill into and disrupt classroom interactions. There are two captains who are the best two players and each chooses their team each day. Their play is tough and unprincipled without a referee. The home school liaison officer who organises the school team attempts to organise and coach the boys but is frustrated by the lack of management support and by the boys' inability to work as a team and to overcome individual competitiveness and aggressive tendencies. When he attempts to prepare them for the inter-school football league and to enter for some matches the boys' efforts are continuously thwarted by the antagonism between them. The coach decides that it is not worth them entering the league until they can sort out the necessary social skills for team playing. He wants them to learn that individual competition while necessary can, if unchecked, thwart team effectiveness.

interested in, they rush over, pushing and shoving through the crowd to have a look and heap praise upon me. In this way I begin to understand which *Pokemon* they value above others and realise that the aggressive fighting potential of individual *Pokemon* is what makes a difference to the boys. What makes *Pokemon* attractive to them is the fact that they do battle against each other under the supervision of teenage humans called *Pokemon* trainers. Each television cartoon episode features the trials of a group of *Pokemon* trainers led by trainer Ash¹⁷², against the rival challenges of other trainers who specialise in various *Pokemon* specific to different natural elements and environments. Ash first became a *Pokemon* trainer when he was ten years old. His worst enemies are trainers who steal *Pokemon*, in particular Jessie and James from Team Rocket whose mission it is to try and defeat Ash and his friends, Misty, Gary and Brock and steal their *Pokemon*, especially Pikachu.

In time I learn that there are one hundred and fifty *Pokemon* in total, each of which is from one of fourteen categories: fighting, fire, water, grass, electric, water, psychic, rock, poison, bug, flying, ice, ghost, ground, normal and dragon. Each *Pokemon* has a series of moves it makes when it is doing battle against other *Pokemon* and a level of effectiveness overall which is described as a *Pokemon's* damage potential or hit point. It is this that the boys are interested in when they look at my drawings; they want to know whether it is an effective fighting *Pokemon* with deadly battle moves that inflict maximum damage. I appreciate then the significance of *Pokemon* to the disruptive boys and boys in general – *Pokemon* and *Pokemon* battles symbolise perfectly the conflict in which boys compete, amongst themselves, to establish a hierarchy of fraternity. The other *Pokemon*, those not effective at fighting, are less interesting to the disruptive boys except for the sake of completing their collection of drawings, which they now all aspire to. The girls, in contrast, are more interested in the *Pokemon* that look cute or pretty. I try therefore to tailor the drawings I produce to meet various demands and in this way learn what significance *Pokemon* have for the children.

Because the drawings become a regular and prolific production I am reluctant to photocopy them at school and resort to spending my own money on copying them in my own time. At this point I realise the transformative potential for fieldwork

¹⁷² See drawing no. 2. P. 112

relations of learning what constitutes significant gift exchange.¹⁷³ The photocopies are highly valued. All the Year Five/Six children want them and are distressed if they miss school on a day when I am giving drawings out.¹⁷⁴ When new photocopies are ready I distribute them in the children's trays in the classroom and each time it causes a furore that Christine tolerates. She teases me, saying, "If only the children responded like that when they were given examination papers." She supports my efforts because she is glad the boys are being given the opportunity to engage in something, which makes them feel special, and which also quells their disruptive antics during free time in the classroom.¹⁷⁵ Christine is not resentful of the boys' enthusiasm for *Pokemon* because she values, as a reward in itself, the evidence of their enthusiasm for an activity that requires tranquil, quiet concentration. In return for my gifts of *Pokemon* drawings my participation in the children's peer groups is welcomed and guaranteed. To consolidate this development I ask Christine if I can start a *Pokemon* club for the class one lunchtime a week and she agrees. I buy each child a ring binder with plastic sheaths for each drawing and with much excitement and anticipation we begin to build up our collection of *Pokemon* characters, familiarising ourselves with their names, colours and characteristics using an official guidebook.¹⁷⁶ I buy two Nintendo Game boys and *Pokemon* games for the club, which the children take it in turns to use.

Game Boy and Games Boys Play

At home meanwhile I play the Nintendo *Pokemon* Game Boy games so that I can take effective part in the dialogues boys have about their relative progress and strategies. There are two versions of the game, Red and Blue. At first I struggle because I find the medium of hand held gaming difficult to get used to because of the small screen and tiny black and white graphics. Getting the hang of the game

¹⁷³ Whilst ethnographies are replete with descriptions of the kinds of exchanges people being studied make it is rare to gain an understanding of how fieldwork as a particular kind of endeavour is made possible and transforms over time as a result of participation in specific exchange relationships.

¹⁷⁴ All the children in the school wanted to have the drawings but I had to restrict my gift giving to Year Five/Six because that is the class where I was doing fieldwork. The cost of copying the drawings for all the children in the school would have been prohibitive. My reputation with the other children in the school was nevertheless established as they saw for themselves in the playground what I was capable of when I took my drawing pad outside. The younger children complained loudly about not being part of the exchanges I was making with Year Five/Six.

¹⁷⁵ When there was an opportunity for free time in the classroom the boys and indeed most of the children would dash to their trays to take out their *Pokemon* drawings to colour in. I bought a giant set of felt tip pens that were reserved in the classroom for this specific activity.

¹⁷⁶ The book we used was *The Official Pokemon Handbook* (Barbo S. 1999)

strategy with the help of the *Nintendo Pokemon* magazine, I begin to experience the obsessive pleasure of



Figure 4. Nintendo Game Boy (Colour version) (All Pokemon products are produced under licence to Nintendo Ltd and images reproduced here are with the permission of Cake Media)

interactive computer gaming and devote hours to competing against myself to try and complete the challenge that the game sets. The challenge in this case involves taking the part of a *Pokemon* trainer, choosing a starter *Pokemon* who will battle on your behalf and using it to do battle against and catch wild *Pokemon*. *Pokemon* are caught inside Poke balls, like the ones that Anthony and Kevin had tried to describe to me before. As I make progress through the game I meet and battle against other trainers and their tame *Pokemon*. The journey is organised into various towns, cities and routes and along the way many out of the total 150 *Pokemon* are encountered. Each *Pokemon* that I have on my team begins with very little fighting power and as it gains more experience in fighting its strength increases. Only with increased strength can I take on and defeat the stronger *Pokemon* that are met at more difficult stages in the game. It is impossible to catch all 150 *Pokemon* on one game so the

Pokemon that are missing from the red version, for example, can only be caught in the blue. This means that eventually I need to connect up to a friend's Game Boy to swap and thereby help each other to collect the ones that each of us needs for the whole set. At the same time, once connected, I can do battle with my strongest *Pokemon* against my friends and daughters to test which of us has trained their *Pokemon* most effectively. Martin and I engage in animated conversations about the challenges we have met when playing our *Pokemon* games and discuss the finer points of fighting experiences, comparing the stages we have reached. He tells me of the cheats he has learned of through friends. These are not revealed either in the game or in the game guide book and are usually posted on game-users' Internet web sites. The availability of cheats subverts the game makers' desire to make the game's challenges difficult to achieve.

Gary meanwhile continues to differentiate his interest in my *Pokemon* drawings from what he sees as Anthony's childish obsession with *Pokemon* in general. He is keen as always to distinguish between the kind of boy he is - a tough boy who plays football and grown up computer games, - from what he believes Anthony and Kevin to be, soft boys who like cartoons and dinosaurs. The differences between the children's peer groups, which are fluid and in a constant state of formation and therefore open to change, are given by the kinds of bodily competence and object relations they are engaged in. The similarities between children within one friendship group are emphasised in relation to the different preoccupations of other children in other groups. Whilst Gary emphasises toughness, computer game competence and knowledge of adult and specifically male concerns in his peer group, he excludes babyish, child-like, weak, soft, girl-like, cartoon and dinosaur loving boys like Anthony. Anthony, who has no desire to be like Gary, or to be part of his group, effectively tolerates and ignores Gary's aggressive character assassination. Anthony's persistent affirmation of the kind of things he is preoccupied with and the world he enjoys is an effective form of resistance. He appears to be submissive to Gary's antagonising antics but he is not. Anthony's preoccupations are just very different and not seeking to be a contender in Gary's

pecking order of toughness, they rarely come to blows. Each is the antithesis to the other of what being a ten-year-old boy means.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Popularity and friendship imply both commonality and conflict. Gary's friends have things in common like being tough and playing grown up computer games but they are also competing within this concern that they share for toughness or computer gaming to be the toughest and the best. They compete against each other, but only within the parameters of their shared preoccupation. Their friendship is predicated on this shared but finely differentiated mastery of a specific form of bodily competence – fighting or computer gaming for example. Their ability to balance commonality and conflict determines the extent to which they can remain friends, continue competing against each other and not fall out irrevocably over fights that have gone too far. Those boys, like Anthony, who have no interest in this form of competition are excluded completely from Gary's friendship group unless there is another form of competence that Anthony can participate in, like football for example. This is not the case for Anthony; he never plays football at school.

Friendship is seen therefore to be a continuous inter-subjective exchange in which each child makes sense of his/her position in a group, which is defined by particular kinds of bodily competence in relation to objects of specific significance. Children in friendship groups denote their own domain of participation by virtue of who can compete within, and who is excluded from entering, specific spheres of exchange. Children within a friendship group have things in common but they also compete against each other for influence within the group. Conflict and commonality are therefore different aspects of the same structuring process in which everyday, hour by hour, a child makes sense of which kind of person he/she is in relation to others. At the same time the boundaries of the group are continuously negotiated on the basis of who is excluded from participation. These boundaries can be quite fluid and open or ruthlessly defended and breached only by physical assertion as when a new boy proves himself a good fighter for example.

Merleau-Ponty defines embodied mind in terms of the statement – *I am because we can* – but I would argue, based on my observations of children, that inter-subjectivity is better defined by the statement – *I am because we can and you can't*. This description contradicts Merleau-Ponty's idyllic notion of childhood and incorporates the centrality of conflict. Merleau-Ponty posits an undifferentiated inter-subjectivity as the primary state of consciousness typified by the state of 'peaceful co-existence' in childhood (1962 P.355). It is in relation to this primary state of inter-subjectivity, that the idea of the person as an individual must necessarily be explained as a continuous, active project of self-differentiation and abstraction. The problem of other minds and the very idea of solipsism, represent, for Merleau-Ponty, a failure to recognise the experiences of commonality that are presupposed by the problem. There is the necessity he argues to consider the temporal development of consciousness that moves from the social to the personal and from the pre-reflective to the reflective. According to Piaget (1968), however, the time of undifferentiated consciousness lasts less than a year. Bodily oriented action schemes are continuously differentiated though functioning and this leads eventually to a nascent awareness of self as the source of co-ordinated efforts. Between the ages of roughly one and two years, consciousness is thereafter radically transformed by the possibilities of semiotic functions and representative intelligence. If the time of undifferentiated consciousness is only at most the first year of the child's life it is important to ask what Merleau-Ponty means when he speaks in general of 'the child'. Subsequently the idea of commonality that resides in that notion of childhood must be interrogated. (I gave a version of this argument in a paper at a conference organised by the department of Sociology at Brunel University. The conference theme was 'Sociality/Materiality: The Status of the Object in the Social Sciences.') In relation to all the ethnographic data that I have gathered about children from as young as three to eleven, childhood cannot accurately be described as a time of 'peaceful co-existence.' On the contrary, from a very young age, conflict between children is central and it is central in surprising ways because conflict is not necessarily oppressive. The centrality of conflict makes it impossible, from a phenomenological point of view, not to consider Sartre's idea of the 'the look' (Sartre 1969). For Sartre the certainty that others exist is derived not from an undifferentiated inter-subjectivity but from the phenomenon of conflict. Inter-subjectivity is given by the realisation that the gaze one directs on the other as an object among other objects in the world is directed back upon oneself. This implies that one is oneself the object of the gaze of the other which confers upon the other an undeniable subjectivity. What follows is a dynamic and continuous conflict. One must defend oneself against objectification and preserve one's subjectivity by asserting the objectification of the other. Experience of self at any point in time is always mediated therefore by the idea that the other has of who you are. Being cannot therefore ever be entirely for itself because being for the other is the constant horizon of the subject's structural possibility.

As I am increasingly incorporated into the various boys' friendship groups, Gary constantly tests my allegiances. During numeracy, one day in January, Anthony and Kevin are chatting about *Pokemon* cartoon episodes they have been watching on television this week. Gary turns to Anthony and says provocatively, "*Pokemon* is all rubbish." Then he turns to me and asks; "Do you watch *Pokemon* now?" I tell him that I watched it on Saturday morning. Anthony and Kevin chip in cheerfully confirming that they watched it too. Gary turns on them again; "You's lot have got an obsession with *Pokemon*." Ignoring him Kevin declares triumphantly that he's completed question number five of the numeracy task. Gary meanwhile is still on number two. Watching Kevin work now, he accuses Anthony of copying, "Hey, don't start copying his work." Ten minutes later Kevin has progressed through question number six whilst Gary continues to distract himself from number two. It is Gary's failure to make progress in classroom work that gives boys like Kevin, who want to do well, the confidence to ignore and make little of Gary's assaults on their integrity. Kevin knows what it means to do well at school and is ambitious in

Merleau-Ponty argues that Sartre's 'look' is a reflective one and that therefore Sartre pays inadequate attention to the pre-reflective, embodied and situated development of consciousness. It is the commonality of embodiment that for Merleau-Ponty makes it impossible to posit the other as an object. The objectification of the other can only be the product of the transcendence, which is characterised by the achievement of a reflective consciousness. The problem, I would argue, is that Merleau-Ponty mistakes commonality for peaceful co-existence. What subjects share in common is mind as an embodied and situated structure, but as Piaget (1972) emphasises, the structure of mind is constantly differentiated through bodily functioning in practice. It can only make sense to argue therefore that, after the first year of infancy, the commonality subjects experience rests on the understanding that we are only all the same in so far as we must of necessity differentiate ourselves and it is this that leads to conflict.

The discrepancy between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty on inter-subjectivity can be reconciled therefore by stressing the situated character of the subject. The 'look' is not reflective; it is embodied, and therefore inter-subjective and always mediated in relation to objects of specific significance. Self-differentiation is the result of the comparison of bodily competence, which results when two people engage with the same object. A shared or finely differentiated mastery in relation to this object is what friendship is predicated on such that conflict, or more precisely differentiation, can be rendered a seductive and not necessarily an oppressive experience. Friendship becomes a form of competitive equality between Gary and his cohorts, for example, whilst those who are not his friends suffer or resist the competitive exclusion he practices. The differentiation which a comparison of bodily competence in relation to objects entails is never therefore quite a 'look' in the sense that the other is objectified, it is a 'look' in the sense of a seductive apperception:

'Round about the perceived body a vortex forms, towards which my world is drawn and so to speak, sucked in: to this extent it is no longer mine, and no longer merely present, it is present to that other manifestation of behaviour which begins to take shape in it. Already the other body has ceased to be a mere fragment of the world, and become the theatre of a certain process of elaboration, and as it were, a certain 'view' of the world. There is taking place over there a certain manipulation of things hitherto my property. Someone is making use of my familiar objects. But who can it be? I say that it is another, a second self, and this I know in the first place because this living body has the same structure as mine.'(Merleau-Ponty 1962 P354)

this respect. He can afford to be dismissive and passively resistant to Gary's onslaught.

When Kevin finishes the numeracy task sheet he goes to Christine who gives him another one to begin. Gary persists with his attack, asking Anthony, "Why do you always talk about *Pokemon*?" I intervene and calmly turn the inquisition on Gary, "What are you into Gary?" He responds emphatically, "Football. I do like *Pokemon* but I don't like it when people talk about it all the time." Kevin retorts proudly, "I love *Pokemon*." Daniel replies, addressing Gary as he puts Kevin and Anthony down, "They might be talking about *Pokemon* when they're old men." Gary laughs and says, "Yeah." Mimicking an old man's croak, he imagines Anthony reminiscing in the future, "I remember Pikachu." Daniel mocks Kevin asking, "Which football team do you support? *Pokemon FC*?" Expertly ignoring Daniel's antagonising jibes, Kevin continues to concentrate on his work.

Participation and Practice

Week by week, drawing by drawing, my relationship with all the children becomes more familiar as they continue to value what it is that they know I can do. Growing intimacy is expressed in increasingly amicable greeting behaviour; children are pleased to see me, girls run up and hug me and boys, still physically reluctant, ask eagerly about my latest *Pokemon* production. Children want me to sit at their table during numeracy and literacy and my popularity impinges directly on the likelihood that they will seek my assistance with their schoolwork. I realise that a person who is significant to the children and who understands the significance of the things that children are passionate about is more likely to be able to persuade them that doing well in class is also valuable.¹⁷⁸ Gary, for example, now more willingly accepts my

¹⁷⁸ Because the value of persons and things is mutually specified a person who is valued because of the things she can do, drawing *Pokemon*, for example, can also lend weight to other things that she does, like concentrating on school work. Presumably this is the way that mentoring schemes operate in the classroom where children who are marginalised from formal learning are paired with older, more experienced but socially significant persons. Christine wishes that the boys in her class had more contact, for example, with men from the local *community*, who understand their preoccupations and can therefore relate to them and convince of the opportunity that school work presents. She contrasts this kind of intervention with what she perceives as the presence of 'wet white men' – middle-class-white-male-professional-men who think they know what is best for *working class* boys – *black* or *white*. She tells me in exasperation about the time when one of these 'wet-white-men' was assigned to Winston as a behaviour support measure. It was hopeless she said because it was obvious right from the beginning that Winston had no respect for this man and ran rings around him to test his authority. Unfortunately Winston's record was then marred by the

attempts to help him engage with a task. When he applies himself to and completes a literacy task with me, he constantly compares himself negatively with the application and abilities of the others on his literacy table. Nevertheless he is pleased and proud of the praise that Christine gives him when he goes eagerly to show her what he has managed to do. Satisfied, he comes back smiling, "She said it was lovely work."

Nathaniel, wanting to know more about me and make sense of what I do, watches me make notes in class one day, and asks me if I am an inspector. Horrified at this perception and doing my best to assure him that I am not an inspector, I try to explain to him what a researcher is, emphasising that I am interested in how children learn so I have to write the things that children do down. Ade says, "Is it the school that told you to write everything down?" Trying to reassure him, I tell him that everything I write down is just for me, not for the school to see and all the children's names will be changed. He replies, "I thought the school gave you a job to be like an inspector and write things down." "No," I say. "I have come to the school from university where I am doing a project about children." He seems satisfied and Daniel, making a useful analogy, goes on to tell us about his older sister who is at college, asking if that is a bit like university which I realise must seem like an abstract and unfamiliar place to the children.

As time goes on and I become more popular with the children they endeavour to learn more about me. They take an interest in my personal life and want to know what I do, where I live, if I've got children of my own, which football team I support and many other questions about my life including where I come from.¹⁷⁹

damaging assessments about his behaviour that the professional, 'who knows how children are supposed to behave' has the power to make.

¹⁷⁹ This question, "Where do you come from?" is routinely asked of new children in the class. It also takes the form more commonly of, "Which country do you come from?" The girls who first asked me the question then happily told me where they came from, citing Jamaica and Bangladesh. The question and its answer, places a new person in terms of the variety of countries that children are familiar with. In this sense it is initially a question about national origin and kinship relations because nationality is decided by birth and/or parents' country of origin. For example, I overheard the following discussion between children about a new boy's nationality. The girls, who are children of West African parents, ask the boy, who is *black*, where he comes from. He can't decide whether he comes from London or Nigeria because he was born in London. The girls tell him that he must be Nigerian because isn't his Dad Nigerian? The boy accepts that yes his Dad is Nigerian but doesn't being born in London make a difference? But the girls, adamant that he comes from Nigeria, disregard place of birth in this instance. For children national origins are derived partly from parents' origins.

During Pokemon club, whilst we are concentrating on our colouring-in, children spontaneously volunteer information about their own personal lives, their loves and hates, stories about family life and the struggles they face with siblings and parents, for example. Gary asks me if I go to the pub and tells me about his cousins who own a pub on the Old Kent Road where his Dad takes him to play pool and darts. Hafiza says, in contrast, that she always has to baby sit for all her brothers and sisters. I ask her if she likes it and she retorts, “No, I hate it because they are always crying and being annoying and they never do as I tell them.” Temi tells us that she hates the school holidays because her mum and dad won’t let her and her brother watch television because they say they have to read books instead. Relaxed and preoccupied with a pleasing activity, children are at ease enough with me to compare their experiences in the different kinds of families they know they live in and seek to know more about mine.

Meanwhile children constantly seek my attention about their colouring-in, looking for praise, encouragement and advice about techniques. When Obi struggles, Hafiza assists him and, encouraged by her own efforts, she is the first to attempt to draw a Pokemon character of her own. It is a really good effort and we all praise her. I tell her that learning to draw, just like everything else in life, is just a question of practice. Gary responds, “Yeah, I can’t ask Gillian to play football for me. She can’t. I’ve got to do it myself if I want to get any better.” Encouraged, all the children then feel confident enough to have a go at drawing for themselves and no one laughs at each other’s efforts. It is a rare moment of co-operation and calm. Ade comes over from another table and disrupts our tranquil activity by suddenly reaching brusquely across us, frantically snatching pens. Gary instantly and mercilessly deals with him, “Go away Ade, you haven’t even got any good

When Obi is new to the class Martin tries to guess ‘where he comes from’ and tries various countries before Obi tells him he comes from South America. Martin knows that they speak Spanish in South America and ask Obi if he speaks Spanish. Obi confesses that he comes from Nigeria. Apart from the initial placement that this questioning is concerned with I witnessed no preoccupation amongst the children for the difference that *ethnicity* might make. *Ethnicity* was nowhere near so important to their relations with one another as other categories of difference, for example, gender or whether or not a boy has computer games consoles at home, or can play football. After gender differences, what a child looks like, in terms of skin colour, for example, is not nearly so important to children as what a child can do, in terms of bodily praxis and what objects s/he commands.

In chapter four part II I explore in detail the methodological strategies I used to investigate the categories children use to describe differences in physical appearance. This chapter includes an

computer games.” (Meaning at his house) Ade retaliates, saying, “I have so, I’ve got Nintendo 64,” and Gary replies under his breath, “Shame.” Danny tells him that at his house he’s got Dreamcast and the Internet and Ade, frustrated and humiliated, makes a vain attempt to posture as though he is ready to fight, but quickly retreats when Gary stands up. He knows from experience that Gary is the better fighter.

Football

Out of the blue Habib declares in class one day, “I like you Gillian. You can draw Pokemon. Will you be here forever?” Attempting to incorporate me into the wider world of what holds significance for him, he asks me which football team I support. Not wanting to appear naïve in this respect, which I am, I hastily reply, “Liverpool.” He is a big Manchester United fan so he tries to engage me in playful rivalry about who the good players are, which games have been won and lost and which is the better team. At a loss, with little to contribute to the conversation I resolve to watch the football on the television at the weekend. For the first time in my life, and much to my partner’s surprise, (he is a football fanatic), I begin to engage with the reasons for boys’ passion for football. At lunch play Habib asks me to play football with him and the other boys. He looks at me, his face full of anticipation, but terrified of failing miserably and jeopardising the respect I have worked so hard to earn, I postpone the challenge telling him that I will play next week.¹⁸⁰ Significant as Pokemon are, I realise that there is no object quite so important to most of the boys as a football.¹⁸¹ What’s fascinating about it is that as a medium of exchange it requires a highly specific bodily competence. It is this that fills me with trepidation. When I sit down to watch the boys play football, trying to make sense of the rules, some younger girls run over to sit down next to me and complain that it’s not fair because boys don’t let girls play football. Two of the older girls from Year Five/Six sit down at the back and giggle about which boys they fancy. The contrast is not lost on me that whilst boys are completely preoccupied with football some of the girls begin to be engrossed with boys.

analysis of the developing relationship between categories of difference, such as gender, *race*, *culture*, religion and country of origin for example.

¹⁸⁰ I am athletic and supple but the specific ball skills that football requires are daunting to me.

¹⁸¹ Not all the boys play football as I have already indicated, but the majority of them did. One girl, Sally, also played occasionally because she was skilled as a result of playing football with her older brothers.

By the time next week arrives morning play has been suspended for Year Five/Six children. The boys' violence at playtime is causing so much disruption to other children and staff that letters have been sent home to the boys' parents. The letter from Mara reads as follows:

"Parents of all boys in Year Five/Six.

Dear Parents

I have been very concerned lately about the great amount of violent behaviour on the part of boys in this class. Several boys have had short exclusions recently for hurting other children. We have not changed playtimes so that boys in Year Five/Six have more opportunities for physical activities, but bad behaviour at lunchtime is continuing to be a problem. I have now decided that if these older boys, who should be giving a good example to the younger ones, cannot behave in a civilised fashion at lunchtime, we have no alternative but to ask you to have them at home at lunchtime. Please talk to your son about the seriousness of this."

So the children don't get to go outside to play in the playground with the other children in the morning anymore and lunchtime play remains a problem because conflicts begun between the boys then spill over and continue to disrupt classroom activities. To compensate for missed play in the morning Year Five/Six get to go outside on their own in the afternoon where their isolation from the other children in the school makes them more manageable and Christine, rather than a classroom assistant, supervises their play. The majority of the boys take advantage of this time to play football. Without interruptions from younger boys in the school, who always want to join in the football game and risk being bullied off the pitch, a more focussed game can now ensue. Christine cannot stand football but she appreciates how important it is to the boys and wishes they could manage to play a game without it descending into conflict. Today Sally and I stand by the side of the pitch and wonder what to do, thinking we might play running races. The boys who are choosing their teams want to play five-a-side football but are short of two boys and so they hail Sally and I out, urging us to join in. I look at Sally with some trepidation, but she is keen so we agree to make up the numbers. As soon as that is decided the game begins and the ball is moving quickly from one boy to another down the length of the pitch. I don't even know who is on my team or which way

my team is shooting and I shout to Nathaniel for instructions. Eventually I work out that Nathaniel, Gary, Mark, Daniel, Habib and Winston are on my team versus Victor, Ade, Richard, Amal and Sally on Tom's team. Two minutes into the game the ball comes my way, moving fast through the air for what could be a perfect header. I am scared, but having just watched Tom execute a perfect header himself, I just try to do the same thing and miraculously pull it off, passing the ball down the pitch. Tom, so surprised to see me head the ball successfully, laughs out loud, and even though he's on the opposite team comes running over heaping praises on me. I am laughing too and so is Sally who also runs over to congratulate me, telling me how much she hates headers.

The game continues and our team is being demolished largely as a result of the brilliance of Victor's, (on the opposing team), considerable talents. Sally begins to moan that the boys on her team won't pass to her and suddenly the ball is coming my way again and I'm close to the goal. I take my chance and before I know what has happened, kicking the ball as hard as I can, I score. Tom comes running over again with his hand raised high in the air for a high-five hand slap. Delighted with me, he affirms, "Nice one Gillian!" Now that I have proved myself capable, Winston begins to pass the ball down to me regularly but I am hopeless at tackling the other players so I stay near the goal with Gary up front. We make a good partnership, setting up goals once other more capable boys have won possession, and we score two more goals between us. Once the game is over, the children are thrilled with my attempts and I haven't had so much fun in years – I feel elated. No wonder boys love football so much. Not to underestimate the seriousness with which they boys take football, I observe Gary and Tom arguing all the way up the stairs about the victory of Gary's team. Tom, proud and not to be outdone, refuses to acknowledge that Gary's team is the better side. Christine asks them to leave the conflict outside and threatens to suspend afternoon football if they don't desist. Sweating and dehydrated, filled with excitement, it is difficult for us to settle down to being in the classroom and begin work. All afternoon Gary surreptitiously takes the opportunity to wind Tom up about the defeat of his team.

Despite the new and exciting opening that *Pokemon* presents, football is an enduring preoccupation of the boys that lasts usually into manhood either as a sport

or as entertainment and is the source of a multi-billion pound industry. It is just another example of the kind of material preoccupation that many boys have which engages all of their passions but is antithetical to the kind of participation that is required of them in the classroom.¹⁸² To play, each of the boys must have in common a basic level of bodily competence with respect to the significant object – the ball. Bodily competence is expressed in fast moving, aggressive, energetic interaction with and against other players and in relation to the object that also moves fast. Boys must move, reach out for and master the ball using highly specific bodily skills and in order to win the game they must do this all together as a team. At the same time each boy competes against his team-mates to be of an equal standard and to win enough influence among them to be continuously voted their captain. Within the team there is therefore a constant struggle for competitive equality. At the same time the boys are, or should be, united in their conflict with the other team aiming to exclude the opposition from mastering the ball and scoring goals. Football is a rough physical game perfect for boys whose social life is oriented around a pecking order of toughness and violent intimidation. Like Pokemon, only more so because the battle between them is acted out in the most physical of fashions, the game of football symbolises the struggle between boys to constitute amongst themselves a hierarchy of fraternity.¹⁸³ Tough boys who master adequate ball skills do well. Boys who can run fast excel also. In general girls and *soft boys* are not tough enough to play football and find other things to do at playtime but may enjoy the thrill of watching the boys who do play it.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² As a game football symbolises perfectly both mind as an embodied phenomenon mediated by object relations and inter-subjectivity in which commonality and conflict are aspects of the same structuring process. No wonder it is called ‘the beautiful game’ and no wonder girls and women have traditionally hated it. Their gendered difference has largely been constituted at school out of the specific bodily competence - physical toughness and ball control – that boys claim to master exclusively. It is no surprise that with changing gender relations generally, girls are increasingly doing things that were typically associated with boys’ behaviour. Girls are more likely now to play football – witness the recent film, *Bend It Like Beckham* – and the female prison population among juveniles is at its highest ever level and rising. In my daughters’ school at the time of my fieldwork, the head teacher was facing for the first time in her career the growing problem of tough girls bullying soft boys.

¹⁸³ I am not trying to suggest that the inter-subjective processes I describe pertain only to boys’ peer group formation. Commonality and conflict are aspects of the same process in which the self is structured in relation to others, mediated by particular objects of specific significance, as much for girls and soft boys as tough boys. It is only, as I explained before, that peer group formation as an ongoing process occurs in relation to particular spheres of exchange (bodily competence, linguistic and object) between children. In this and the preceding chapter I have focussed on disruptive boys because they dominate social relations in the classroom and pose the greatest problem to teachers.

¹⁸⁴ Women’s football leagues are common now and in America there is a professional league. Whilst *Asian* boys in Tenter Ground are avid football supporters and a few of them play on the Year Five/Six team they lament the fact that no *Asian* player has yet been signed to play in a Premiership

The world of football sets an example to tough boys that the qualities they admire in each other, which are anathema to those necessary for being 'good' at school, are valuable elsewhere. Most of the boys dream of becoming Premiership footballers with six-figure salaries and they know full well that most footballers didn't do well at school.¹⁸⁵ Whilst tough boys continue to dominate at playtime girls and soft boys meanwhile are largely excluded from opportunities for sporting excellence at Tenter Ground. Netball teams, which were once the standard sporting preoccupations of girls, are not an option for them. The disillusion of teachers who struggle to manage the disruptive boys and the lack of will among senior management precludes the more equitable distribution of sporting resources amongst all the children.

Five days after our victorious football match Gary is off school because he's been suspended. At lunchtime I see him outside sitting in the front seat of his parents' large expensive car. I go over and ask him what's up and we have a chat. He tells me that his mum has come in to have a meeting with Christine and Mara because he's been excluded and can't come back to school until Friday. I ask him why he got excluded and he explains that he was laughing in Mara's assembly. When she told him off he carried on laughing. As he tells the story Gary hangs his head blushing, half-ashamed and at the same time smirking in amusement. I ask him what it's like to be excluded and he says, "The teachers think it's a punishment but it's not you get to stay at home and play Dreamcast all day." I tell him that he's going to miss Pokemon Club on Thursday and he asks if I will still put his drawings in his tray and I agree. In the back of the car is his lovely dog, a large boxer, that barks like mad as soon as I come over and Gary turns round and tells it loudly, "Shut up!" Gary then takes out of his pocket and proudly shows me his brand new shiny blue mobile phone. This is the sign of things to come after Pokemon, a new object of significance. Before long, I think to myself, kids will all be carrying mobile phones. Gary passes it to me, I look at and admire it and think that it is no wonder that Gary has influence amongst the other boys, apart from his football and fighting skills, his daring and charisma, there is nothing his parents will see him go

team. *Asian* boys' reputation for being soft and not tough persists but is changing in the light of reports of *Asian* gangs on streets in London and the north of England.

¹⁸⁵ Football has traditionally been a *working class* men's game whilst cricket, tennis and rugby have been thought of as middle class, public school boys' sports.

without. No matter that he misbehaves at school, he gets what he wants and getting his own way gives him influence.

Pokemon Lady

The Pokemon club is such a big hit with the children that parents who bring their children to school in the morning begin to come up to me in the playground to say hello and to find out who this '*Pokemon Lady*' is who their children are all talking about. I introduce myself to them and we exchange stories about how excited the children are about their Pokemon drawings. Anthony's mother praises my drawings and then laughs, telling me about how Anthony acts out Pokemon games at home and drives her crazy because he does all the different voices. Some of the Bangladeshi children bring their mothers over to me; speaking in Bengali, they tell their mothers who I am and interpret for us as we exchange greetings. The parents appreciate the enthusiasm that children have for the Pokemon club.¹⁸⁶ Week by week the children accumulate their drawings in their folders and take them home to show their siblings, friends and parents. Adam's father photocopies the drawings for Adam's cousins and neighbours' children and Adam is pleased with the popularity this gives him among his family and wider kin. Meanwhile the complexity of the Pokemon world guarantees that our fervour isn't quickly satisfied. There is still so much for us to learn about each character and many more drawings yet to be done. Each Pokemon character has many distinctive features, and children compete to demonstrate how knowledgeable they are about them. There are the names to remember, and each Pokemon, when it has enough strength and fighting experience evolves into another form, which also has to be memorised. Pikachu, for example, evolves into Raichu. Some children, like Anthony and Martin, learn off by heart the moves that each Pokemon has at its disposal, the category that each type of Pokemon belongs to and which kinds of Pokemon are suited for fighting against particular other types. An ice Pokemon battles well against a fire Pokemon, for example. All this knowledge is put to good use trying to complete the Game Boy games. We test each other's ability, trying to recite all 150

¹⁸⁶ At the end of the school year, in June when it came time for me to ask parents for permission to conduct ethnographic interviews in their homes, Mara, the head teacher doubted that I would get a single positive response. She couldn't have been more wrong. Precisely because I had managed to turn myself from a researcher into a '*Pokemon Lady*,' a person of significance to children and parents alike, parents were happy to receive me in their homes and in some cases to extend this invitation to prolonged visits for fieldwork during the summer months.

Pokemon in exact sequence. Tom, who doesn't even know that there are 26 letters in the alphabet and cannot recite his alphabet in full, has no trouble at all reeling off all 150 Pokemon in order.

Pokemon Stickers, Pocket Money and Presents

After a few weeks, some of the boys begin to bring into school, surreptitiously smuggled in their trouser pockets, collections of Pokemon stickers. This causes a whole new wave of excitement because this is another new medium to explore. The graphics are bright and colourful and the stickers quickly become highly valued objects. Gary, whose collection of stickers is held together with elastic bands in a thick wadge, shows them off to me and to others at every opportunity. He lets me hold the collection and I go through them one by one in my hand whilst other boys lean over my shoulders, crowding round, and uttering praises when they see Pokemon they hold in high esteem. The rarest stickers are the shiny ones and Gary has many of these. We have to be careful where we look at them since the children are not supposed to bring playthings into school. If they bring their stickers out when they are not in Pokemon club and teachers other than Christine catch them, the stickers are confiscated, much to the boys' distress. I tread carefully to make sure that the Pokemon club and my efforts to find out what the children's interests are, are not conceived of by other staff members as disruptive to the aims and objectives of formal learning.

At the boys' instigation I begin to develop my own collection of stickers and experience the thrill of tearing open the top of the packet, pulling the stickers out and going through to see if I have got a shiny one. Gary and I discuss this particular pleasure and he admits that when he's colouring his Pokemon in during the club his heart beats faster because he's worried that someone is going to nudge and jog him. Gary cares about his Pokemon drawings, is proud of his colouring in and through the medium of this specific exchange, camaraderie on the football pitch and help in class, a fragile friendship develops between us. I am reminded that significant exchanges between people, of words, bodily gestures or objects, facilitate emotional transformations and hold substantial integrative potential.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ Although I have not yet investigated them it seems likely that object centred therapies ought to be highly successful with children. I am reminded that objects are the bridges over and through which

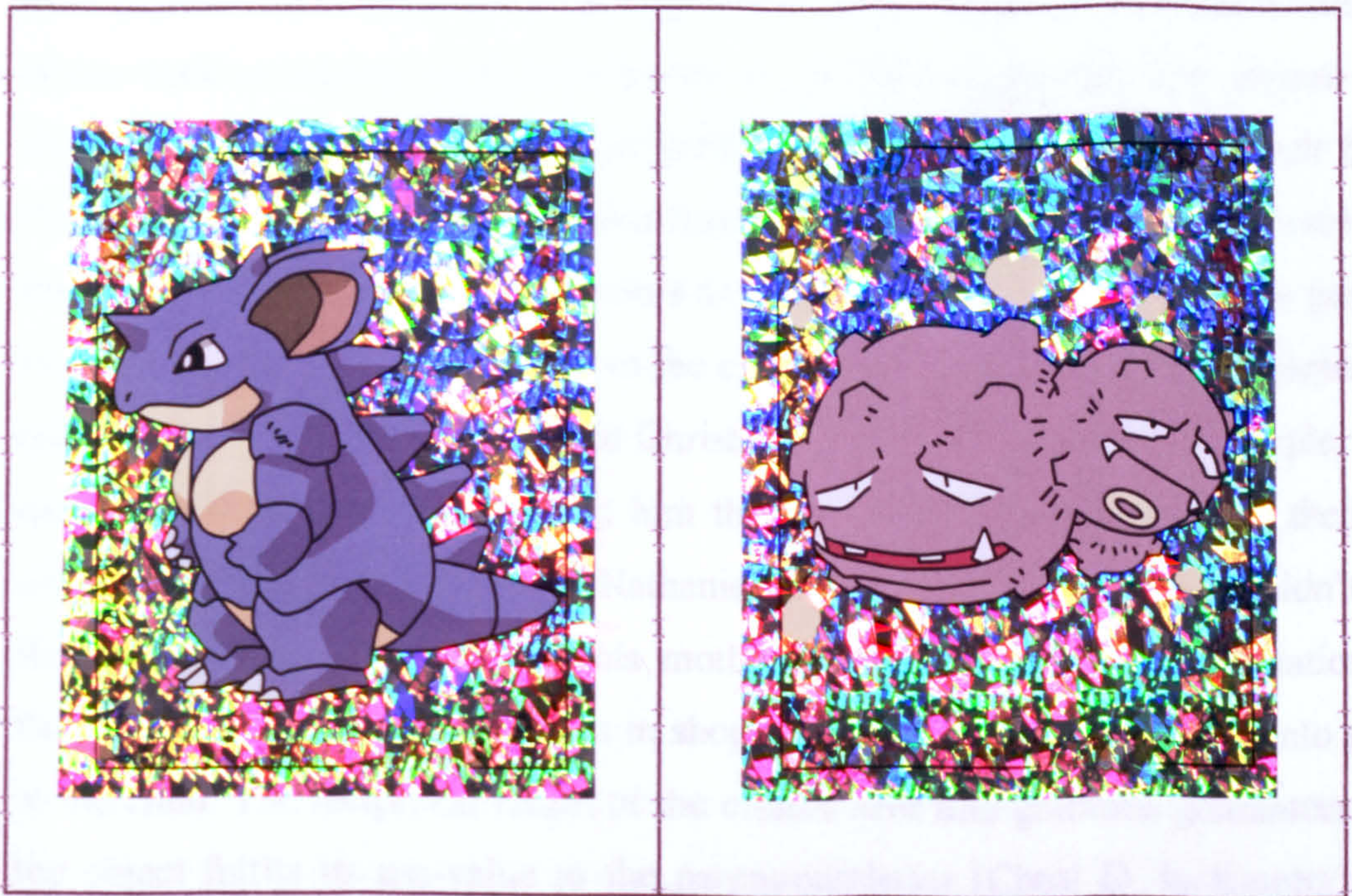


Figure 5. Pokemon Stickers – Nidoqueen and Weezing. (Stickers are manufactured by Topps Ltd. and are reproduced with permission)

Children, like Ade, who don't get pocket money to spend as they please, are frustrated because they cannot develop sticker collections and this makes it hard for them to gain influence with the others boys. Each packet of stickers costs 30p and as quickly as newsagents get new stock in they sell out, which makes the stickers scarce and even more desirable. It becomes obvious that Pokemon are not just popular in Tenter Ground, children everywhere are talking about them and competing to complete their sticker collections. Apart from childhood being synonymous with certain kinds of play and learning, it becomes clear that children also share a distinctive relationship to money. For the most part because children's work is considered properly to be schoolwork, they do not exchange their labour for money or goods, which is what differentiates them from adults in the Western world.¹⁸⁸ The access to money that they do enjoy takes the form of pocket money

children encounter each other. Therefore when there has been a disruption or break down in a child's social relations, either at school or at home, it makes sense that in an effort to repair them the mediation of significant objects would be vital to the reestablishment of trust. I imagine that words alone would probably be insufficient.

¹⁸⁸ Children like Ade from families recently arrived from Africa, for example, are expected to do housework without the expectation of a reward of pocket money. Children's labour is an intrinsic part of the execution of household tasks. Ade's mother is often away in Nigeria when he is left in the care of his older sister. Ade tells me that in the morning he gets up at 7.00, gets his younger brother ready for school, sweeps the house, top to bottom and then leaves for school. Now that Mara has started the breakfast club, he gets to have breakfast in the morning which he wouldn't otherwise have time for.

from parents that is given either as a gift or as an exchange for minimal household labour such as tidying up their bedroom or just for being *good*. The objects that children hold dear are rarely bought with this pocket money however; their Sony Playstations, computer games, Game Boys and other expensive toys are received from parents and other family members as gifts. Familial emotions between parents and children are intimately related to the cycle of gift giving that follows particular anniversaries such as birth days and Christmas or Eid. Nathaniel, for example, tells me one day that Richard had told him that because he was angry with them he wished all his family were dead. Nathaniel says he told Richard he shouldn't say that, because after all wasn't it his mother who bought him his Playstation?¹⁸⁹ Parents buy things as commodities in shops and give them, transformed into gifts, to the child. The reciprocal return of the child's love and gratitude guarantees that the object fulfils its use-value to the parent/purchaser (Cheal D. in Komter A.E. 1996). From an economic point of view therefore, children are principally dependent on the receipt of gifts to fulfil their desires and are largely marginal to and are not expected to contribute to the family's relationship to the monetary economy.¹⁹⁰

Children are differentiated from each other, in part, on the basis of the gifts they receive from their parents and family members. Children from families with little disposable income for children's playthings struggle, like Ade, to keep up with the competitive language of exchange in which boys' prestige is in some measure made. Nathaniel and Richard, for example, bring their Game Boys, Game Boy games and their computer gaming magazines into school on Pokemon Club day. Obi who has recently arrived from Nigeria, and is still learning about the specific world these boys are seriously engaged in, can only sit and watch in amazement and with admiration.¹⁹¹ Girls, who are less involved in computer gaming, are under less

¹⁸⁹ The intimate relationship between children and the kind of objects they are preoccupied with and the way in which these objects mediate significant social relations was emphasised for me when a boy tells me about when his best friend from outside school was killed in a car accident. He is obviously distraught about the tragedy and expresses his sorrow for his friend by asking whether or not people think that his friend will be able to play Playstation in heaven.

¹⁹⁰ Of course in other countries, for example in Africa, a child's labour often forms a crucial part of the household economy.

¹⁹¹ When I presented versions of this paper to Masters students they lamented that children, understood as consumers, obsessed with objects and the prestige they bring, are being prepared for the cut throat world of capitalism. I argued with them that whilst in a capitalist economy peer group formation among children may take particular material forms, object relations must mediate social relations wherever children are growing up. The difference is that these objects need not be

pressure and are not expected to know how to participate appropriately. The Pokemon drawings, in contrast, given from me to the children as gifts, incorporate all of them into a more equitable system of exchange and it is this that parents appreciate. It does not differentiate the children on the basis of what their families can afford and their value lies partly in this. It is the children's skill in colouring and keeping their folders neat and well cared for that differentiates them from each other. Mark, for example, takes pride in his folder and goes so far as to make a detailed index at the front, on which he ticks off each Pokemon as I draw it. He is determined that before I leave we should complete the collection of 150.

Remembering the Pokemon trading cards that I bought at Toys R Us back in December, I bring them into school to see what the boys make of them, but they are not interested. They are still preoccupied with stickers. In contrast to the simple and appealing graphics of the stickers the card is dense with text, full of highly detailed information, written in small print, concerning each Pokemon's features and battling potential. Most of it I do not understand and the graphics are small and more difficult to identify with. Also a pack of cards, printed on high quality card, costs £2.50 whilst a pack of stickers, printed on paper costs only 30p. Whilst we persevere at school, therefore, trying to confine our enthusiasm into the half an hour space each week that the Pokemon Club permits, I am introduced to the joys of Pokemon Card trading elsewhere, by the children who live on the estate where I live. It is with the passion for Pokemon trading cards that the Pokemon phenomenon proper is born. This is a global phenomenon in which, via the medium of exchange, children the world over are incorporated into frenzied trading of Pokemon cards. A craze is born that makes newspaper headlines on several occasions and causes adults everywhere to speculate about what the beginning of the 21st Century means for children and childhood.

commodities. Control over other objects like scarce food items, for example, could just as easily become a good way for children to gain and wield influence. My point is to emphasise that the mediation of objects is an aspect of the way the mind works, (understood as an inter-subjective phenomenon), not a defining feature of capitalist economies. A review of the literature in the anthropology of childhood might provide an interesting comparative perspective in this respect.

Part II

Place and Prestige

The Pokemon Phenomenon

My Area

On my way into school one morning I bump into Habib and Chetana, cousins and children of first generation Bangladeshi immigrants, who reside in the block of flats opposite where I live. Between their flat and mine is the garden square that three blocks of flats, part of a much larger estate, enclose. We walk to school together and Habib offers to carry my bags. Eager with reciprocal gestures because they are pleased with my gifts of Pokemon drawings, I frequently receive requests from the boys who are not preoccupied with looking tough, to carry my bags. Habib asks, "Do you know why we don't come into your area?" (Meaning to play after school and at weekends.¹⁹²) "No," I say, "I don't know. Why?" He goes on to explain that it is because of Jenna and other kids who live in my block who won't let them come into, what Jenna says, is their (meaning kids' from my block's) area.¹⁹³ Habib,

¹⁹² Children from the block of flats where I live play on the concrete area at the front of the block, in the communal garden behind and in the adjacent car park.

¹⁹³ When I ask Habib to explain what he thinks the reasons are for him, Chetana and Chetana's brothers being chased out of my area they make no mention whatsoever of it being anything to do with them being Bangladeshi. The territorial rivalry between children in other blocks on one estate is, I have heard, quite common and may be nothing to do with *ethnic* difference although it wouldn't surprise me if it was because *white* people's prejudice against *Pakis* is high. At the same time *Asian* prejudice against *black* people is also pronounced. Bangladeshi children who live on the ground floor and who are not even five years old spat at my daughters and called them, ironically, fucking *Pakis*. It so happens that all the children that Habib refers to in my block are *white* children and these are the children who play out and have the opportunity therefore to claim the area as their own. The block has four floors and it is interesting to note the *ethnicity* of children, their ages and where their families live in the block. On the top two floors there is a predominance of first generation West-African immigrant families with young children under the age of six who are too young to play out much yet. The popular perception is that this residence pattern has emerged because the flats on the top floors are damp and hard to let and only immigrant families who are coming from worse conditions in their home countries will accept them. Whether this is true or not, I don't know. On the first and second floor there are mostly *white* families with children between the age of about six and fourteen. There are two long-standing *white* tenants, women who have lived in the block for forty years or more and have grown up children and grand children. There are also two long-standing *black* Jamaican tenants who have raised their children here and are now retired. This reveals the pattern of immigration in which Jamaican families were the first to establish themselves in Bermondsey followed later by West African and Bangladeshi Muslims. There is often a great deal of prejudice and hostility between Jamaican and Nigerian immigrants and little love is lost between them. This makes it ironic that *white* and *Asian* people lump *black* people all together when there is much tension and rivalry between the different groups within these apparent *black* collectivities. On the ground floor there are mostly Bangladeshi Muslim families also with young children too young to go far beyond their doorsteps. There are two *mixed race* families in the block one of which is my family with my partner and our two daughters aged nine and six at the time of my fieldwork. There is another couple, a *white* man with a *black* woman on the third floor, and they don't have children as far as I know. Very few of the families in the block are *born and bred* Bermondsey people even though they live in and are raising their children here at the periphery of Bermondsey. Towards the centre of Bermondsey, between The Blue and either side of the Jamaica Road, for example, more *traditional born and bred* Bermondsey families are to be found.

describing how kids from my area always chase him and his cousins, fervently describes how Aamir, Chetana's younger brother was hit on the head and made to bleed by a stone that had been thrown. He tells me how another time Aamir was injured on the arm and it had to be stitched. I ask Habib why he thinks this sort of thing is happening and Chetana explains that it started at school. She says that Jenna, who is nine-years-old and has two younger brothers, lives in my block and used to be their friend but then she started telling lies, picking on them and getting the older boys in my block to gang up on them. At the time of my fieldwork all the children from my block who play out regularly are *white* kids and there are four older boys in my block aged between ten and fourteen, who hang out together.¹⁹⁴ Habib and Chetana continue to describe how each time they try to come into my area to play they get stones thrown at them. Once, Chetana says, Jenna and the others followed them back to where she lives and threw stones at Chetana's flat, breaking her Mum's kitchen window. Chetana tells me that her mum is scared and

My daughters are of an age to play out but they don't hang out with Jenna and the other kids in general. As I explained in chapter one children and families on council estates are differentiated in part on the basis of whether the children are allowed to play out or not. My daughters, Ty and Fola, are not allowed to play out during term time on school days because they have to do homework and music practice and this differentiates them from other children of their age in the block. At weekends we tend to go out as a family on different excursions, to the park or to visit friends and family and this also differentiates my daughters from the other children who spend longer periods of time in the area making their own amusement outside. So, on the few occasions when my daughters do play outside, they tend to keep their own company, roller blading or playing on their scooters and occasionally playing chase with the other kids. One day as we were returning from school in the car Jenna approaches me on her bike and asks, "Can your girls play out today?" I remind her that they are not allowed to play out on school days and Jenna asks me why. I explain that they have homework and music practice to do and she looks at me as if she has understood the difference between us for the first time emphasising, "Oh, you have rules don't you?" Laughing I say, "Yes that's true I do have rules. Doesn't your mum have rules?" Pleased with herself, Jenna replies, "No, we are allowed to do what we want." Happily she rides off on her bike, obviously feeling sorry for Ty and Fola. A headteacher from another local primary school explained to me that she is particularly interested in the way that middle class parents can become obsessed with making every aspect of family life an opportunity for formal learning or skill improvement. In homes like these watching television becomes akin to committing a sin because it is a passive activity. Televisions and books become diametrically opposed and symbolic of class difference. These pressures lead, she suggests, to the phenomenon of middle class children who are permanently exhausted by intensive homework and after school activities without a chance she says to 'enjoy the freedom of their childhood.' At the same time she reflects upon her own class position. Despite being a head teacher she will always think of herself as a *working class* woman because of her background whilst she is determined that her children who have had a different upbringing are middle class. Childhood experience is crucial therefore to the formation of perceptions about class position.

The older boys in the block, between the ages of ten and fourteen, who are all *white*, tend to hang out together. They are differentiated from the younger children and from girls by virtue of their freedom to move beyond the immediate area of the block further into the estate, usually on their bikes, along the main roads and to explore other areas.

¹⁹⁴ Three of these boys do not attend regular school, one receives a few hours tuition at home because he has become alienated by being bullied at school, and the other never attends school at all. Another attends a specialist school for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Ian is the only boy amongst them who attends regular school.

wants to move away, explaining that her family needs more space anyway because four of them have to share one small bedroom and Habib sleeps at her house too.¹⁹⁵ Her mum wants her own house, Chetana says, where she can grow plants in the garden.¹⁹⁶ She tells me that her Dad works in a carpet shop in Whitechapel and she then goes on, making spontaneous kin associations, to tell me about her aunt in Bangladesh who was taken over by monsters, went crazy and died. “They believe things like that in Bangladesh,” she says, looking up at me to see what I think.

Habib, eager to get back to the point, interrupts and tells me that Chetana’s Dad has phoned the police twice because of the kids in my block. Each time, he says, the police tell them to stick to their own areas. But he thinks to himself, Jenna and the other boys don’t stay in their own area so why should they? When we get to school, Gary and Daniel run up to greet me and Habib, Chetana and I are still talking about their troubles so Gary and Daniel overhear the topic of conversation. I ask Chetana if her Dad ever does anything about the trouble himself and she says no because it would make things worse. Daniel disagrees loudly, saying, “You have to stick up for yourself or they won’t stop.” He then tells us how he had to punch someone once because he was being picked on. Gary agrees. I suggest to Habib and Chetana, “Tell Jenna and the others that you know me and say you are coming into my area to knock for my daughters. If they try and stop you or give you any problems then let me know and I’ll tell my boyfriend.” I know that this is how problems get sorted out on estates and Gary quickly picks up on it, asking me enthusiastically if my boyfriend is tough, wanting to know, “Can he fight?” I tell him that my boyfriend grew up in the East End of London and knows how to handle himself. Habib, who is obviously afraid, begins to look nervous about the prospect of a confrontation whilst Gary and Daniel are excited by it. Habib is not a tough boy, and his uncle is patently not a fighting man either, so he quickly changes the subject and asks me if I watched the Lazio/Chelsea football match. Luckily I did watch it, so we are occupied with discussing Chelsea’s poor performance until we get up to the classroom.

¹⁹⁵ All the children call their homes houses, not flats. They might say, for example, “Do you want to come to my house?” A house is another word for a home.

¹⁹⁶ This time she does mean house not flat.

A few days later, watching from my balcony I observe how kids from my area run to hide behind the bins when they see Habib, Chetana and her brothers coming along the path that separates the blocks. At the last moment, having great fun with their campaign of terror, they jump out, frightening and chasing the intruders away. I realise that apart from particular objects children can have spaces in common, blocks and areas on council estates for example. This is a more abstract form of materiality but it is nevertheless pertinent that when children have little to do outside, the one thing they do have is the space, their familiar territory - the area that they claim as their own. There are no actual amenities for children's play in my area and for the most part children are not allowed to go out of the area, to the parks, for example, because they would be out of their parents' sight. The children are not bored however. It constantly amazes me how they make their own amusement in the car park out of any discarded items of furniture that can be retrieved from the bins. Old mattresses, bits of wood and other items can quickly be transformed into a game that occupies the children's time. That this space can be controlled and patrolled in the way that Jenna and Ian contrive to do is no surprise. What kids from my block share in common – their area – is the place where friendship is formed out of daily adjustments to the space as a specific kind of urban landscape. Within this area children participate in various kinds of play, climbing trees, football on the grass, inventing games and riding on their bikes, skates or scooters. Children live the space outside in a way that adults can never do and that is why childhood matters in a *born and bred* kinship system. Children are born in particular places, grow up and live in specific spaces and are therefore thought of as being irrevocably attached to the place that they were raised in. *Born and bred* kinship prioritises childhood as the time when an attachment is made between person and place and therefore space as a particular form of materiality, mediating social relations in a specific way, has enormous significance in Bermondsey.

True to my word, I go down into the car park and talk to the kids from my area. I explain to them that Habib and Chetana are my friends and to leave them alone because they are coming to knock for my daughters. The following week Habib runs up to me in the playground, telling me that Ian (the dominant and most

troublesome amongst the older boys from my block) is his friend now.¹⁹⁷ I am surprised by his enthusiasm and by the dramatic turn around in neighbourhood relations which, I imagine, can't be quite as harmonious as he portrays, but I am pleased for him. Habib asks me if I also know Glen, another boy from my block and I tell him that I do. I don't tell Habib what Ian and Glen told me which is that Habib, Chetana and her brothers cause a lot of trouble around the estate and are always in trouble in their own area. That apparently is the reason why the kids from my area chase them away, "Even their own neighbours call the police on them," Ian explains. Realising that the explanation they give about why they don't come to play in my area is obviously not as clear cut as Habib and Chetana make out I'm eager to understand how neighbourhood relations between children vary from those at school so I persevere.

Before long and inquisitive now about the intervention I have made on Habib and Chetana's behalf, Jenna and her brothers begin to come up and knock for my daughters again. Going out to play in the car park, where Ian and the other boys join in, my daughters report excitedly, when I call them up for dinner, that Ian and Glen were swapping Pokemon cards. Having been told about my Pokemon drawings (by Habib and Chetana and now by my daughters) Ian and his friend Glen, too curious to stay away for long, knock tentatively on the door. They ask uneasily to have a look at the drawings and I fetch my Pokemon folder to show them on the doorstep.¹⁹⁸ They are impressed by my drawings but more interested in showing off their Pokemon cards, asking me if I have got any to trade. Ian, the more forceful of the two, is proud of his *shinies* which are *Pokemon* cards with holographic pictures on. I didn't even know you could get shiny trading cards, so I am taken by surprise. The few cards I've got aren't worth showing so I decline to trade, and opt to show them my sticker collection instead. Ian gives them a disdainful glance. Unimpressed, he says disparagingly, "Stickers are *lame*. At my school everyone collects cards." Momentarily embarrassed, I have no choice but to acquiesce to Ian's influence and realise that if I want to get to know how the dynamic of

¹⁹⁷ Ian is to our block what I imagine Gary is to his, a boy who makes his presence known, is often engaged in nefarious activities, finding himself frequently in trouble and dominant among the boys of a similar age in the block because of the reputation of an older brother.

¹⁹⁸ There is an unspoken rule amongst the children and parents in the block that children don't go into other families' 'houses' unless parents have between them agreed permission. The doorstep

children's relations works on the estate, I'd better quickly improve my trading card collection.

Learning to Trade

Ty and Fola, keen to participate in this unexpected opportunity to trade Pokemon cards and to get to know Ian and Glen, accompany me on a trip to Toys R Us where we buy some trading card packs, a few of which I give to each of them as gifts. Each pack costs £2.50 so we can't afford to buy too many at once.¹⁹⁹ The cards come in shiny silver packets with Pokemon graphics on the front depicting which series the cards belong to and the first series are Jungle cards.²⁰⁰ Each pack contains eleven cards. To make a difference we know we must get some *shinies* together, but at this early stage we are just as excited to see which, of the different Pokemon we have become familiar with over the previous weeks, are featured in the cards. We know, from watching Ian go through his cards, that the fighting Pokemon, those that have high hit points and do moves which inflict maximum damage are valuable even if they are not shiny. Like the boys at Tenter Ground, Ian and Glen are most interested in the battling potential of various Pokemon, and it is on this basis, apart from their desire for *shinies*, that they are building their collections. With much anticipation, feeling like Charlie looking for a golden ticket, my daughters and I open our packets and quickly flick through to see what we've got. Unlike the stickers there isn't a shiny in every pack and much to her sister's disappointment, only my younger daughter gets one, a beautiful *Snorlax*.

becomes therefore a significant boundary between *indoors* and outside in relation to which intimacy between various families is constituted.

¹⁹⁹ Part of the reason for the prolonged duration of the Pokemon phenomenon was the fact that the cards were expensive and so it took a long time for all the rare cards to enter into circulation. Also, as soon as children began to master one set of cards, another series of cards was released, which introduced more rare cards into and revitalised the trading networks.

²⁰⁰ New series of cards were released every few months, marked by an increased frenzy in trading as rare and desirable cards entered the sphere of exchange. The three series were – Jungle, Fossil and Dark or Team Rocket cards followed later by a limited trend for collecting Japanese versions of the cards.



Figure 6. Snorlax

Ty pleads to be allowed to buy ‘just one more pack,’ so I give her money to go back in and buy one more. This time she is lucky, finding a shiny *Venosaur*, which is an excellent battling Pokémon with 100 hit points and high damage potential. She knows instantly that this is a card Ian will want to trade for and can’t wait to get back to the flats, hoping to find Ian and Glen, and attempt to make a trade.

After school the next day my doorstep is cluttered with children crouching and sitting, outside my door and on the step, looking at each other’s cards and engaging in the difficult business of trade. Observing and listening carefully I try to ascertain how the process of exchange between the children works. The older boys, Glen and especially Ian, dominate proceedings because they have the best cards. Younger children and children without cards to trade sit and watch, quietly observant. Looking over the balcony my youngest daughter, Fola, notices Habib, Chetana and her brothers in the car park outside and alerts me to their presence. I lean over the balcony and call to them to come up and when they do I introduce them to my daughters and try to make them feel welcome. Habib and his cousins stand tentatively, just beyond the younger children, watching proceedings. Because Ian is interested in Ty and Fola’s cards, each of them has to go through their cards in turn in front of him. Each child holds his/her own cards and goes through the pile one by

one, lifting the top card and placing it at the back of the pack to reveal the one underneath. When the younger children ask to look at the cards, they want to hold them themselves, but Ian quickly tells them off, saying, "You don't touch other people's cards." Holding someone else's cards is a matter of trust and when he got to know us better Ian would let us, under his watchful gaze, hold and go through his cards and we returned the courtesy. Usually this only happened if no other and especially no younger children were watching.

As Ty and Fola take it in turns to go through their cards, Ian and Glen make occasional remarks under their breath or to each other, indicating which cards they desire. *Shinies* evoke the most rapturous admiration. Good cards are described as *bare*, *rough* or *buff*. A rubbish collection of cards is *lame*. Once all the cards have been seen, Ian decides with whom he wants to trade first and chooses Fola. He then goes through his cards for her to see. She sits quietly and looks carefully because she doesn't yet know what the terms of trade are or how value is established. Everything is new and exciting including the language Ian uses to talk about the cards. Assessing her trading skills, he begins negotiations, presenting a possible trade for her to consider, "I'll give you my *Victreebel* for your shiny *Snorlax*." A strong trader, like Ian, tries to take advantage of the inexperience of the younger child, hoping to get rid of his worthless or less valuable cards in order to acquire her most valuable cards. If she senses what he is doing and has some knowledge about which cards are valuable she refuses the trade, suggests a more suitable one herself or waits for him to make another offer. In this case, she declines the trade because she doesn't want to give up her new shiny *Snorlax* too easily. Ian makes another offer, "I'll give you my *Victreebel* and my shiny *Venomoth* for your shiny *Snorlax*." Looking quickly at her older sister for confirmation, Fola accepts the trade, cards are swapped and Ian declares, "No refunds." This means that if anyone should have a change of heart and regret the trade it is impossible to go back to the person to try and get your cards back.

Turning to Ty now, Ian asks her to go through her cards again. She does so. When he and Glen see her shiny *Venosaur*, they draw their breath in and lean closer to have a better look. Feeling confident that she has something they want Ty waits for Ian to go through his cards again. He suggests a trade; "I'll give you my shiny

Snorlax for your shiny *Venosaur*. She refuses. Looking frantically through his cards again Ian seeks another shiny to add to his offer. Speaking as if he is being hard done by now, he continues to trade, “I’ll give you my shiny *Snorlax* and my shiny *Vileplume* for your *Venosaur*.” Looking over her shoulder at me Ty seeks reassurance and advice but I don’t know whether it is a good trade or not so I shrug my shoulders as if to say, it’s up to you. She agrees to the trade, cards are swapped and ‘no refunds’ declared. Glen immediately tells her, “You got *skanked*, it wasn’t worth it on you, you could have got up to eight shinies for that *Venosaur*, boys at Ian’s school would give you their whole collections for that card.” Looking dejected she replies, “I don’t care,”



Figure 7. Venusaur and Vileplume

Glen, eager to take his turn to trade with Ty and Fola moves forward as Ian withdraws, but Ty having had her fingers burnt doesn’t want to trade anymore. She retreats into the flat leaving her younger sister to handle Glen on her own. Glen asks to see her cards again. He’s got his eye on what was Ian’s, but is now Fola’s, shiny *Venomoth*. He needs it to complete his collection of one of the grass Pokémon’s evolution sequence – *Parasect*, *Venonat* and *Venomoth*. He shows her his cards again and suggests a trade, “I’ll give you my *Bellsprout* and *Weepinbell* to go with your *Victreebel*, then you’ll have a set, ‘ ‘cos *Victreebel* is the *evolvshun*²⁰¹ of

²⁰¹ Both Ian and Glen say *evolvshun*, because they think that that is how you say evolution. Pokémon were the original creation of a Japanese man, Satoshi Tajiri who was obsessed with insects

Weepinbell.” Glen talks up the desirability of having a complete set and when he thinks he’s convinced Fola he prompts her response, “You give me your shiny *Venomoth.*” Thinking for a moment and weighing up the prospect of having a whole evolution set against having a single shiny, Fola happily agrees to the trade. Pleased with himself Glen swaps cards and quickly declares no refunds. Ian immediately tells Fola that ‘it wasn’t worth it on her,’ she shouldn’t have given him her shiny and she, like her sister, tries to save face and says she doesn’t care.



Figure 8. From right to left, Victreebel evolves into Weepinbell evolves into Bellsprout.

The boys turn to me and ask me if I want to trade but not confident enough, either about my trading abilities or my cards because I don’t have any *shinies* yet, I decline. I say goodbye to the boys and the other children and closing the door I go inside to see if Ty and Fola need consoling. Fola is explaining to her sister the trade that she made with Glen and Ty tells her it wasn’t worth it, but Fola doesn’t care, she’s happy. Ty is cross and disappointed that she got *skanked* by Ian. He proved his position of influence among the children by trading aggressively and without mercy, but she is determined to make a comeback. She wants to know when we can go and get some more cards.

Over the course of the next six weeks, between us, Ty, Fola and I increase our collection of cards and our trading skills. We know now that there are rare cards, regardless of whether they are fighting Pokémon or *shinies*, and we learn more

and their evolution as a child. He was also a video game freak who spent most of his time in Tokyo’s arcades. Eventually he was employed as a game designer by Nintendo and there he devised Pokémon for Game Boy.

about the significance of the different categories of text on the card. We begin to develop our own agenda for building our collections based on a combination of the desire to complete the Pokemon card collection but also of accumulating rare cards. We know that part of the art of trading is not to divulge what the rationale for your collection is because then kids you are trading with realise how they can influence the trades you make. At the same time you need to try and ascertain what the rationale of other kids' collecting strategies is so that you can accumulate cards they want in order to make favourable trades. Trades begin to take a longer time and become more exciting as negotiations become tougher to conclude because we know more now about which cards are valuable, what their worth is, and we can't therefore easily be *skanked* anymore.²⁰²

Creating and Transforming Value

It doesn't take long to realise that in every pack of cards there is a pattern. There are always seven cards with a small black circle in the bottom right hand corner and we learn that these cards are common.²⁰³ There are plenty of common cards out there and most kids you encounter will have at least some of these. Every time you buy a pack you are getting seven common cards so you quickly build up triple or more copies in your collection and so these become surplus to value. There are three cards in the pack with little black diamonds in the bottom right hand corner and this means that they are scarce cards. We know that we are wise to accumulate these because they can be used in numbers to trade up for rarer cards. Only one card in the pack has a little black star in the bottom right hand corner and this is the sign of rarity, indicating that there are not many of these cards in the trading network.

²⁰² Fola is less discerning in her trading relationships because she is younger and more interested in having fun and giving her new found friends what they want whilst Ty aspires to become a skilful trader.

²⁰³ We learn these things from the official information in the trading card game packs, which are boxed sets of cards with instructions on how to play the trading card game. An American company called Wizards of the Coast, which organises the game card phenomenon in America, produces the cards. The trading card game network is firmly established in America with adult participants who collect and trade different card sets, such as Dungeons and Dragons. There is a very complicated game with formalised rules that goes with the Pokemon cards but none of the boys I encountered during fieldwork in Bermondsey knew how to or endeavoured to learn how to play it. I and my daughters learned how to play when we went to the Pokemon trading card game centre in London, which was at the Borders bookshop on Oxford Street. There we encountered mainly very well behaved *middle class* children playing under their parents' supervision. There were some boys who turned up solely to trade cards and they demolished our confidence about our dark cards because they were trading for Japanese shinies which they had bought from The Forbidden Planet gaming shop near Tottenham Court Road. When we went there to investigate we discovered packs of Japanese cards for sale at up to £12.00 each.



Figure 9. Rarity Symbols

The star cards are the most valuable and the card may or may not be a shiny card but it doesn't have to be shiny to be rare. Of the *shinies* in the network, it is the ones that are seen the least and do the most damage that are the most valuable. For a long time the most sought after shiny is *Charizard*, the evolved form of *Charmander* and *Charmeleon*.



Figure 10. From right to left, Charmander evolves into Charmeleon evolves into Charizard. At the top right hand corner of the cards there is a symbol inside a circle. These symbols depict the type of energy that the Pokemon character portrayed in the graphic uses in battle. This symbol describes the qualitative aspect of the energy. For example an eye in a purple circle stands for psychic energy, a fist in an orange circle stands for fighting energy and so on. The quantitative aspect of this energy is measured in hit points or HP, which are shown on the top right hand corner of the card next to the energy symbol. The hit point of different Pokemon varies between 40 and 120. The higher the hit points the more valuable the card.



Figure 11. Psychic energy symbol showing hit points.



Figure 12. Grass energy symbol showing 40 hit points.

Some of the cards that you get in a pack have no energy symbol and may depict human characters, or other kinds of graphics apart from Pokemon characters. These are called trainer cards, which can also be traded, but unless they are rare, have little value and cannot in themselves embody damage. Damage, like energy, has a qualitative and a quantitative element. The qualitative element is called a move and is described in the text underneath the picture of the Pokemon character. The number next to the move tells you how much damage that move does to an opposing Pokemon in battle. The higher the number, the greater amount of damage a move does and therefore the more valuable the card.

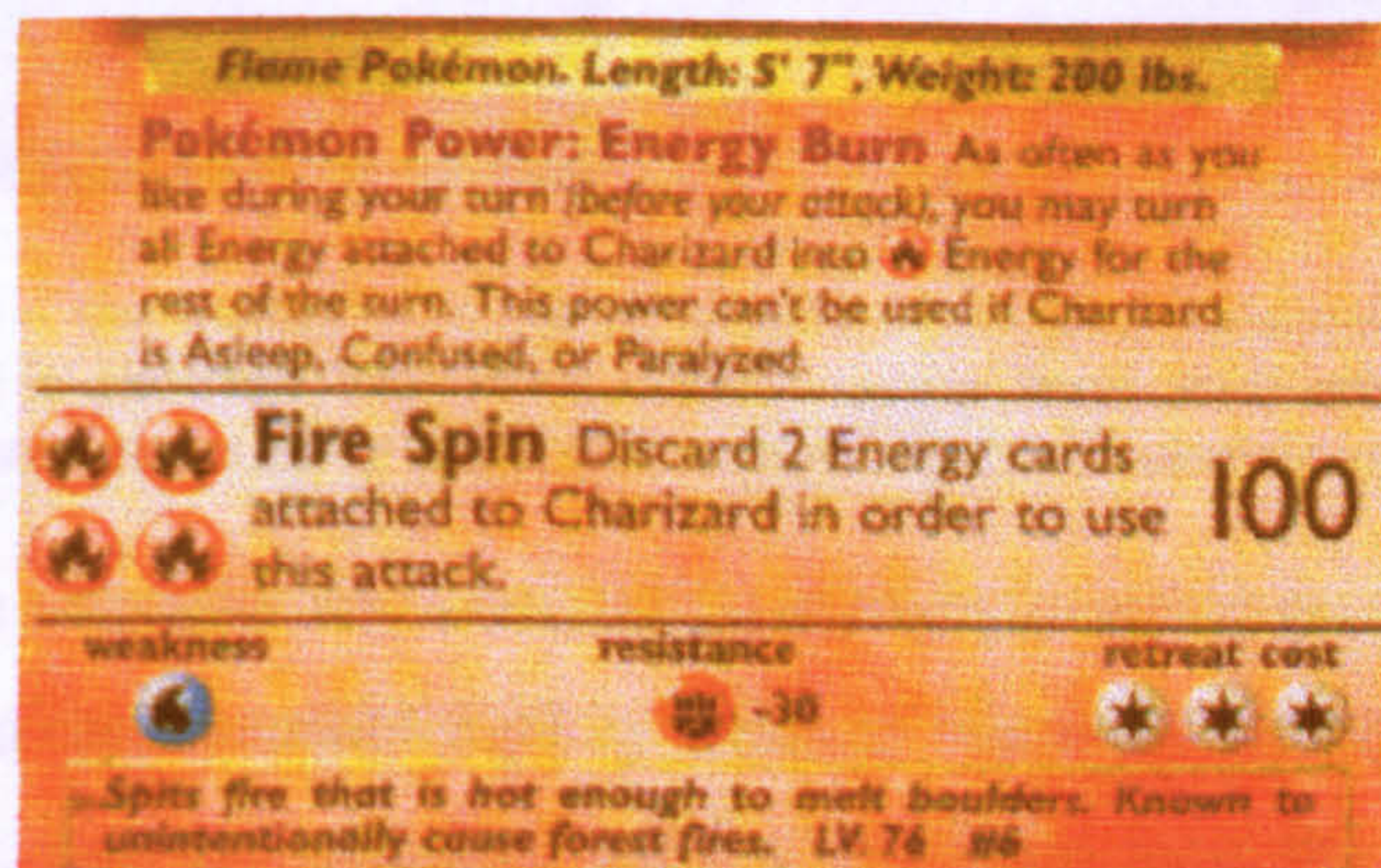


Figure 13. Description of Charizard's moves and damage potential.

The name of each Pokemon is given in the top left-hand corner of the card, it is either a basic Pokemon or it is an evolved form.



Figure 14. Hypno is the stage one evolution of the basic Pokémon Drowzee.

The only other kind of card is an energy card, which has no trade value unless it is a rare one like the Double Colourless energy card or later in the series the Rainbow Energy card. The energy cards are essential for the trading card game but are largely irrelevant in trading.



Figure 15. Recycle – the trainer card which has the effect in a Pokémon trading card game which is described in the text. This is an electric energy card, each move performed by an electric Pokémon card in the game requires a certain number of electric energy cards.

Compared to the formality and complexity of categorisation on the card, the value of each Pokémon card is established by children relatively simply in the process of exchange. Shiny, rare and effective battling Pokémon have the highest value and evolution sets also have worth. Some children trade merely to accumulate a better set of shinies and others like Ty aim to achieve that at the same time as they want to complete the whole set of Pokémon cards. The transformational potential of this highly specialised form of exchange is demonstrated by the dramatic appreciation in the value of single *shinies* in a relatively short period of time. One pack of Pokémon cards costs £2.50 and one single shiny might appreciate to many times its own value over a period of six weeks, becoming, for example, worth up to £35 or £40 in

specialist shops, which sell rare cards singly. In the same way that single cards can appreciate in value, a child can also increase his/her own influence/reputation among peers by becoming a skilled trader with a *buff* collection. Whosoever has the most *shinies* has the most prestige and therefore the most influence. The way to get more *shinies* is to have parents who are prepared to spend money on keeping up the regular supply of gifts of cards and after that to learn how to be a confident and canny trader. For some boys becoming a skilful trader and acquiring more *shinies* involves a degree of intimidation, aggression and wielding of influence. A clever *Pokemon* trader can however talk up the value of the cards s/he wants to offer and talk down the value of the *shinies* or rare cards s/he wants without resorting to aggression. Prestige is also constituted therefore in skilful trading. Boys like Ian make much of the joy of trading with younger kids who don't know the value of what they are giving away so they are easily duped. Ty lambastes Fola frequently for not being a strong enough trader and for giving into Ian too easily and therefore not winning his respect. Meanwhile the person who brings out an impressive collection of *shinies*, but who is not willing to trade, is frowned upon and put down aggressively. Completing the *Pokemon* card collection is not the point. Trading is everything and it is through trading as a means of establishing differential exchange relations that relative influence between children on the estate is, in part, constituted. In the end the *shinies* circulate continuously like valuables in a Kula ring (Malinowski B. 1922) and trading networks are formed on the basis of more or less stable trading partnerships between kids who are known to have a regular supply of new cards and know how to trade properly. These trading partnerships, like the peer groups I observed at Tenter Ground, are friendships based on a shared and continuously negotiated mastery over objects of specific significance. Excluded from these friendships are kids too young to know how to trade effectively, or kids from families too poor or unprepared to spend money on cards. Hard as it is, these children fail to develop and to demonstrate a competitive mastery. The exchange of *Pokemon* cards, as a form of competitive economy between children, is exciting, fun and completely ruthless. It is the desire to gain access to this highly specialised sphere of exchange, in which my daughters and I are able to establish considerable competence, that makes *Pokemon* a craze like no other. *Pokemon* trading provides the opportunity for children to transform their social relations with each other

simply by virtue of their capacity to compete for prestige.²⁰⁴ It is the immediacy of this social transformation that makes the exchange of Pokemon trading cards so thrilling. This social transformation is possible only because the value of cards and kids is created and transformed, mutually established, through the practice of gift exchange²⁰⁵ (Mauss M. 1966 orig. 1950).

Exchange Relationships

Just as I became a person of significance to boys at Tenter Ground by virtue of my specific competence in relation to particular objects, so by similar means, my daughters become influential trading partners with the boys who dominate my area. Trading of Pokemon cards is predominantly the preoccupation of boys but girls are also involved and can, like Ty, overcome the gendered expectation that girls don't know how to do it properly. Ian, by virtue of his ruthless trading skills, retains the best collection of shinies and therefore the most prestige. Younger children and those who are less confident and have fewer cards but who nevertheless want to trade with Ty and Fola, wait to bring their cards out until Ian and Glen are gone. They know they can rely on Ty and Fola, because they are girls, not to be as ruthless with them as Ian and Glen frequently are. Boys as young as two who know nothing about the complex categorisation of value, are often seen on the stairways fervently swapping the common cards that older boys have given them as gifts because these cards are surplus to trading requirements.²⁰⁶ Habib, Chetana and in particular Chetana's brothers quickly accumulate a few shinies of their own and seize the opportunity to begin trading with Ty, Fola and myself. In this way they are incorporated into the trading network in my area and are able to strike their own

²⁰⁴ Of course part of the problem with this form of prestige seeking is that it relies on the fact that children's parents have disposable income to buy Pokemon cards as gifts. Children whose parents lack this income and who are excluded therefore from the sphere of exchange, are hard done by. Should those children happen to be tough boys used to competing for prestige through their physical prowess and daring forms of intimidation, they are most likely to resort to stealing Pokemon cards. Physical prowess is free whilst prestige objects cost dearly and it is no surprise therefore that with the increase in children's preoccupation with portable prestige items street thefts have increased commensurably.

²⁰⁵ As a form of exchange Pokemon trading effects transformations in social relations so quickly because it doesn't really require mastery of specific forms of bodily competence like football or drawing which require dedication and practice over long periods of time.

²⁰⁶ A year after the summer of 2000 and even this year in 2002 young children and especially younger boys in my area who were completely precluded from gaining influence amongst the older kids before have now started to trade cards again. They are safe now in the knowledge that older kids have moved on to other preoccupations and can impress each other with the cards and trading skills they failed to win influence with before.

deals with Ian and Glen. The conflict between them, expressed territorially before, is transposed now into a different medium of exchange. Back at school I hear endless stories from Habib and Chetana about how they got *skanked* by Ian and even accuse him of stealing their cards.

The transposition of the violent conflict between Ian and Habib/Chetana into the more technical specifics of Pokemon card exchange does not however replace the dynamic of relations between the children that pre-existed the phenomenon. Conflict between children in my area remains but the distinctions between them and the play for dominance in the area can be battled out with cards and cunning rather than stones and blood. The trading of cards, as a new medium of exchange between children, creates the possibility for the transposition of other forms of competition and makes possible the rapid transformation of a child's social relations. As a phenomenon Pokemon has huge integrative potential as I and my daughters experienced, and yet at the same time the necessity for a degree of ruthless competition, skill and access to cards differentiates children within the trading network and defines those who are excluded from it.

On the *working class* council estate, children control space and gain influence within particular areas in relation to their capacity to initiate and withstand violent conflict. These spaces, blocks of flats and *areas* that mediate child's play are rarely conceived of as being a place called Bermondsey.²⁰⁷ The explicit reference to Bermondsey as a particular kind of place belongs to the domain of wider territorial battles, which are the preserve of teenage youths like Ian's brother Daniel who is sixteen. Chetana and Habib and their families struggle to accommodate this violent aspect of what living and growing up on council estate means whilst Ian and Jenna relish the opportunity to wield their influence. Chetana and Habib refuse or are unable to do what Gary and Daniel feel must be done, which is to stick up for themselves.²⁰⁸ This demonstrates the specific manner in which certain immigrant families struggle to come to terms with what toughness, as a necessary attribute of

²⁰⁷ Only one child out of sixty at Tenter Ground - Tom – identified the *area* where they live and play as being Bermondsey.

²⁰⁸ Perhaps, as I indicated before, the immigrants such as those of Jamaican origin who have been resident in Bermondsey longer have learned to stick up for themselves sooner. At the same time it is possible that the men in Jamaica have a *big man* system of their own in relation to which boys' developing masculinity takes a similarly violent form.

developing masculinity, means to *white-working-class* boys growing up in areas like mine. Habib's distress at the assaults against his cousins and delight at the chance of friendship with Ian, highlight the way in which, in a particular neighbourhood, friendship and conflict between boys and between boys and girls unfolds as a continuous spatio-temporal flux. The development of the Pokemon trading card network in my area reveals the fine line that exists between the competitive rivalry out of which friendship is constituted, in relation to which shared competence must constantly be shown, and the boundary that friendship creates around who is excluded from participation. This is not necessarily an oppressive experience for children because what emerges most strongly is their desire to resist exclusion and their desire to compete for inclusion in the peer group that holds sway. This desire renders the apparent dominance and influence of particular children over many others as less of an oppressive force and more like a 'seductive apperception' to which children are drawn – this, I would argue, is the power that charisma holds. That is why, whilst staff members find it so easy to despise Gary, children in Year Five/Six find it difficult to resist his appeal – the same is true for Ian in my area.

Space and Gender

Ian remains the most influential boy in my area because he is tough, ruthless, has charisma and the freedom to exercise his influence in other areas of the estate beyond where his mother can see and supervise him. He brings these independent qualities to the way he makes Pokemon exchanges and they serve him well. His indomitable spirit continuously finds a way to win but he meets his match in Ty who is a canny trader. He quickly notices that Ty keeps her *shinies* in mint condition whilst his, often scrunpled in his pocket become quickly scuffed and damaged. Often she refuses to trade with him for cards she would otherwise have wanted. In time he persuades his Mum to buy him a folder like hers to keep them in because the potential trades he has missed with Ty frustrate him. The difference between Ian and Ty, however, is that her influence ends with the successful conclusion of trading at the doorstep. She does not have the freedom to extend and exert her influence among the children in relation to the independence to explore the wider spaces of the area in the way that Ian does. This frustrates him too. Attempting to extend the competitive rivalry they enjoy into a friendship that

extends beyond the doorstep, Ian invites Ty and Fola to accompany him on excursions into the wider territory of the estate, but I decline permission. I fear the trouble that I know freedom, a reputation, and the desire for influence can bring to boys like Ian, Tom and Gary. Like Jenna and other girls in my area, my daughters must stay close to home, and the space of the neighbourhood is therefore gendered.

Raising the Stakes

During July I take the girls on holiday to Canada to visit my parents and there we discover to our delight that we can buy Pokemon cards from the next series, the dark cards that are not yet on sale in England.²⁰⁹ Returning home triumphantly, Ty and Fola instantly demolish Ian and Glen's trading dominance and witness Ian offering Ty his whole collection of shinies for a single dark *Raichu*, the value of which Ty has skilfully talked up to the point of almost unimaginable rarity.



Figure 16. Three different Raichu cards, from left to right, Dark Raichu, fossil Raichu and Raichu.

²⁰⁹ The restriction of children to the estate and its environs and the close relationship that develops between children and the place where they grow up is heightened, of course, if they don't have the opportunity to travel further afield, either in London to other areas or abroad. Where we live, for example, is very close to the South Bank and all its amenities but families with children in my block, either because of poverty or because of preoccupations closer to home, are rarely seen along the river. This kind of restricted geographical mobility was and continues to be a typical feature of *working class* life for some families. Others in contrast live what would conventionally have been thought of as a middle class life style, taking foreign holidays, owning houses and cars. One woman I spoke to who has this lifestyle, lives in a council flat and owns a house in Normandy, says there is a need for a name for a new class. She looks for words to describe people who are proud to be *working class* and would hate to be thought of as middle class but have a middle class lifestyle and she suggested a term - "The New *Working class*." Elsewhere I have heard the term 'New Commoners' used. I put myself in this category because I live in a council flat and have children at private school. What interests me about this phenomenon is that it makes it clear that *working class* people don't aspire to be middle class they just want to be rich. The mistake that middle class people make is that they believe that if only all *working class* people could be middle class then everything would be all right. This idea is false because it fails to comprehend the fact of *working class* pride.

Tables turned now Ian, who no longer has cards to trade with, draws on his influence in other areas and brings an older boy, Steven, from another block on the estate to trade with us. Ian is determined to get these new prestigious dark cards into the trading network and cannot do it by himself. For several weeks the majority of our spare time is taken up with the heightened excitement of more aggressive trading with this boy who is about thirteen years old, a *mixed-race* boy from a family and block on the estate that we don't know.²¹⁰ Ian is careful to warn us that this boy steals cards from kids and advises us to watch our cards carefully. Meanwhile Ian gains influence amongst older boys like Steven by bringing him to trade with us and thereby showing that he's well connected, he knows people, like us, who have *buff* cards to get hold of. Even Ian though seems nervous and unsure of himself hanging around Steven who is that much older with a more menacing reputation to contend with.

By June the trading of Pokemon cards has become a national and international phenomenon and the media buzzes with headlines and stories about the crazy things that children are doing just to acquire rare cards. One young boy who doesn't know how to trade tries to swap the whole contents of his bedroom for a single rare card. Parents despair and fail to understand. Otherwise children, and especially boys, are everywhere - on their way to school, out on the street, on the bus, any chance they get – seen to be trading frantically. Before long the fact that some children will go so far as to steal Pokemon cards from other children, sometimes at knifepoint, hits the news. The thefts do not surprise me. The value for children of having the cards

²¹⁰ These boys are about twelve or thirteen years old which is about the limit of the age that boys continued to be interested in Pokemon cards. I repeated the model of the Pokemon club in a youth club in Kennington where a friend of mine who is a youth worker works. She had discussed with me the presence in the youth club of a group of violent and disruptive young boys and I suggested that we try and repeat the Pokemon club to see if the same effect that I experienced at Tenter Ground could be replicated elsewhere. We ran the club along the same lines as the club at Tenter Ground, giving gifts of Pokemon drawings, allowing the boys to participate in colouring in and collecting drawings and we witnessed exactly the same outcomes. The boys who were dominating the club and bullying other children were eager to sit down and colour in and in this way the youth worker and I got to know the dynamic of conflict and witnessed it transposed into a new form of competitiveness. Again the manager of the club, just like Christine at school, was astounded to see the same set of boys who are usually causing mayhem, sitting down applying themselves relatively quietly to colouring in. The club was a success and we had time, unlike at school, at the end of the club to trade cards which gave me access to a whole new trading network where I learnt to trade with much more intimidating and aggressive boys. They made the boys at Tenter Ground seem tame in comparison. The oldest boy was thirteen and he gave me a sign of what begins to preoccupy older

is not for the sake of possession but rather for what they represent, which is the opportunity to trade and therefore to have the chance to gain personal prestige among peers. This creates a telling dichotomy between different kinds of children. There are those who have parents who can afford and are prepared to buy them cards as gifts to trade with and who can then learn how to trade cleverly, albeit ruthlessly. Then there are those children whose parents cannot afford to buy them Pokemon cards and who are then excluded from the means to compete for and transform their personal value amongst friends and peers. This is a desperate situation to be in. Some children will accept it unwillingly and humbly look on at their peers' participation in the Pokemon phenomenon. Other children, like Steven perhaps, who live in an area where being violent and ruthless are in themselves means to gain prestige among peers may think nothing of stealing to get what they want. Being able to steal is a particular kind of violence, which many boys are not ruthless enough to participate in. Like it or not, being able and willing to steal can be a means for tough boys to increase their prestige, especially if they are prepared to carry an object with a new and heightened significance – a *blade (knife)*. Being tough costs nothing. Prestige items on the other hand cost a lot of money and boys growing up in an area like mine are quite likely to have parents who do not have the means to distribute disposable income towards gift exchange. The incidence of theft is no surprise therefore. *(There are two kinds of people in the world. Those who battle to catch wild Pokemon and work hard to raise them well. And those who try to steal Pokemon without working hard at all.)*²¹¹

The problem of children stealing from children causes a furore among parents and provokes a national discussion about what the Pokemon phenomenon implies for children at the beginning of a new century. Parents worry that children are no longer safe on the streets and that children as young as ten years old can be armed and dangerous. Meanwhile they resent what they perceive to be the exploitation of

boys when he surreptitiously pulled out of his pocket, to show off to me during the club, a small stash of *weed* – marijuana.

²¹¹ Children are supposed to learn that work is the only legitimate means to transform the value of objects worked upon and of themselves as persons acquiring new skills, either at school or by other means. The kind of participation that the street implies becomes opposed to the value of work as a way to create and transform value – stealing is the easy way to get prestige – work is hard. Stealing is illegitimate therefore and when children steal it is shocking because it violates what children are supposed to learn very early on in their lives and that is that objects belong to people. Part of the inter-subjective contract that makes the privatisation of objects possible is the mutual and competitive desire to own private property.

children by multi-national and multi-media computer game and card manufacturing corporations.²¹² It becomes clear that children are being treated as consumers and that many people resent this as a violation of childhood which is conventionally a time in their lives when they should be protected from the apparent corruption of the capitalist economy. Reacting against the craze, schools everywhere ban Pokemon cards because of the conflict they apparently cause between children. This only serves to make the trading of cards more exciting because it suddenly becomes a subversive activity that cannot be done in open public spaces or schools where the vulnerability of children is now emphasised.

This apparent crisis in the state of the *nation's* childhood is largely a result of the unexpected and exponential increase in the value of these strange objects - *shinies*. The Pokemon phenomenon was apparently beyond adults' understanding, but I would argue that the trading of Pokemon cards became a craze simply because it gave children access to a specialised sphere of gift exchange in which rare cards functioned as prestige objects. This was a prestige system that enabled children to transform their own personal value in relation to peers as a direct effect of the transforming value of the cards. This system for creating and transforming value was the means by which the hierarchy of fraternity amongst themselves was brought into being and is just another form of the hierarchy with which children are continuously preoccupied with anyway. This dynamic of differentiation, which structures peer group formation, precedes the Pokemon phenomenon and outlives it. In this dynamic the struggle for commonality that shared competence brings and the inevitability of conflict between children are seen to be aspects of the same process in which children embody a sense of themselves in relation to others, this is what defines inter-subjectivity. The trading of cards did not create conflict between children. It simply transposed the material means for conflict into a new medium of exchange. At Tenter Ground and on the estate where I live and in my area, being tough, able to fight and do battle, embody damage and maintain prestige are what

²¹² I gave a version of this chapter as a paper at a conference in the department of philosophy in Vienna in September 2000. The conference title was World in Transition: Technoscience, Citizenship and Culture in the 21st Century. At the conference I met a delegate from the economics department in University of Sweden who told me how he and his wife refused to buy Pokemon cards for their son and so did the parents of his friends. This was because they wanted to protect them from exploitation he explained. Later he sent me copies of the Pokemon cards his son and his friends had decided to make by hand in order to try between them to instigate a sphere of exchange.

count as competition for particular kinds of boys. This tendency precedes the Pokemon phenomenon, precedes children's participation in *consumer culture* and precedes parents' and teachers' efforts to get children to be nice to each other and get on well together.

In the face of the ideas that adults have about what children should be and how they should behave the Pokemon phenomenon was a rare instance in which children were able to create and be noticed for their own value system. The effectiveness and the rapidity with which it became a national and international medium of exchange between children shocked everyone because, by definition, children are supposed to be excluded and protected from the market places that the monetary economy establishes. Little credit was given to children for participating in the creation of a system under their own control, in which the value of relatively cheap commodities was transformed via the medium of gift exchange into prestige items worth many times their original price. Anthropologists, on the other hand, are well aware that at the margin of capitalism, which is a space that children in the Western world are supposed, by definition, to occupy, gift exchange can function perfectly well. It create real opportunities for transformation in both social relations and the use value of objects. Conflict between children is transposed and takes new and surprising forms when different mediums of exchange emerge and violence reveals itself as an ideological fault line every time children do things that are apparently out of character with what adults expect of *innocent* children.

Mobile Phones – Ring Tones and Face-Offs

By the beginning of July the Pokemon phenomenon is at its height. The block that I live in is alive with the frenzied exchanges of young trading partners, newly bound by the excitement of Pokemon competitiveness. Children continue to be preoccupied with trading cards throughout the summer holiday. By August however, Ian, who has no cards left to trade with, has a new prestige item to show off - a brand new mobile phone. He is the first kid in the block to get one and the whole point of having a mobile phone, like all prestige items is to show it off and that's where the trouble starts. At the boundary of the space he is allowed to travel in, on the other side of the estate, Ian and his friend Glen encounter a group of *black* boys who take a liking to Ian and Glen's bikes and noticing Ian's mobile phone, try

to take it from him. Ian and Glen, none the worse for wear, but scared by their encounter with this group of older teenage boys, return quickly to the safety of home to tell what has happened. Ian's older brother Daniel is sixteen; he has just finished school. A week before this I was chatting with his mum about how Daniel is doing, reminiscing together about having watched him grow up on the estate. I tell her about my research and ask her if she thought Daniel would mind doing an interview with me seeing as he seems to have turned into such a *bod*. She laughs, saying, "It's true, he is a *real Bermondsey bod* now since he's hooked up with a gang of *white* boys from The Blue.²¹³" She explains that Daniel used to hang out with *black* boys before because he used to go to Walworth school but there had been a few incidents recently where he had been badly beaten up by *black* boys on the Walworth Road. Daniel's mother emphasises that she's not *racialist*, she says, "I get on with everybody and anyone round here will tell me that." She tells me that she doesn't let her boys say *racialist* things in front of her but she's heard them talking and she knows what goes on. She worries, she says, because she feels Daniel always has to prove his reputation on the street and when she tells him not to get involved, advising him to walk away he tells her that she doesn't understand. He tries to explain to her that if he walked away from confrontations he wouldn't have a reputation. Cheering up, Daniel's mother tells me that Daniel has got a lovely girlfriend now and she says she is thanking God because now they spend a lot of time indoors and so Daniel is not out on the streets with the boys where trouble starts. She tells me with pride that after the summer Daniel is going to look for a job.

²¹³ Ian and Daniel have both grown up in Bermondsey, although on the periphery close to the northern border but their parents are not Bermondsey people. This means that although they were *born and bred* here they do not have the genealogical credentials that children whose parents are Bermondsey people have. These kind of children and youths like Daniel who start to hang out with real Bermondsey bods like those who hang out down The Blue, are marginal both genealogically and geographically to what being a *real* Bermondsey person means. They can however, like Daniel, for example, be accepted into *bods'* peer groups where, because of their desire to belong, they try twice as hard to prove their credentials for belonging. When I spoke to one of the youth workers at a local youth club about Bermondsey bods, he happened to mention Daniel, explaining to me how Daniel had proudly described his forays over Tower Bridge to cause trouble with the *Pakis* who dominate the territory north of the river. The youth worker had asked him why they were doing that and Daniel had apparently replied, "Cos we're Bermondsey ain't we, that's what *bods* are, they're *racist*." *Racist* discourse and action becomes a particular form of participation that Daniel feels he must demonstrate his capacity for in order to be part of the gang of *bods* that hang out 'down The Blue.'

So Ian goes home and his brother Daniel is indoors and hears about what happened. Probably against his mother's wishes Daniel made his way straight round to this area to see if he could find these *black* boys and teach them a lesson. Nobody knows exactly what happened but at dusk terrible screaming pierces the peace of the evening. I run to the front balcony to see what is going on and Ian's mother is holding her side and crying in pain, pointing and screaming, "They're killing him, they're killing him, phone the police!" We can't see what she is pointing at or where to but witnessing the look of terror on her face I run inside and phone the police. My partner runs down to see if there is anything he can do but Daniel is long gone, apparently being chased by a gang of twelve *black* youths. It is said that one of them came into our area after Daniel's incursions into their area and hailed Daniel out from the street below the flats. Thinking he faced a one on one confrontation Daniel presumably went down without a second thought. At least ten more boys were hiding, waiting for him to come down, before they pounced.

The police arrive in numbers but are not able to prevent the eventual assault, which happens several blocks away and down a quiet street. It emerges later that the boys managed to corner Daniel and one of them used his mobile phone to call his Dad for back up. The father apparently arrived in a car with a baseball bat and assisted the boys in dragging Daniel out from under a car where he had tried to hide. They beat him to within inches of his life. The next day whilst his son lies in intensive care Daniel's father who has a reputation of his own to defend issues a warning to the man he has heard is responsible for the attack on his son. It is a warning that everyone in Bermondsey can understand and it is not an idle threat. It is popular knowledge that Bermondsey has its own justice system that runs in parallel to and often against the efforts of local police. The foundation of this justice is that you do not *grass*, because the people who need to seek revenge will do so on their own terms.²¹⁴ If you *grass* you are implicating yourself in the cycle of revenge seeking which is an extremely dangerous thing to do. It is against this background that the police struggle to bring people to conventional justice. Witnesses are a rare phenomenon in Bermondsey.²¹⁵

²¹⁴ *Grass* means give evidence to the police.

²¹⁵ A Bermondsey man tells me about a murder case a long time ago in which the victim was stabbed in a crowded pub. The policeman investigating the case had apparently said that if there are no witnesses to this murder there must have been 200 people in the toilet that night.

Eventually police charge the man who allegedly brandish the baseball bat with attempted murder and the flat where he used to live with his family, on the same housing association estate where Tom lives, is now boarded up and empty. They have been moved to safe housing fearing for their lives. Meanwhile Ian's mother and her family, fearing for their own lives too and disrupted beyond measure, struggle for the next eighteen months to try and secure a housing transfer from the council. That this incident should end up becoming an issue to do with the way the council manages housing is poignant. Time and again *white* people I interview or speak to in Bermondsey accuse the council of mismanagement and incompetence because the pressing needs of local *white* people are overlooked for the sake of outsiders, who are perceived to be *black* people and immigrants whose needs are always given precedence. The question of who owns the land rights and therefore the territory in Bermondsey is thrashed out in the tense dynamic between *white* people's sense of belonging to their *manor* and the council's legal responsibility to meet government legislation about housing people in the most need.

To most people it seems outrageous that this level of violence could escalate all because of a mobile phone. But it is about much more than that. In part it is about the way in which male prestige, from the early years of childhood from the age of ten to twenty and sometimes beyond, is constituted through the capacity for violence and brutality. This is intimately related to controlling and wielding influence over particular neighbourhood areas and sometimes leads to involvement in territorial gangs.²¹⁶ This has always been the case in Bermondsey, there is nothing new in it. *White-working-class* men from Bermondsey battled against their enemies in adjacent manors in Peckham, Walworth and the Old Kent Road long before immigrants from Africa, Jamaica and Bangladesh arrived. The dynamic of these territorial conflicts is the historical precedent that governs all present transformations. When I speak to older men and women about this precedent they say all that has changed is that young men carry knives now and take drugs, have fewer amenities to distract them and so get carried away more quickly. In addition

²¹⁶ I do not want to over emphasise the incidences of violent skirmishes in my area. I have lived here on the periphery of Bermondsey for twelve years and learned about only a handful of these kinds of brutal confrontations. The point I want to make is that having a reputation, embodying a certain

they are quick to blame the presence of *black* people on the estates as a reason for what they see as the demise of Bermondsey in general and for the escalation of violent tension in particular. What happened to Daniel becomes the stuff of legend and the evidence for what *white* people perceive to be the truth of their perceptions. But things are not so simple.

Space and *Race*

Two days after Daniel was ambushed two gangs of *white* youths further into Bermondsey were involved in skirmishes, which resulted in a youth fifteen years of age being stabbed to death. He was stabbed fifteen times. Obviously this was not reported as a *racial* assault because both gangs of youths were *white* but I would argue that to differentiate between the assaults on the basis of *race* is to miss what the assaults share in common. The point is that what all young men in Bermondsey have to contend with is a prestige system based partly on their ability to be brutal and withstand brutality in the defence of territorial areas. In this system, space, masculinity and a specific kind of bodily competence become mutually specified. Being able to handle yourself on the street where territories are mapped out is what counts. Ian was beginning to learn this when he was chasing Habib and Chetana out of his area. The increased incidence of young *black* youth's involvement in violent skirmishes on the streets of Bermondsey simply means that as particular kinds of outsiders they are confident enough to compete for prestige in this *big man* system. Perhaps as the children of immigrants from particular countries like Jamaica they, unlike Habib and Chetana, are already learning from their fathers about a way of life that combines masculinity and violence with the necessity for reputation and prestige. If so this doesn't make them much different to Bermondsey *bods*. But what they share in common is ignored or rendered irrelevant, whilst what differentiates them - the fact that *black* youths are outsiders - is accentuated in the precise terms of *race*, skin colour and what that stands for which is *cultural/national* difference.

Kinds of people become associated with their attachment to kinds of places, whether these places are blocks, areas, estates in one *manor*, boroughs of London or

disposition on the street and being prepared to intimidate and withstand intimidation are things that young men in Bermondsey must accommodate as an aspect of their developing masculinity.

countries/ *nations*. Classification systems intersect, therefore, and it is at this point that skin colour and what it stands for - people who come from different kinds of places - begins to obscure everything else that young people growing up on council estates in Bermondsey have in common. Difference becomes the metaphor through which the marking of territorial boundaries is described whilst sameness takes on a new form - Bermondsey people become *white* - where once they were *working class* people from one *manor* among many.²¹⁷ Investigation into what it means to be *working class* reveals therefore manifold conceptual distinctions and connections which are embodied in childhood and which precede the attainment of adult status that finding work and becoming *working class* implies.

Gender, Space and Developmental Cycle

Ian as a young contender in this *big man* system and Daniel as a more confident youth were both crushed by this incident. Rivals are destroyed and lose face unless they can demonstrate an equal capacity for damage and destruction. No wonder Pokemon battles have such potent meaning for boys. Ian, as a result of the assault on his brother, is not allowed to play out for a long time and mobile phones, as predicted, do go on to become the next big craze for children.²¹⁸ Not surprisingly street crime rises commensurably.

²¹⁷ I am arguing that this a development peculiar to Bermondsey; it may well be a feature of other *working class* areas but this shouldn't be taken for granted, further comparative investigation is necessary. Wallman S. (1982) gives a description of a housing area in Battersea in South London in which *ethnic* diversity appears to be celebrated. There, there is no attachment to place based on a combination of kinship and residence patterns as there is in Bermondsey. Edwards J. (2000) gives a description of born and bred kinship in a northern town called Bacup in which kinship and residence patterns are important to people, but there is no mention of *whiteness* as an aspect of personhood because outsiders there are not *black*.

²¹⁸ Mobile phones become and continue to be a craze among young people for several reasons. What interests children about them, are the various differentiating features of the phones. The following questions are important to them: What brand of phone is it? Which make of phone is it? What face-off or fascia does it have? (Fascias can be removed and changed as fashions change.) What logo does it have as a graphic on the screen? Can you download multiple choices of graphics from internet sites? What ring tones have you got? What games can you play on it? These differentiating features are the secret of a successful craze. Because peer group formation works on the basis of a shared, but finely differentiated mastery over objects of specific significance, the more levels of difference there are to explore the longer the object will enthrall and continue to mediate relations among friends.

The phones cannot physically be exchanged because their initial worth is too high and the function they serve doesn't lend itself to exchange between one person and another. There is still, however, a form of exchange in operation. What is important to young people is the comparison of prestige that possession of the object engenders. To me, the most interesting thing about mobile phones is the way that the inter-subjective relation the object mediates is made absolutely explicit because the object is itself a medium for verbal communication. The mobile phone substantiates the social relations the child is engaged in. Who phones? How often? The answers to these questions directly address the important issues of peer group formation, which are the issues of popularity and

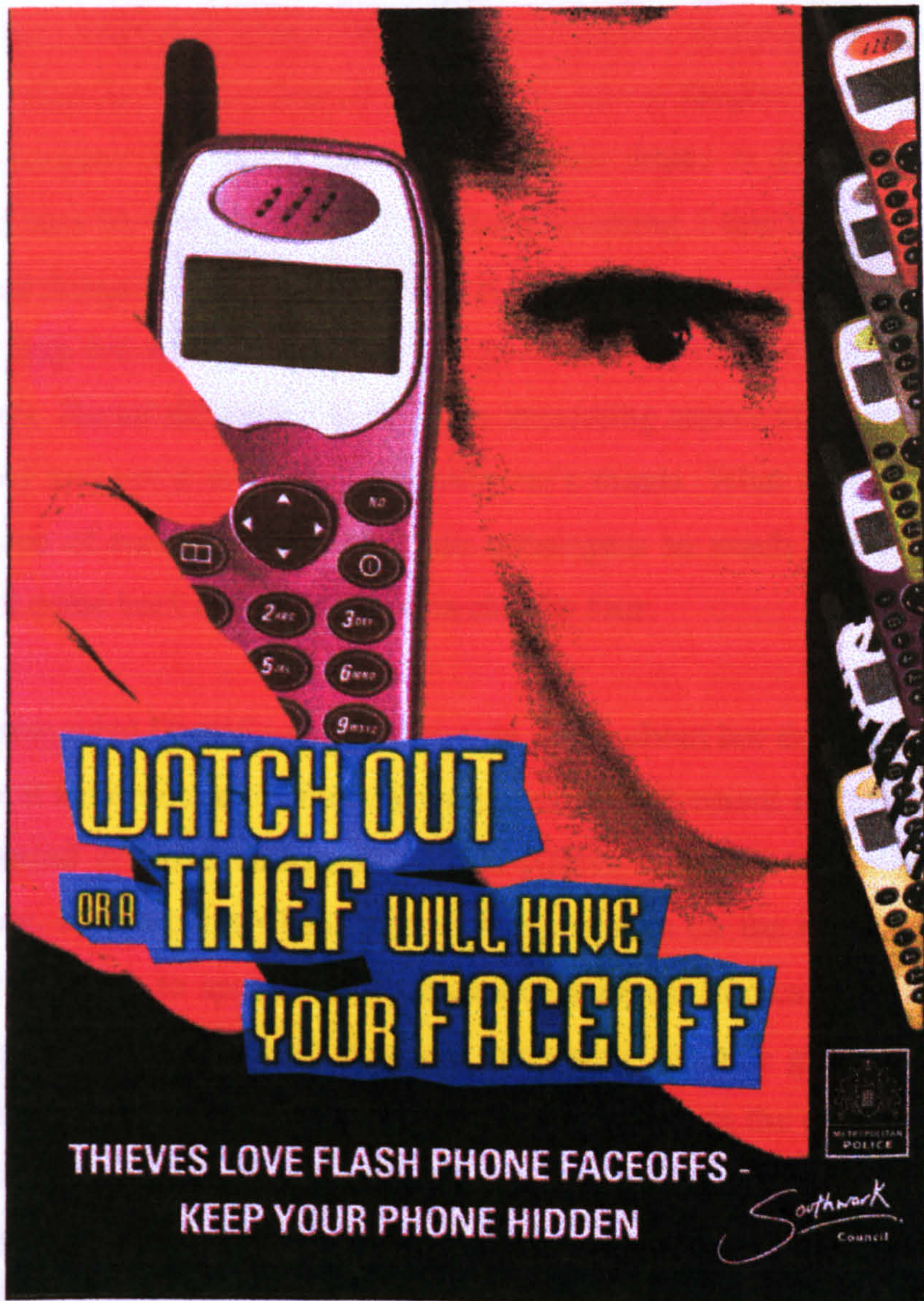


Figure 17. Southwark Council/Community Safety Campaign to warn children about the dangers of showing off their mobile phones. Reproduced with kind permission. © Southwark Council.

When I do see Ian outside it is obvious that he has to stay close to home now. He is playing in the car park with Jenna and her brothers, encouraging Jenna to call the

friendship. With mobile phone ownership children are differentiated one from the other on the basis of the desire and ability to contend for competitive equality and children whose parents cannot afford to pay the considerable bills that mobile phones entail are excluded from the means for gaining prestige among peers.

It is no surprise that street thefts reached epic proportions with the increasing ownership among young people and children of mobile phones because each handset can be worth up to £300. Often parents who buy expensive gifts like this for their children are those parents who are reluctant to deny their child the chance to compete for prestige among peers. They, like Gary's parents, want their children to win and won't see them go without. This pride, which prevents a parent from seeing her child go without creates very real pressure for parents. It did for Tom's mother, for example, when she imagined that selling cocaine might be a good way to bring in a bit of extra money to buy things for the kids. Parents who know what it was like to have gone without as children are the most likely to make sure their kids don't go without anything that matters to them. It is a matter of pride and no one wants to lose face.

young African children, who are thrilled to be old enough to come out to play now, *niggers*. They intimidate them into going back inside, and don't allow them the freedom to play out. Ian meanwhile stops talking to my daughters and me. I wonder if that is because they are *mixed race* and their father is *black* but because I understand how he must be feeling I don't say anything. I don't try to explain how complicated things are or remind him that it was my partner who was the first to go down and help his mother when she was pushed aside trying to save Daniel from his attackers. *Racial* difference is the least interesting aspect of what's at stake in Bermondsey and yet it is what is on everyone's minds. What trick, I ask myself, does the idea of *race* achieve that it can encompass so much and yet explain so little? I will come back to this question in chapter four.

Remembering what Daniel's mother has said to me about her expectation for him I realise that it is important to situate young men's involvement in street violence as just one period in the developmental cycle (Goody J. 1958) of the household in Bermondsey. At the point when *bods* with reputations on the street begin to date *nice* girls they start to spend more time indoors again. Ironically the relationship between space and gender that makes it impossible for nice girls to compete for prestige on the street in the same way as boys saves *bods* in the end. *Nice* girls who stay close to home are the best possible things that can happen to Bermondsey *bods* and their mothers who worry about them desperately. This is because the girlfriend in her domain, which is the domestic space, begins to take precedence over his peer group of troublesome youths and the street where violent skirmishes unfold.²¹⁹ No wonder that relationships between daughters-in-law and mothers of boys in Bermondsey can become very close, the girlfriend is the mother's ally in the battle to secure her son's future and perhaps his life. After or about the same time that he starts to go steady with a girl a Bermondsey *bod* might get a job, that's what every mother hopes for because there is security in that too, but I will discuss the implications of employment and money in chapter five. What is important to emphasise here is that situating young men's peer group territoriality as just one

²¹⁹ This difference, between a man's relationship to his male friends, the things that boys like to do together and his relationship with his girlfriend or wife at home is the source of tension which finds ritual expression in pre-marital occasions such as 'the stag night' and 'the hen night.' Where should a man's allegiances lie – with his mates or with his wife who saves him from them? This dynamic is also the source of much of English comedy and advertising for domestic products and services, such

aspect of the development cycle makes it imperative to argue for increasing investment in out of school and especially summer holiday youth club provision in areas like Bermondsey. This might be the only chance that boys have to resist the *big man* system that a number of young men fail to survive.

In an article describing the gentrification of Bermondsey a journalist asserts that the old Bermondsey has finally been tamed. Presumably he hasn't spent time talking with local people and fails to realise that claiming a space in is not just about buying up the land or its properties which smacks of the arrogance of monetary control. Those *born and bred* here, their allies and especially the young men at the warrior stage of their lives still feel that Bermondsey belongs to them and are ready to die defending it. Listening to them talk in the youth club, which features in the next chapter, the word 'tamed' doesn't come to mind. The chapter describes the significance of peer relations among older teenage youths and is concerned with reproduction of economic and political relations in the broader context of social life.

as adverts where the furious wife attends upon her husband and his mates who have taken over the living room to watch football on a Sunday afternoon.

Chapter Four

Dirt, Disgust and Desire: The Death of a *Community*?

Part I

Puff, Pubs and Patriots: Music and Racial Politics in Bermondsey

Part I i) Race

Kitchen Germs

I meet Lee, who is sixteen and father to a baby boy nine months old, outside a youth club on a freezing February evening, 2001, having a *puff*,²²⁰ waiting for the doors to be unlocked by the youth workers. Wondering who I am he asks me what I'm doing there. I introduce myself and tell him that I'm writing a book about Bermondsey *bods* and he replies, teasing me, "What - *Kitchen Germs*?" Not understanding what he means, I look at him askance. He explains that *Kitchen Germs* is what *Roaders* call Bermondsey *bods*: *Berms* rhymes with *Germs*. I laugh and ask if he is from Bermondsey and he tells me he was born and grew up in Peckham but like many Peckham *white* youths he's not proud of it. I ask him why and he replies, "Cos of all the *blacks*," and adds, "I never hang out down there."

Inside the club Lee challenges me to prove to him that I am not *the old bill*. I ask him what makes him think I am. He replies, "You just look like *the old bill*." Intrigued, I wonder aloud what it is about me that makes me look like a policewoman and he says, "Your hair." Lee's not the first person to tell me that I look like *the old bill*. Terry, a Bermondsey man who lives in the neighbourhood of Tenter Ground School tells me that there are certain pubs he wouldn't take me to because people would think I was *the old bill*. Below shoulder length, naturally curly, my hair is tied back in a loose ponytail; I certainly look nothing like a Bermondsey *bird*²²¹, but didn't expect to be mistaken for a policewoman.²²² I try

²²⁰ Smoking *weed*/marijuana.

²²¹ A *bird* is a woman.

²²² From the very beginning of my fieldwork people made it clear to me that the way I dressed wasn't appropriate to the way women of my age are expected to dress in Bermondsey. One woman for example, said she couldn't take me to the pub until I bought myself a pair of smart black slacks and loafers. Turning up to the working men's club in jeans, trainers and jeans jacket I was teased mercilessly about looking like an Australian back packer. The next week I dressed up in smart, feminine clothes, wore make up, and was well received. I realised by the end of my fieldwork that my hair was a problem because it is too natural and has no obvious style. Not having a *proper* hairstyle I missed the opportunity to demonstrate pride through attention to careful styling of my personal appearance. Most women in Bermondsey dye their hair blond or have blond highlights and a naturally blond, blue-eyed girl is the ideal of desirability. I wonder how long it takes during a period of fieldwork before an anthropologist begins to embody, as an aspect of the subtle exchanges pertaining to bodily competence, changes in intimate aspects of her personal appearance and physical demeanour. In the end I tease Lee, warning him that if he doesn't stop going on about *the old bill* then next time he sees me I'll have had my hair cut and dyed blond. "No, no, no," he

to convince Lee that I'm not from the police, that I really am writing a book and he responds, "What would you have done if when you came up to talk to me outside, I'd said, 'Why don't you fuck off you cunt?' " Looking him straight in the eye, trying not to appear intimidated, I tell him, "I would have gone right ahead and fucked off." He laughs and asks me where I live, trying to find out if I'm an outsider, testing my local knowledge. I tell him which estate I live on and he asks me if I know John (see chapter three) and his family and I explain that I do emphasising that it was me who phoned the police on the night John was attacked. Lee is a good friend of John's and so he begins to relax then, believing in the honesty of my intentions, knowing that I am, as the youth workers said I was, *straight up*.²²³

Being a *Bod* - Having a *Racist* Reputation

Sitting on the comfortable chairs in the warmth of the pool-table room I ask Lee what it is about *black* people he doesn't like and he says, " 'Cos they're scum, they're thieves, muggers, murderers." He goes on to explain how he thinks *black* people are here to kill because, he reasons, "If you check anyone whose been running around in Nigeria, bare feet, stepping on glass and that, they must be tough." Lee's friend Mark, who was *born and bred* in Bermondsey, explains his worst fear which is that soon the whole of Bermondsey will be taken over by *black* people.²²⁴ He emphasises, "I hate 'em, they come into the estates and ruin 'em because they come from living in mud huts and then that's why they don't know how to keep their places clean and before you know it it's spoiled where they can't even put their rubbish in the skip properly."²²⁵ He continues, "Look at them new

says, looking worried, "Don't do that, you shouldn't change yourself to please other people, you should be who you are."

²²³ *Straight up* means for real, honest, nothing shady or dishonest.

²²⁴ This is a common fear among Bermondsey people. An elderly woman Mrs. McAlester explains to me that she now feels, in Bermondsey, like the American Indians must have felt when they were pushed off their land and put on reserves.

²²⁵ The stereotype of African primitivism probably hasn't changed much in several decades in Bermondsey. A general lack of geographical and historical awareness beyond the confines of Bermondsey's boundaries is common among poorly educated people so that it would be inconceivable, for example, for people to imagine Africans living in the cities and urban conurbations that are associated with modernisation. This does not mean that there are no longer people in Africa living in villages because there are, but it is the social perception of what 'living in

houses on Lynton Road that's full of *blacks* now and it's *naughty*²²⁶ there now. I wouldn't even walk down there on my own." I ask Mark how he feels about the *yuppies* that are just as much outsiders in Bermondsey as *black* people are. He says, "I don't mind 'em 'cos they stay up near the river and they're nice, it's all the fucking council's fault for moving the *blacks* in here."²²⁷

Another *bod* comes over to ask what we're doing and Lee tells him, "We're telling 'er about the *blacks*," and the youth responds, "What *niggers*? Line em all up and shoot em. Cunts. Round 'em up, that's what I say." His friend playing pool overhears, agrees and they all laugh whilst I begin to wonder if I have put myself and possibly my family in danger by coming here. Suddenly a young *black* guy walks in to the club and several of the *bods* including Lee *check for* him,²²⁸ asking "All right Vince?" as they greet him. This is not a matter of courtesy because *bods* don't greet people they don't *check for*. Stunned by the apparent paradox between the previous conversation about how much he hates *black* people and the respectful greeting Lee has just extended to a *black* person, I resume our conversation. I ask Lee, "How it can be that when there are no *black* people in the room everyone is '*chatting all that*'²²⁹ about *niggers* and then when a *black* person walks in everyone *checks for* him? Lee explains, "It's because we know him, he's

a mud hut' means that concerns me here. Africans are associated with the poverty and squalor that Bermondsey people feel they have struggled over several generations to escape. People are afraid of the poverty that they associate with African and Asian countries and are desperate to defend themselves from it.

²²⁶ *Naughty* means dangerous.

²²⁷ When Bermondsey people refer to the council like this they are talking about Southwark Council as opposed to Bermondsey Borough Council which was subsumed within Southwark Council in 1965. Bermondsey Borough Council existed as an independent borough from 1900 – 1965. Its first mayor was Colonel S.B. Bevington, head of the most prosperous local leather treatment firm. The loss of their own Council is a source of deep regret for people because Bermondsey Borough Council worked solely on behalf of *local* people and was widely perceived to be protectionist of its housing, resources and amenities. Outsiders referred to Bermondsey Borough council as the Bermondsey Mafia because it controlled everything and looked after the interests of Bermondsey people exclusively. When I spoke to a man from the Walworth Road who now lives in Bermondsey he explained to me that all through his childhood his mother dreamed of being housed in Bermondsey but never bothered to apply because her husband said, "We'll never get a look in."

²²⁸ To *check for* someone or something is to respect it/him/her.

²²⁹ *Chatting all that* means talking big.

all right. If I didn't know him first I would hate him because of the way he looks with the hairstyle and the way he dresses.”

Whiteness

Vince, the *black* youth, wears his hair in China bumps,²³⁰ sports a flashy tracksuit and what *bods* call *black* boys' trainers. *Bods* in contrast have their own instantly recognisable dress code consisting of navy blue track bottoms, Nike or Reebok as opposed to Adidas trainers with a hooded sweat top and on their heads standard hair cuts or baseball caps.²³¹ *Bods* can choose from only one of two or three haircuts including the French Crop and a close shave. Out of the most intimate objects – clothes – and mutable aspects of the body – hairstyles – *bods* make a uniform that signifies allegiance to their peer group and to their *manor*. In relation to these specific forms of materiality – clothes and hairstyles – which, are subject to changes in fashion, *bods* constitute peer relations but also the specific meaning of what is immutable about their bodies. Focussing on skin colour as a symbol of more significant differences *bods* make themselves *white* out of the continuous negation of everything they believe being *black* means. *Whiteness* becomes the shared substance in relation to which friendship and more, allegiance to their battle cry, is constituted as a particular kind of mastery amongst Bermondsey *bods*. Their reputation on the street, put to the test in territorial conflict with *white* and *black* boys from other *manors* becomes the means by which youths in Bermondsey make *whiteness* synonymous with being a *bod*. Vehemently racist discourse becomes a form of posturing that runs in parallel with and begins to supersede the historical precedence of antagonistic relations with other *white-working-class* youths, *Roaders*, from the Walworth Road and Old Kent Road. What is continuous, despite this apparently dramatic transformation towards *racist* conflict amongst youths, is the consistent relevance of conflict itself. I cannot over emphasise how

²³⁰ China bumps were a fashionable way for *black* boys to wear their hair during the time of my fieldwork because of the popularisation of the style by Craig David, the UK Garage singer. The style involves dividing short hair into sections and twisting it down into neat little bumps.

²³¹ The alternative look usually associated with slightly older youths or men would be smart jeans with a designer shirt under a smart jumper with smart loafers or trainers and close shaved/short

far the preoccupation with racial tension obscures what *working-class* boys – black and *white* - hanging out on the streets, have in common. What they share is involvement in peer groups in which the capacity for violence and brutality is highly valued as the stuff with which reputations are made. This is as true for *black* boys in Peckham as it is for *Roaders* from the Walworth and Old Kent Road and *bods* in Bermondsey. Racist talk simply demonstrates the capacity for one kind of intimidation among others. It creates tension for *bods* between the commonality of a past shared with *black* boys at school, a significant number of whom are their friends, and the conflict of the future in which similarity must be disavowed.

Taboo

Because skin colour is given and not achieved it makes the differences that skin colour signify seem natural and therefore objective as opposed to being at once social and subjective. Intrinsically criminal or otherwise dangerous, dirty and primitive, *black* and especially African people are trapped in a negative stereotype in the minds of these *white* youths. They hold an idea of Africa inspired by fear and loathing that generates discourses of taboo, pollution and the need for protection (Douglas M. 1991 orig. 1966). This stereotype appears to foreclose the possibility of the youths acquiring any knowledge and/or experience with *black* people that could alter the perceptions they feel so sure of, but in reality *bods* share the understanding that each of them has made friends with *black* boys at school. *Bods* do not stop to consider that their way of life, in a place with a past that presses closely to squalor and deprivation, is itself filled with the likelihood of poverty, criminality and the fear of intimidation and violence.²³² This is a life

haircut. A middle-aged woman says to me when she is talking about Bermondsey men, "You can tell a *chap* by the shoes he wears." A *chap* is a man worth dating.

²³² People in Bermondsey make a distinction between what they call '*black* boys' crime' and the kind of crimes that Bermondsey boys commit. In Bermondsey it is accepted that you don't, 'steal from your own,' or resort to becoming a *drummer* – a *drum* is a house - meaning that Bermondsey thieves don't break into houses. A woman whose ex-husband was an armed robber explained to me that everyone has ideas about the different kinds of crimes that various groups of people commit. *Pykies* (Irish gypsies), she says, are notorious for robbing country houses of antiques whilst Nigerians thieves are renowned for all kinds of fraud.

remarkably similar to the one they accuse *black* people of living but similarities between *black* and *white* youths growing up in South London, are denied in the desire to emphasise difference.²³³

A Bermondsey man explained his perception that in Bermondsey there is very little 'crime against the person.' Mugging, for example, is considered to be what *black* boys do and is thought of as petty and pathetic. The assaults on the elderly and young children that mugging involves are scandalous to Bermondsey people. Not 'robbing from your own' means that whilst everyone in the neighbourhood knows who is stealing and involved in crime, neighbours don't themselves feel personally at risk. So, when the man says that there is very little crime against the person what he actually means is against the Bermondsey person. He goes on to explain that drug dealing aside, the scale and ambition of Bermondsey thefts is bigger. Crimes are committed against corporations and businesses not individuals. This, however, is all changing now, he tells me, because of the desperation of *scag heads* in Bermondsey. Heroin addicts will steal anything they can get their hands on to get a few quid together to buy enough heroin for one hit.

²³³ During the era of industrialisation in England when liberal minded philanthropists and politicians became interested in, or horrified by, the living conditions of the labouring *classes* in the slums of the cities, the squalor they discovered was sometimes likened to the living conditions of 'Negroes in Africa' (Cannadine D. 2001):

"For as the British contemplated the unprecedented numbers massed together in their new industrial cities, they tended to compare these great towns at home with the 'dark continents' overseas, and thus equate the workers in factories with coloured peoples abroad. The 'shock cities' of the 1830s were seen as resembling 'darkest Africa' in their distant, unknown and unfathomable menaces; and during the third quarter of the nineteenth century London's newly discovered 'residuum' and 'dangerous *classes*' were likened in their character and their conduct – to the 'Negroes' of empire. (P.5-6)

It is important to emphasise therefore that the prejudice *working class* people in England feel towards *black* people is no different to the prejudice middle and *upper class* people feel towards the *working classes*. The pride of *working class* people fights back against this prejudice and celebrates its own, often subversive, value system by means of which people preserve their own distinctively local character. Part of the pride of Bermondsey people is about having survived and in many cases prospered after the arduous deprivations of the past. Pride takes the form, in part, of a continuous distancing relationship from people who are not managing to rise out of poverty. Thus the contempt for *scag-heads*, *low-lives* and Africans who are perceived to come from 'living in mud huts.' Anger is directed down the social hierarchy.

Because of the degree of prejudice against *black* people in Bermondsey it is ironic that one of the main thoroughfares is called Jamaica Road. It is pertinent also that the dockside industry, which led to the creation of Bermondsey as it was in the 19th and early 20th Century, was as much a product of the British Empire as are the kinds of prejudices Bermondsey people maintain about Africa. *White-working-class* peoples were linked, via the chain of shipping, docking and food production in factories, with the dark-skinned people labouring on the other side of the world under the subjugation of British rule. Just like Jamaica Road which runs through the centre of Bermondsey, at the heart of the industrial transformation that made the place what it is, there is an inseparable relation between the peoples of Bermondsey, Britain, Africa, South-East Asia and the Caribbean. This productive and political relationship is not however a source of solidarity between *black* and *white* people but rather the subject of a powerful denial. All that matters is that whilst the very existence of the Empire emphasised hierarchical relations and took for granted the inferiority of *working class* people in England, *working class* people could be reassured by assumptions about the inferiority of 'coloured' peoples subjugated by British rule. The end of the Empire has brought with it, however, the transformation of hierarchy and an increasing ideal of equality for all British subjects regardless of racial and ancestral origins. As the vestiges of Empire and British interests overseas retract and economic and political transformation ensues, migrants have followed like a centrifugal force to stake their claim in the future of the *nation* that their countries were involved in

In the previous chapter a detailed account was given of the way particular kinds of boys' preoccupations - that is, the material basis of their peer groups, such as computer games technology, competence in fighting and Pokemon card exchange - forms the grounds of friendship as a continuous social process. Skin colour, the idea of *race* and what comes to be known later as *cultural* differences between people are, at this early primary school age, largely irrelevant to peer group formation. This was the case even if children, like Emma (see chapter one), lived in homes that were typically prejudiced against *black* and *Asian* people. As I showed towards the end of chapter three, however, everything that young children growing up in Bermondsey have in common becomes the background against which what marks them out as different, their visual appearance, and especially their skin colour, gains in significance during their teenage years.²³⁴ These transformations are to be understood as an aspect of the developmental cycle of both childhood and the household in Bermondsey because desire and eventually

creating. It is this transformation that Bermondsey people, and indeed all people of a conservative inclination in the country, are struggling with when they subscribe to the outpouring about the crisis that the immigration of *black* people implies for the *nation's* identity. Out of this crisis they create the illusion of a harmonious past when hierarchical *class* relations between *white* people were uncorrupted by the challenges of *race* and *multi-culturalism*. Witness the renewal of the British National Party, which I will discuss later. The truth of the matter is that ideas about racial difference obscure both the similarities between *black* and *white* people and the multiple points of difference, oppression and conflict between *white* people.

My understanding of the politics of *race* relations is ethnographic in the sense that it is an understanding arrived at by means of the social relations I have engaged in since my arrival in London in 1984. I am grateful to Wendy Francis for her comments on this chapter and for the insightful discussion about *race* that we have been having since we were undergraduates together. Because my interest here is specifically in the idea of *race* that people, including myself, have in their everyday understanding I have not referred to the extensive literature pertaining to the history of racial politics in Britain. The work required to tie the observations of this chapter to a critical discussion of the literature will be the subject of another paper.

²³⁴ In part II of this chapter I will give a detailed analysis of how the conceptual distinctions arising from differences in visual appearance are constituted by children at Tenter Ground School. It will be seen that at this young age, children between the ages of five and eleven increasingly make the differences in visual appearance between them, including gender, significant but they do so in surprising ways. What is most unexpected about this analysis is that it reveals that primary school children's increasing preoccupation with differences in physical appearance is not necessarily constituted at the expense of what is similar between them. I call this phenomenon **The Equilibrium Effect**.

marriage between young people is regulated in relation to ideas about what it means to become a particular kind of youth.²³⁵

House-proud Bermondsey Women - Cleaning the Neighbourhood into Existence

Resentment about the condition of and access to social housing is the primary source of so-called *racist* hatred towards *black* people in Bermondsey. Prejudice against incoming outsiders and *black* families in particular prevented the incorporation of these kinds of women into the turn-taking cycle for cleaning communal areas in estate blocks. Cleaning as a specific form of exchange was once the predominant means by which neighbourhood relations between women living on council estates were constituted. Vera, my next door neighbour, who has lived in her flat for forty years, remembers how women once took it in turns to clean the stairs and the landings.²³⁶ “You could eat off the stairs in them days,” she says. Vera emphasises that people who lived in our block were once *decent*, explaining that there was no *social*²³⁷ to rely on. Vera explains that, “It was only hard work that got dinner on the table and a woman went to work and did her

²³⁵ Because ideological transformations are characteristic of the developmental cycle it is equally possible to imagine that when youths become adults the focus on ideas of *race* and *cultural* difference diminish in importance especially as an aspect of the mellowing of middle age. It is important to emphasise therefore that the meaning of social relations is constituted as a social process from birth until death and is not the preserve of childhood years (Toren 1990). The study of social transformation, from an anthropological perspective, requires a historical sensitivity, not just to *national* and local changes but also to the constitutive process itself. History both surpasses *culture*, *society* and *identity* as an analytical tool and becomes in Toren’s model (1990, 1993a), a two-fold task. This is because there is the necessity to attend to the historical precedents, which precede current social transformations and at the same time to investigate the specific details of the way that children constitute, over time, the categories of understanding through which adult life is organised. This historical model for anthropological enquiry is not necessarily an abandonment of anthropology’s social scientific status, however, because of the systematic methods in which an adequately objective history is produced (Toren 1999) (See part II of this chapter for a discussion of innovative ethnographic methods).

²³⁶ Communal areas in the block of flats are divided into stairs and landings. In my block for example there are four floors with eight flats on each floor. The landings are the communal spaces in front of each flat fronted by the balcony, which all flats share. Landings lead to staircases, which join floors and lead to the outside spaces of the estate, car parks, pathways, gardens etc. which are cared for by the council’s caretakers.

²³⁷ *Working class* pride is just that – pride about *working*. Working was once the only difference between poverty’s deprivations and respectability. Social security in contrast is the cushion that protects people who cannot work, but there is no pride in claiming it because it doesn’t provide

housework everyday.” She stresses that the women cleaned their windows every week, doorsteps everyday and took pride in where they lived because they were grateful for what was then newly refurbished housing. She laments that the once close relationship between neighbours has been lost.²³⁸ “In them days,” she says, “Everyone left their doors wide open so that children and neighbours could come and go freely. There was never any thought of anyone stealing from anyone else like there is now.” Vera explains, “If your neighbour had a loaf of bread she’d be sure to bring you half.” Everyone knew that everyone else was going without and pride in the face of poverty is what Bermondsey women had in common. “Now,” Vera says, “Everyone keeps to themselves and there’s all sorts moving in, you never know who you’ll get next.”

Prejudice

Vera recalls the problems she experienced when the first *coloured* families from Jamaica moved into the block. The women, Vera explains, didn’t know about the system for sharing responsibility for cleaning of the communal areas. She illustrates her point with a story about a day when she was chatting on the landing with a neighbour after her turn for cleaning the stairs was over. Suddenly, Vera says, a huge great bucketful of dirty water came swooshing down all over her beautiful clean stairs. In fury she rushed up to find the Jamaican woman trying to clean the stairs on her floor. Vera says she realised that the woman was making an effort to clean the landing because she had seen the other women doing it. What the woman didn’t realise, because no one had gone to explain it to her, was that cleaning of communal areas was organised on the basis of a turn-taking exchange. Incorporation of a new neighbour usually began when an influential woman on the landing knocked on her door to explain what was expected of her in terms of cleaning standards. In this way a woman from a newly arrived family would be

enough money to make a *decent* living. Many people claim the social and work cash jobs but it is not easy to do and therefore most are usually aiming to go *legit* – i.e. get a legitimate job.

²³⁸ Although Vera emphasises the closeness that communal living once implied the women were also notoriously fiercely competitive about the standard of their cleaning which sometimes provoked hostility between neighbours. Cleaning was and still is a competitive form of exchange and therefore both commonality and conflict between women are implied in this practice.

incorporated into the neighbourhood through the practice of cleaning as an intimate form of reciprocity in which being the kind of person who deserves to live in the block was, in part, measured.

The failure to incorporate outsiders; Jamaican, Irish and later Bangladeshi and African women, into the system for cleaning the neighbourhood into existence constituted a blatant disavowal of outsiders' neighbourly status. **Prejudice is expressed at its most fundamental level as a refusal to allow outsiders to enter into the established exchange relations, in which the belonging of long standing group members is defined.** The Jamaican woman's efforts to participate appropriately reflected her desire to learn from the women in the block and therefore to be a good neighbour. But when a newcomer faced the blunt rebuttal that outsiders in Bermondsey notoriously received how could she learn the specifics of the particular practices in which cleanliness and *decency* was constituted? Exclusion from the gendered forms of exchange in which Bermondsey people are brought into being emphasises the inclusion of insiders and highlights the marginality and difference of outsiders as other kinds of people. Exclusion involves making the peripheral participation of a person who is willing to learn illegitimate.²³⁹ This prevents the development of appropriate participation and the inability of the newcomer to engage in essential exchanges becomes the evidence Bermondsey people needed to confirm what they had already decided for themselves – namely their preconceived idea that *black* people are dirty. Polluting qualities are not ascribed to *black* people alone however. The point I want to emphasise is that in Bermondsey people are preoccupied with the unwanted presence of outsiders and with the necessity for protection from penetration of the boundaries, which make Bermondsey into a cohesive space containing certain kinds of people. Youths at the warrior stage of their lives take on this protective role, policing the boundaries where the interface with outsiders is constituted as a hostile relationship. It is no surprise then that *white* people from the other side of

²³⁹ For a discussion of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave 1991) see chapters two and three.

the Old Kent and Walworth Roads – *Roaders*, make people from Bermondsey synonymous with infectious germs. The boundary is permeable in both directions.

The blame for the change in *community* relations in Bermondsey is often laid at the door of the council and its policy of housing newcomers and outsiders. Ironically however it is as much the failure of Bermondsey people to incorporate newcomers that has led to the disintegration of neighbourhood relations. The apportioning of blame and the scapegoating of outsiders, of whom *black* people have become the most potent visual symbol, conceals the difficulties people face when they live communally in social housing. But it is not only Bermondsey women who scapegoat *black* people and project on to them dirtiness as a polluting quality. One day, as I am chatting with one of the Bengali Muslim mothers on the ground floor of my block, we are moaning about the way that the bin area has become unsightly with rubbish spilling everywhere. She suggests, without a second's thought, "The trouble is they are letting too many *black* people move in." Apart from the fact that she knows and greets my partner and hasn't stopped to think that I might be offended I am astounded by her presumption.²⁴⁰ I am shocked to discover that everyone seems somehow to have prejudices about everyone else and realise that *white* people's *racism* is just one form of prejudice among others.²⁴¹ The focus on difference divides people in the block, making us lose sight

²⁴⁰ This same woman is a childminder to at least two African women's children. This is becoming a common pattern on council estates in Bermondsey. Bangladeshi Muslim women, whose husbands prefer them not to work because of the potential for immodest contact with men, allow their wives to become childminders at home. Often the children they are caring for are the sons and daughters of Nigerian women.

²⁴¹ *White* people are often heard to say that *black* people can be *racist* too. But my understanding has always been that the difference between prejudice, which all people are capable of, and *racism* which only *white* people are guilty of, is that *white* people have had the power to turn their prejudice to discrimination. The perception on the street, however, is that this power relation is changing in places where *black* people are in a position of dominance *white* people are beginning to feel discriminated against. A woman, who is the mother in a family living in a block of flats where hers is the last *white* family there, says she feels discriminated against by the African women who are now in a majority. "What am I supposed to do about that?" she says, "I'm not *racialist* but if I go to the council to complain they will tell me that *black* people can't be *racialist* and accuse me of being *racialist* instead." *Bods* on the street feel that *the old bill*, since the Stephen Lawrence case, are now held hostage by *black* youths because all *black* boys have to do to get away with what they are doing is to cry *racism*. Meanwhile *bods* feel that the police come down heavily on them all the time and there's nothing they can do about it.

of what we share in common which is the struggle against the constraints imposed by the kind of housing we live in. I don't collect my thoughts quickly enough to ask the Muslim woman if she has actually seen *black* people recklessly disposing of their rubbish but I have certainly seen the kind of *white* people Vera despairs of because, "They're not decent," throwing rubbish over the balcony instead of bothering to take it down to the bin. When the bin bag smashes everywhere the rubbish spills onto the concrete where people have to come and go to get into and out of the flats. It only takes one of two families who couldn't care less to spoil it for everyone. No one wants to clean other people's dirt so usually the mess they have made stays there until the caretaker arrives for his once weekly clean by which time the rubbish is smelly and disgusting.²⁴²

Prejudice, Racism and *Real Life*

Analysis of the historical precedents that underlie present preoccupations has shown that the prevalence of *racism* in Bermondsey is inseparable from the wider political, economic and social context of British history. Understood at the local level *racism* is no simple matter. It would be short-sighted and unhelpful not to situate the development of *racism* in Bermondsey in terms of the more fundamental xenophobia in which previous conflicts with other kinds of outsiders, such as *Roaders*, who are *white* people, become relevant.²⁴³ The preceding analysis has revealed how, on council estates, women cleaned neighbourhoods into existence and that cleaning, as a particular form of exchange, prevented insularity, which arises when each family in a block of flats keeps to itself. In the face of the difficulties of communal living it's easy to see why *yuppies* in luxury apartments can be *nice* and clean. They don't have this concern for dirt since their service charges pay for cleaners, care-takers and permanent, often 24 hour concierge

²⁴² When my children come up and down the stairs they hold their noses and encourage friends who have come to visit to do the same. In this way they accommodate a level of shame about the place that they live in and this counteracts the pride that I am struggling to take in our individual home.

²⁴³ A *white* person, from Peckham for example is an outsider as long as s/he lives in Peckham but as soon as s/he comes to live on an estate in Bermondsey his/her status as an outsider changes because s/he is now a resident outsider. Resident *white* outsiders have more status than resident *black* outsiders.

service. Whilst Mark, Lee's friend, despairs of the necessity to have to live on estates in Bermondsey which were once kept spotlessly clean and have now become dirty and run down, he fails to understand that this is about more than the arrival of *black* people. This is as much about the mismanagement of social housing as it is about the failure of Bermondsey women, because of their prejudice, to integrate *black* women and other outsiders via the means in which neighbourhoods were traditionally made *decent* - through the cleaning of communal areas. Perhaps it is also about the failure of *black* women and other kinds of outsiders to take up *real* Bermondsey women's lead. What is certain is that prejudice has proved to be counter-productive and the legacy of house-proud Bermondsey women is lost.²⁴⁴

Newcomers in Bermondsey estates are divided, then, between those who belong because of *born and bred* or other kinds of kinship connections, those who are *yuppies* and those outsiders who are dependent on state assistance in the form of social housing. Taking pride in having survived the deprivations of the past and defensive of amenities hard won and fiercely protected, Bermondsey people have no desire to assist in improving the welfare of new arrivals from the outside, *white* or *black*. On the contrary needy newcomers are condemned for using and having privileged access to the services, like affordable council housing, which *real* Bermondsey people feel they and their families ought to be able to benefit from. Those outsiders who arrive and are in need have become synonymous in Bermondsey people's eyes with immigrants. Immigrants are thought of more recently as being people of African or *Asian* origin where originally they would

²⁴⁴ During my fieldwork I certainly learnt the value of being house-proud and despite myself began to spend more time cleaning. I became aware of the fact that taking pride in one's *house* both inside and out is one of the primary ways in which relations between *working class* women are constituted. Instead of resenting housework I began to enjoy it as light relief from hours spent writing at the computer. On the horizon of each hour spent cleaning is the possibility either that a future conversation will require an exchange pertaining to the day's housework or that some one you know is going to pop round and make a judgement about the state of your home. After the conversation with Vera about communal cleaning I actually noticed how dirty my windows were and made an effort to clean them which she noticed. Teasing me as I cleaned she said, "Hurry up Gillian! You can do mine next."

have been people who had come from Ireland and Jamaica.²⁴⁵ *Yuppies*, who are considered to be wealthy *white* people living in their luxury apartments, are immune from Bermondsey people's most vehement contempt for outsiders. This is because they are rich, keep to themselves and are not to be found on the estates which, are the places where Bermondsey people are struggling to live in badly maintained and often over-crowded housing. The difficulty in this kind of social housing is that each family lives in close proximity to the others and shares the use of communal spaces such as balconies, stairs and bin areas. The problem is that each family does not necessarily have the same idea about their responsibility for care of communal spaces. With inadequate care-taking facilities blocks can quickly become dirty, smelly and run down. It is in relation to these difficulties that Mark's opinions have, in part, been formed. It is easier for Mark to project the reasons for the decline in conditions on the estates on *black* people than it is to take responsibility for it himself.²⁴⁶

Comparing the estate that he lives on now with the one that he grew up on, Anthony's step-dad²⁴⁷ explains the difference. "What you've got on the estates now is a lot of people thrown together who have nothing in common except the fact that they live in the same place." Anthony's little sister who is six years old tells me, when we are talking together at school, that she's not allowed to play with the growing number of African children in her area. When I ask her why she says, "They're dirty, they don't keep the place clean and my mum is sick of cleaning when they don't take their turn." Meanwhile Temi, from Year Five/Six at Tenter Ground, the child of first generation Nigerian immigrants in Bermondsey, moans that her mother doesn't let her and her brothers (three of them between the

²⁴⁵ This perception was just beginning to change towards the end of my fieldwork when I began to hear resentment against Kosovans and Albanians expressed. This will present an interesting shift in the synonymy that is presented between ideas of *race* and immigration because Kosovans, for example, are not obviously non-*whites*.

²⁴⁶ The resentment towards the council is to some extent explicable in terms of the failure of the council to manage the maintenance of the housing stock, long overdue repairs are never seen to, refurbishment is not undertaken when necessary and people who are dependent on social housing become increasingly frustrated. At the same time the housing department, which is subject to local authority governance, blames an inadequate budget, and meanwhile, conditions on the estates continue to deteriorate.

²⁴⁷ Anthony is a pupil in Year Five/Six at Tenter Ground School (see chapter three).

ages of fourteen and nine, living in a small three bedroom flat) out to play. When, I come to spend time in her home I ask Temi's mother why the children don't play out, and she replies, "My dear, I am not naïve, this is Bermondsey and my children are *black*." She then goes on to recount how two *white* boys threw a glass bottle on her son's head from an upper balcony at Pilgrim's School. The bottle smashed and cut her son's head open. The school's security video cameras, which were fitted because of the high incidence of assaults in the school, were not working at the time so the culprits were never brought to justice. Meanwhile Temi's brother has to go back to school everyday facing the reality that there are boys there who can get away with attacking other children. There is no way of telling whether this attack was simply reflective of the way boys in Bermondsey must prove to each other their capacity for intimidation and violence but Temi's mother worries that it was a specifically *racial* assault. Temi and her brother are prisoners, in their own home, to their fear of Bermondsey peoples' prejudice against them. It is not walking bare foot in Nigeria that toughens up *black* boys in families living in areas like this, it is the necessity to contend with and resist the constraints of living in a place where they are not welcome and are subject to attack.²⁴⁸ Mutual misunderstanding prevails.

²⁴⁸ I am not trying to suggest here that *black* families don't have prejudices of their own because they do. I have already referred to the prejudice between Nigerians and Jamaicans never mind the prejudice between different groups of African people and also between different Caribbean islanders. Kemi's mother, for example, in part because of the experience of prejudice against her, dislikes and distrusts English people. She says to me while we are cooking in her kitchen, "I can't understand why *black* people are not welcome here. In Nigeria we treat *white* people like kings and queens but here we are treated like dirt." She goes on to qualify her feelings about me as an English woman, "Because you are married to a Nigerian man, you are my wife, I must look after you but I feel sorry for you because you are English. English women don't know how to look after their husbands. They give them fish and chips and spoil their children, treating them like pets, making them useless." She emphasises how African, specifically Nigerian children are brought up to respect their parents and to quickly be able to look after themselves proving their self-sufficiency. She stresses, "There is no place in the world a Nigerian person couldn't go and be able to survive and do well - that's the kind of upbringing we've had." While we are cleaning up after cooking Kemi's mother rubs the surfaces of the kitchen vigorously with her cloth proclaiming all the while how dirty English people are because they don't know how to clean properly. Inside myself I am laughing because I realise that the projection of dirtiness is an aspect of the phenomenon of prejudice itself rather than an empirical observation of actual behaviour. It constantly surprises me during my fieldwork how each group of people, including *middle class* people like myself, find in the world the evidence we seek for the confirmation of our prejudices against other kinds of people. I am amazed by the arrogance that ignorance breeds.

Part I ii) Community

Social Housing, Kinship, Residence and Employment

Apart from the large-scale council housing developments instigated by Bermondsey Borough Council private landlords and philanthropic housing associations were once the only source of accommodation for people living in Bermondsey.²⁴⁹ The landlord or the resident estate caretaker managed the allocation of housing and was intimately aware of his tenants' changing family circumstances and perceptive therefore about their housing needs. If a woman's daughter was to be married, for example, she would speak to the caretaker or landlord about securing a nearby flat or house for her. In this way and over time kinship and residence patterns became extremely close.²⁵⁰ The arrival of outsiders in Bermondsey, under these kinds of housing arrangements, was rare. Even an

²⁴⁹ After the large-scale destruction of Bermondsey in the war, there was a massive programme of slum clearance and many families were de-canted to housing estates on the periphery of Greater London. This in itself posed a huge threat to traditional residence patterns and some elderly people who remember the war cite these changes as the beginning of the end of Bermondsey as they knew it. Alfred Salter, the famous Doctor and politician, was instrumental in the improvement of housing standards in Bermondsey. Working initially as a doctor he was determined to alleviate the misery caused by inadequate housing conditions, but soon realised that the best use of his considerable energies would be to turn his attention to local politics. He quickly appreciated that it was only through influence as a local politician that he could command the necessary resources for social change in Bermondsey. He and his wife Ada Salter became renowned for their devotion to and pride in Bermondsey and they were responsible, in part, for its development from an urban slum into a thriving socialist borough which took self-conscious pride in the effort to build the *community* into a safe and healthy place for its people to live (Brockway F. 1949).

The Carr-Gomm family was one of the largest private landlords in Bermondsey and Richard Carr-Gomm went on to found a voluntary sector organisation to assist in the housing of vulnerable people. The foundation of this organisation followed upon his observations that the elderly people of Bermondsey were left behind and isolated from kinship ties after their younger relatives, whom they were used to supporting and being supported by, left London for outlying regions.

²⁵⁰ There is not the space here to include a historical survey of kinship and residence patterns but I intend to undertake further research about this in the near future. See also Willmott and Young's (1957) classic study for a comparison with London's East End in the 1950s. Edwards (2000) gives an ethnographic description of *born and bred* kinship in a small town in the north of England and associates the phenomenon with rural life and the development of villages into industrial towns. It is perhaps significant therefore that Bermondsey's historical origins, over a thousand years ago, were rural. It was originally a low-lying island surrounded by marshy ground and was known as 'Beormund's Ey.' The earliest description of Bermondsey is to be found in the Domesday Book where it is described as a royal *manor* belonging to King William. A local historian referring to Bermondsey's entry in the Domesday Book describes 'land for ploughing, growing corn, meadowland for cows and woods to provide nuts or acorns for pigs,' and refers to Bermondsey's origins as a village. 'Bermondsey Street was the High Street of old Bermondsey. It is many hundreds of years older than Tower Bridge Road. As you walk up this narrow curving street, not a bit like a modern motorway, try to picture the scene when Bermondsey was just a village and all around were farms and market gardens which supplied produce for the City of London.' (Boast M. 1998) Bermondsey was also renowned for its beautiful abbey built around a church, which became a place of pilgrimage for people from all over England including kings and nobles.

outsider who was marrying into a Bermondsey family was given a hard time and rarely made to feel welcome by the spouse's kin. This was because ideal spouses were considered to be those found within Bermondsey's boundaries making it a place infamous for its endogamy.²⁵¹ Not only do people say of Bermondsey that it is a place where 'everyone knows everyone else,' they also say that 'everyone is married to everyone else.'²⁵²

Sally is one of the girls from Year Five/Six at Tenter Ground. Her mother, Margaret, describes to me how she married a Bermondsey man and moved into his area when she was a young woman. Because she is Irish her husband's family and her neighbours constantly made her feel like an outsider. Even twenty years later, she says, she didn't feel welcome in the neighbourhood. It wasn't until her son was being badly bullied at school that things changed for the better. Finally having had enough of the bullying she went to pick her son up from school one day.²⁵³ She marched him over to the culprit and told her son that either he thump this boy on the nose right away or she would be forced to thump her own son on the nose to shame him in front of all the parents who were watching. Her son, realising she was serious, did as he was told. He gave the boy a good thump on the nose and after that word got around. Sally's mother finally started to get some respect from people and only then did the women become friendlier to her. This story highlights the problem that outsiders, who are not made to feel welcome, face in Bermondsey. It is difficult for them to find out about or gain access to the means

²⁵¹ I have not made any formal investigation into the existence and extent of endogamy in Bermondsey but note here people's perception of it. A thorough genealogical study, which I hope to undertake at some stage, should be revealing.

²⁵² These statements have a mythical status. It is impossible for everyone to know everyone else but the phrase refers to the closeness of neighbourly and kin relations. Terry, a Bermondsey man from the neighbourhood of Tenter Ground School only discovered that he was related to one of the school's secretaries when they realised that they had both been invited to the same wedding. They were then able to sit down together and trace exactly how they were related to each other, albeit distantly, via their relatedness to the bride and her family.

²⁵³ I do not have a complete set of verbatim dialogue from this interview but note in passing something that I had already observed widely which is that when people refer to their kin they say, for example, 'My boy,' or 'Our Keith.' Quite often it is the relatedness of a person or a particular status relationship that is emphasised rather than the person's individuality. A father might say in affectionate tones, "Come here boy," or "Come here son!" rather than calling the child by his first name and a husband might say, "All right girl?" to his wife.

by which a person in Bermondsey can gain respect. Sticking up for yourself is just one of those means. In this instance Margaret's situation changed quite by chance. She explains that soon after this incident she began to receive requests from older members of her husband's family to run errands for them and she quickly realised that her loyalties were being tested. More importantly she was being given the chance for incorporation into the kinds of exchanges in which relations between kin are made.

Margaret recalls working in the Peak Freans biscuit factory in Bermondsey and remembers how the production of biscuits was organised by women on the basis of age, residence in Bermondsey and genealogical precedence. Established and older Bermondsey women got to work on conveyor belts with the nicest 'fancy' biscuits. *White* women who were outsiders were clearly identifiable because they were forced to work on different conveyor belts with the 'plain' biscuits whilst upstairs out of sight Jamaican women were making Christmas puddings. Margaret says, "What you had there was segregation." She goes on to tell me how she had never been brought up to be prejudiced so she refused to observe the segregation and used to go upstairs. Getting into trouble and faced with the threat of demotion or dismissal she told the older women that she wanted to go up and work in Christmas puddings. The Bermondsey women were outraged at her request but granted it and she was moved upstairs. At first she says the Jamaican women were suspicious of her because they thought she had come to take over their domain where they were used to being in control of their own affairs. When the Jamaican women realised that Margaret was there to work with them and do as she was told they got along fine.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ Whilst the prejudice *black* and Irish immigrants experienced in England often created solidarity between them this was not necessarily the case. An Irish nun in Bermondsey remembers the priest giving a strong sermon one Sunday, to a congregation full of Dockers of Irish origin. In the light of growing *racism* against *black* immigrants in Bermondsey the priest preached about the necessity for racial tolerance. The sermon caused outrage amongst the congregation and an older man who had been going to that church most of his grown life approached the nuns afterwards to tell them, speaking with a strong Irish accent, that he thought the sermon was disgusting. The nun explains to me that she looked the man full in the face, addressing him by name and said, "Is it not true that you are an immigrant in this country as well Mr. X?" Faced with this rebuttal, Mr. X turned his back, stormed off and never came back to church again. The nun's story emphasises the prejudice

Regeneration

Peak Freans has long since moved out of the factory in Bermondsey but the building remains; it has been converted to an industrial estate accommodating small businesses. Frean Street, which has taken its name from the famous food producer, is now derelict, only the street sign remains. Soon it is to be included in the Bermondsey Spa regeneration project, which forms part of Southwark Council's plans for the economic transformation of the area. What place will there be, in the increasing numbers of local area regeneration plans, for recognition of Bermondsey's industrial and social heritage? The question remains a sensitive bone of contention amongst local people.

Of most interest to me, however, about the economic changes in Bermondsey is the fact that whilst it is clear that the original industrial basis of the *community* has collapsed, this is not what is on everyone's minds. Only very few people I spoke to attributed the 'death of the *community*' to economic transformations. What I consistently found, in contrast, was preoccupation with the threat that the presence of outsiders poses to the once close relationship between kin, and the housing they used to occupy. The question people implicitly ask is how can Bermondsey people reproduce their *community* if there is nowhere for its people to live? The issue at stake is the availability, affordability and management of housing. Social housing from the council is now allocated to emergency cases only and housing associations take referrals from the council. Private housing is unaffordable because the gentrification of the area makes its warehouse and flat conversions accessible only to the wealthy few – *yuppies* - all of whom are outsiders. Meanwhile every Bermondsey person I speak to laments that the *community* is dying, that is, if they don't pronounce it dead already.²⁵⁵ Almost everyone places

between established immigrants and those who are newly arrived. Those who have struggled to become established resent the visible presence of newcomers who highlight the outsider status of immigrants in general.

²⁵⁵ A local priest points out to me that whilst people are preoccupied with the death of the *community* funerary rituals have become increasingly elaborate. People now spend a fortune on the funerals of their kin and with the revival of horse and carriage funerals (originally an East End practice) tradition is being re-invented (Hobsbawm & Ranger (Eds.) 1983). The priest worries that funerals are increasingly a cause of indebtedness among Bermondsey people. The visual

the blame for this on the presence of *black* people but the preceding analysis has shown that this prejudice is a transformation of more deep-seated historical precedents.

The idea of *community* belonging in Bermondsey in which kinship and residence criteria take precedence arose originally out of the clustering of housing around and the defence of employment on the docks and in food processing factories organised on the basis of kinship relations.²⁵⁶ Post-industrial and post-colonial transformations in Bermondsey must be understood in the light of this particular idea of the *community* in relation to which what it means to be a Bermondsey person is brought into being. This is illustrated well in the example of the hierarchical organisation of factory production in Peak Freans. There are people whose mothers, mothers' mothers and mothers' mothers' mothers are Bermondsey women and then there are all the various gradations of belonging in between.²⁵⁷ The example of factory work practices at Peak Freans illustrates the

representation of the closeness of kin relations has always been a feature of *working class* funeral practices with flowers arranged to spell out all the kinship terms by which the deceased was known: – Dad, Son, and Granddad – for example. The priest suggests that this relatively recent elaboration of funeral rituals signifies a *community* in the throes of death.

²⁵⁶ Protectionism was rife on the docks and in factories and other industries (long before the arrival of *black* and *Asian* immigrants) in part because kinship and employment relations were close. Sons and cousins followed their fathers and uncles into the many different specialisations on the dock and likewise for the women in the factories. The fact that Dockers went on strike to prevent *black* men labouring there must be understood in the light of earlier forms of protection and xenophobia. A man who was a floor manager in a tin factory in Bermondsey during the 1960s recalls, for example, the day when the whole of the Bermondsey workforce walked out when Jamaican immigrants were taken on by the management. There is substantial scope for a more detailed social and economic history of Bermondsey including investigation of the experiences of *black* people living and working here over along period of time. I hope in time to undertake this study.

²⁵⁷ Kinship is often reckoned through mothers but can also be traced through fathers depending on which side of the family has the most long standing relationship to living in Bermondsey. Although I didn't conduct an exhaustive investigation into genealogies the beginning I have made shows that people generally emphasise their mother's side of the family with particular stress placed on the importance of the mother's mother – nan - the centre of the family. People generally trace their family through at most three, sometimes four, generations. In discussion with Patrick (see chapter five), who grew up on the Silwood Estate, he explains to me that a Bermondsey person's loyalties, in order of importance, are as follows: mum, dad (if you have one), siblings, your estate (Silwood), Bermondsey, South London, London, Southern England, England, Europe. To illustrate these shifting loyalties Patrick tells me that Millwall fans will fight Leeds fans everyday if possible, but will fight alongside Leeds fans against fans from a rival country at an England football match. He stresses, "An enemy in Bermondsey can be an ally when rowing with Peckham boys."

I am particularly interested in the relevance of developmental linguistics to studies of the formation of the idea of the person. These studies (e.g. Rosch T. 1976, 1981) demonstrate that the structure

finely differentiated distinctions between the types of *white* people who live within Bermondsey, never mind between the kinds of *white* people who are outsiders.²⁵⁸ Understood in historical context it is clear that belonging in Bermondsey is not simply about racial exclusivity even though it is becoming more so as time goes on. It is for this reason that people can say with confidence that they are not *racialist* because actually what they are is 'placist' or *strangerist* as one woman defined it for me.

Shifting Allegiances – From Kinship to *Race*

Only against the background of *born and bred* kinship in which people are understood to be synonymous with the places where they and their parents and grandparents were born and raised can the problem of *race* relations in Bermondsey be understood. Because of the shifting focus from ideas of relatedness based on kinship and residence towards *racial* criteria it is also possible for other kinds of outsiders, like *white* boys from Peckham who were once the enemy, to prove their eligibility for insider status. These youths, like John and Lee, often work twice as hard to prove that they can participate in the kinds of exchanges that being a *bod* requires. They are not excluded from participating in the way they would have been in the past because *bods* are looking for allies in their battle to keep Bermondsey a '*white* people's *manor*'. An elderly woman

which gives any category of knowledge its coherence derives from the relationship of proximity to or distance from the prototypical exemplar which defines the category. The prototypical Bermondsey person is someone who is *white*, was *born and bred* in Bermondsey, is still resident here and can reckon his or her kin in the area back through three generations. After that there are all the subtle gradations of belonging which are defined in relation to proximity to or distance from the exemplar. There are for example people who are resident in Bermondsey but are classified as outsiders whilst people who were *born and bred* here but are no longer resident can still claim insider status because of the priority placed on childhood experience. What becomes interesting is enquiry into the different situations in which certain aspects of a person's sense of belonging are emphasised, residence/kinship, born/bred, local/national, Bermondsey/England/Britain/Europe. Within a complex concept like personhood there is considerable latitude for variable emphasis of conceptual content depending on the social situation in which a person finds him/herself. It would seem to be the case that although the structure of the concept coheres around the prototypical exemplar there is a figure/ground shift operating in practice which makes it impossible to conceive of a concept of the person as fixed. The prototype itself is, therefore, subject to transformation.

²⁵⁸ When people talk of *community* it is important to understand that there can be no taken for granted assumption about which group of people constitute the *community*. Whilst cohesiveness might be emphasised in one situation it is clear that there are many kinds of division between

describes to me, in contrast, how when she was a little girl her aunt wanted to marry a *white* man from Peckham and her Dad had said, “What do you want to bring a bloody foreigner into the family for?”

Bermondsey prejudices create dichotomies between dirt and cleanliness, insiders and outsiders and make the danger of pollution/contagion a permanent possibility. Particular discourses and specific kinds of exchanges relate types of people with kinds of places and accentuate territorial and personal boundaries close to home. Meanwhile since Bermondsey Borough Council was subsumed within Southwark Council changes in the way housing is allocated has meant that newly formed families, couples who are about to be married and have children of their own, have no chance of being housed by the council. New families are forced to continue living with their parents in already cramped accommodation or to move away from Bermondsey even if they don't want to leave.²⁵⁹ This fuels resentment against the council and against outsiders who are perceived to be moving in and taking what Bermondsey people feel belongs to them. The problem is that Bermondsey people feel that Bermondsey belongs to them but they own little of the land or the housing. In a state of dependency they are doubly dispossessed and territoriality easily becomes the mask that poverty wears. The frustration *bods* experience arises because they are powerless either to prevent the decline in conditions on the estates or to stop the council from moving outsiders and especially *black* people into flats on the estates. This makes *bods'* boundary defences at the periphery ineffectual and hatred is fuelled. Meanwhile *yuppies* continue to buy their way into control of the riverfront.

Bermondsey people. What becomes important is an investigation into the different ways in which the *community* is imagined (Anderson B. 1983)

²⁵⁹ When Bermondsey people move away they usually go further South to Lee, Welling, Bromley and beyond. I have not undertaken a statistical analysis of demographic trends but intend to do so in the future. It wouldn't surprise me to discover, for example, that the close relationship between kinship and residence is being reproduced elsewhere. Several people have said to me, “Don't worry about Bermondsey, it's alive and well and living in Kent.” The same is also true of the East End because the traditional *white working class* population of the East End has moved out to Essex.

Street politics prove inadequate, then, to the fundamental problems that Bermondsey people face. Whilst they are accused of unconsidered *racism*, *bods* are also alienated from conventional democratic processes and this prevents the translation of their actual grievances into issues that are relevant to local authority politics. I will come back to this point later in the chapter but want to emphasise here that any solution to what is described as the problem of *racism* in Bermondsey must take account of the historical development of the problem. Either the needs of those who think of themselves as *local* people must be met in some way, or *racism* will continue to escalate.

Part I iii) Racism?

An Apparent Paradox

In the youth club Lee continues to explain to me why he was able to respectfully greet Vince, the young *black* guy who walked in, “ ‘Cos I know him since five years, he’s all right.” I tell him that I don’t understand how that fits in with him being so *racist*? He explains further, “I don’t think of myself as *racist* ‘cos I’m friends with so many *black* guys, it’s just that some of them are all right.” He holds his head in his hands for a moment in confusion and then looks up at me; “I don’t even know what *racism* is you know. If you want to understand how we feel you should watch a film called American History X.”²⁶⁰ “Why? How would that help?” I ask and he replies, “There’s a part in it when the *white* guy stamps on the *black* guy’s head. It makes me go crazy like I want to go out and see that happen to all of them, but then in the end of the film the *white* guy ends up being friends with a *black* guy. That’s what it’s all about.” After eighteen months in which I avoid watching the film because I am afraid of what I expect to see in it, I finally get round to renting American History X from the library. Lee is right; the film explains in graphic detail how he feels. There are parallels between the English and American cases in which dispossessed *white* youths struggle to overcome the differences between them in order to compete against the increasing numbers of *black* gangs that have rivalries over the place they all live in.

Of most interest to me about the film is the moment when the protagonist, Derek, the fledgling leader of a *white* power organisation, finally overcomes his refusal to engage with the young *black* prisoner with whom he has been assigned to work in the prison laundry. Derek is in prison for the manslaughter of two *black* men who broke into his car one night. In prison the inmates are divided amongst themselves: *whites*, *Hispanics* and *blacks*. Derek only manages to survive certain death at the hands of the *black* inmates who know about his reputation and his crime because he is able to ally himself with the other *white*-power inmates. He is able to identify these men because of the tattoos on their arms. When Derek takes off his shirt in the gym to reveal the Nazi swastika that is tattooed on his chest the *white*-

²⁶⁰ Kaye T. (1998) *American History X*. Entertainment in Video. USA.

power gang identify with and take Derek under their wing, affording him a measure of protection. Derek quickly becomes disillusioned with the gang, however, because he witnesses the leader of these men making surreptitious and lucrative exchanges with the Hispanics.²⁶¹ The exchanges represent, to Derek, a violation and contradiction of the vehemently racist ideology on the basis of which the gang is formed. Behind the leader's back Derek begins to accuse him of hypocrisy and attempts, therefore, to undermine the legitimacy of his leadership.

Meanwhile in the prison laundry Derek has to work alongside a cheerful young *black* inmate who tries determinedly to get to know him. True to the consistent prejudice that Derek's racism requires he refuses to participate in any kind of exchange with this young guy, and remains silent and unforthcoming. In time however the relentless efforts of the light-hearted young *black* guy begin to have an affect on Derek. It becomes obvious from the persistent banter in which he aims to find common ground between them that as two young American men they have plenty of things, such as how much they miss women and how passionate they are about football, in common. Finally the young guy manages to make Derek laugh and from this point they begin, cautiously, to get to know one another. Despite his best efforts the cold war that Derek had attempted to wage against the young guy begins to thaw and via the forced exchanges necessary to the tedious job they must share, and playful conversations which relieve the tedium, a fragile friendship develops between them.

At the same time that Derek is allowing himself to enjoy, albeit tentatively, the company of his new found friend, Derek, in frustration at the hypocrisy of the leader of the *white*-power gang, burns his bridges. At lunchtime, where allegiances

²⁶¹ In prison, segregated from the economy of commodity capitalism, gift exchange comes into its own. It is the means by which scarce items acquire value and competent traders gain prestige and respect. In the case described here the desire for personal gain outweighs the integrative benefits of belonging to a gang formed on the basis of participation in vehement *racist* rhetoric. I am told of a similar case in Bermondsey in which a man, notorious for his *racist* opinions, made a fortune selling false passports to Africans. Ergo making money competes against *racism* as a means for gaining respect among peers.

are most obviously mapped out in the seating arrangement of the prison hall, Derek snubs his *white* allies and sits alone with his back to them. To teach him a lesson he'll never forget the leader arranges to have Derek violently assaulted and raped in the shower room. Alone, vulnerable and without allegiances Derek is once again at the mercy of the *black* prisoners' desire to finish him off. Completing his prison sentence a virtual loner Derek is amazed to still be alive when the time comes for him to leave prison on parole. He realises then that he owes his life to his young friend from the laundry room who risked his own reputation by vouching for him and therefore preventing Derek's murder at the hands of the *black* inmates. Watching the film confirms what I have come to understand in my fieldwork. The hatred that prejudice implies is overcome and becomes friendship only by means of shared participation in a meaningful relationship of exchange. This exchange can take various forms, either in conversation, bodily actions, participation in mundane practices, which, like folding sheets in the laundry, require co-operation or the dramatic gesture that saving someone's life implies. It is only co-incidental that the transformation of Derek's *racist* beliefs occurs in the most apparently mundane of places, a prison laundry, where one of the most basic needs, the organisation of communal cleaning practices, is met.

Common Humanity

Because of the young *black* guy's tenacity, Derek, vehement racist and nascent leader of the *white*-power movement in his hometown, discovers that having things in common is the fragile thread that friendships between *black* and *white* men are made of. This, I would argue, is what Lee means when he says that I should watch the film to understand how he feels. The film articulates what he finds difficult to explain. How can it be that he hates *black* people and still knows particular *black* guys as his friends? The apparent paradox of it 'does his head in.' In the face of all the hatred that divides the men in the prison into different groups, the fragility of the friendship between *black* and *white* men is highlighted. The window of opportunity that meaningful exchange creates for the recognition of

common humanity can, however, effect an enormous change. Meaningful exchange, as I pointed out in chapter three, has substantial integrative potential and creates the possibility for emotional transformation. The tragedy of the film is that out of prison Derek finds it impossible to undo the cycle of hatred and revenge seeking that ends in the death of his younger teenage brother.

Young men like Lee, then, face a confusing and dangerous dilemma. Their peer group and often, for boys like Mark, their families demand of them the passionate defence of a closely defined territory – the *manor* of Bermondsey. *White* youths, like Lee, from areas like Peckham which have become predominantly *black manors*, feel they have one of two choices, either they ‘act *black*’ or they take refuge with and fight alongside Bermondsey *bods*. Ideally the defence that is demanded of *bods* implies a consistently racist ideology in which there would be no place for *black* people in their affections. In reality, however, the wholly negative idea of *black* people is shattered by friendships with *black* guys which were formed at school and which penetrate the defensive shield of hatred with the intimacy of personal experience. Thus when there are no *black* people around consistently *racist* discourse predominates but as soon as a *black* person that everyone knows and likes walks in, everyone stops *talking rash*.²⁶² This situation appears to be paradoxical but I would argue that in fact it demonstrates perfectly the figure/ground capacity of mind.²⁶³ This is a conceptual capacity that allows for continuously changing emphasis between intersecting schemes of differentiation. In this case the scheme for *racial* classification which generates powerful feelings of disgust for certain kinds of differences intersects with the scheme in which people are classified as friends. When Lee is alone among *bods*, *talking rash*, his generalised feelings of disgust for *black* people form an acceptable part of the kind of participation that being a *bod* requires. When one of his *black* friends walks in Lee has no problem greeting him respectfully, because this is a *black* guy they all know and *check for* and *rash* talk is no longer appropriate so long as Vince is in the room. Depending on the social situation different kinds of participation

²⁶² *Talking rash* is to engage in *racist* talk.

become appropriate.²⁶⁴ What is appropriate in the present moment becomes the foreground of social action whilst everything that is inappropriate recedes into the background and is not emphasised. This does not mean that it is not there as a source of potential participation in a different situation. When the situation changes what was in the background because it was inappropriate suddenly becomes acceptable again. This does not necessarily render people's behaviour as paradoxical or irrational but demonstrates, rather, the capacity of mind to accommodate complex conceptual distinctions understood not as abstract mental operations but as emerging understandings about how to participate effectively in social practice. The problem with a *racist* ideology is that it doesn't allow for this shifting between figure and ground and denies the possibility that there will be situations in which *white* and *black* youths are able to participate together as friends. So it is that Lee can simultaneously wish to see all *black* people have their heads stamped on and welcome a particular *black* person as his friend. The apparent paradox of it literally does Lee's own head in. It's confusing.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ About which I will explain more in part II of this chapter.

²⁶⁴ It is in relation to the way these different schemes operate in practice and the degree of distress they cause to young people that youth workers attempt to make appropriate interventions. My experience in the youth club taught me, however, that only the more experienced, senior youth workers are in a position to make this kind of intervention with young people. Other youth workers are either intimidated by the youths' violent posturing or found that in fact the *racism* that *bods* espouse reflects their own feelings of discomfort about prejudices they themselves hold. Many of the *bods* resent the fact that there was one night a week set aside in the youth club for *black* boys when they aren't allowed to have a night just for *white* boys. Ideally there should be no need for this forced segregation because a capable team of youth workers could deal with issues that come up between *black* and *white* youths on a mixed night. Not once did I hear a youth worker explain to the *bods* that vehement *racism* might make some *black* boys feel unsafe and that because *bods* are in a position of dominance in the club their *racism* is different to the prejudice that *black* boys may have against *white* boys. Because youth workers couldn't explain the segregation adequately it only exacerbated the *bods'* perception that there is one preferential rule for *black* boys and another which works against *white* boys. In the club there is only one *black* youth worker and he only works on the night when only *black* kids are allowed. He was never there on the mixed nights to set an example of *racial* solidarity along with the other white youth workers. When one of the youth workers suggested challenging the management about the fact that the club was becoming segregated he was told by the other youth workers to let sleeping dogs lie.

²⁶⁵ For a comparison between this and another analysis of youth *culture* in South London see Back L. (1996). Back encountered similar problems in his fieldwork with *white* youths who engage in *racist* discourse, but who are at the same time involved both in friendships with particular *black* people and interested in particular aspects of what is thought of as *black* people's *culture*, particularly music. Back suggests that *white* youths are 'caught within the paradoxes that emerge from their use of *racist* discourses and their lived experience.' Whilst I agree with him to a certain extent and find his ethnography revealing, I would argue that discourse is not disembodied and is always, therefore, an aspect of lived experience too. It is necessary, as Back acknowledges, to make

Part I iv) UK Garage – *Black People's Music?*

an investigation comparing the different situations in which *racist* discourse is acceptable amongst *white* youths and when it becomes inappropriate. Back does makes this comparison in his ethnography, but I would argue that the idea of the shift between figure and ground, rather than what he refers to as 'the splitting of *race* registers,' resolves the problem of an apparent paradox between discourse and behaviour. At the same time an appreciation of the figure/ground shift allows for the confusion that some youths feel. I am not suggesting, however, that the apparent paradox between prejudicial discourse and multi-racial friendships is a phenomenon peculiar to *white* youths. The shift between figure and ground is an aspect of the way that mind works in practice and is relevant to all situations in which complex schemes of differentiation intersect, not just *race* and friendship but gender and *race*, locality and *nation* and so on. When I explain the concept of figure/ground shifts to my partner, for example, he tells me that in his experience *black* people experience exactly the same, apparently paradoxical, phenomenon. In a room full of *black* people, he says, he hears no end of complaints about the evils of *racism* and the extent to which *black* people hate *white* people. When a *white* person walks in, however, no one dares continue the conversation and afterwards you find out that half the people in the room are the close friends of, if not lovers with, *white* people.

UK Garage

What is crucial about Lee getting to know and like a *black* person is that it is recognition of common ground between them. This common ground is created out of specific kinds of exchanges in which boys, usually at school, discover that they share an interest in similar kinds of competence, playing football, computer gaming, fighting and so on. The racial prejudice which *bods* begin to emphasise during their territorial teenage years requires, however, that they start to limit or resist participation in the kinds of exchanges in which friendship with *black* boys is constituted, but this is easier said than done.

Youth clubs occupy an intermediate position between the constraints of the household and the freedom of the street. In winter months they provide respite from the freezing cold and the dark and a place to hang out in safety. In line with the youths' own interests, the clubs provide amenities such as table tennis, pool and snooker tables, indoor and outdoor football pitches, computing facilities and in some places training for boxing. The most recent addition to the range of facilities with which the clubs entice youths in from the street is DJ decks, turntables where youths can practice *spinning tracks*, *chatting on the mic.* (microphone) and dream of becoming famous Garage DJs with a dedicated following.²⁶⁶

In the youth club where I met Lee, I see the *decks* (turntables) working for the first time.²⁶⁷ There are two turntables, with a DJ operating the sound system including a

²⁶⁶ Garage is a descriptive term for the particular kind of music that has become popular out of an underground street music scene in London. It is differentiated from other forms such as Hip-Hop or House on the basis of the distinctive relation between the lyrics, melody, vocal presentation and most importantly the beat. I am not able to undertake an expert analysis of what makes Garage musically distinctive but such an investigation, if done comparatively, would record the technical transformations in London's underground music scene.

²⁶⁷ The time that I spent in the youth club was limited because the fieldwork took place at the end of the time that I had available for participant observation. I did not have time, therefore, to learn myself either to *chat on the mic.* or to *spin tunes*, which would have been fascinating in the same way that learning how to trade Pokemon cards was. I did however get as far as composing a *chat* of my own which I recorded with my partner and the CD which accompanies the thesis (see appendix) gives an indication of what UK Garage sounds like. The track has been played to youths preoccupied with the UK Garage scene in various London locations and received wide acclaim. The track forms the audible representation of everything that I learned about UK Garage from *bods*

sampler, a mixer and a microphone, but no one has yet dared to pick it up to *chat* some lyrics. The DJ mixes the track from one *deck* into the beat of the track on the other (*spinning tracks*), adding personalised sound effects from the sampler. I look over the turntable to see what tracks are being *mixed*. On the first turntable there is no mistaking the trade mark names of the legendary Dr Dre and Snoop Dogg, icons of *Black* American urban rap music, printed on the label of the shiny black vinyl. It is a Garage re-mix of a rap track called Next Episode; this is the Pikachu Tear-Up Mix.²⁶⁸ I am incredulous. I cannot believe that the first Garage mix I ever see is called The Pikachu Tear-Up Mix after all the work I have done with younger boys preoccupied with the Pokemon phenomenon. The coincidence is astounding, but in fact there are many similarities between what happens here in the youth club and what happens at Tenter Ground School. I watch the young *white* DJ quietly confident in front of admiring eyes deftly managing the decks. Whilst one hand presses the head phones to his ear the other mixes the Snoop track on one *deck* into the sound of the track on the other. The room, tense with the young men's need to be constantly attentive to the changing pecking order depending on who is coming and going in the club.²⁶⁹ This is just like being with the boys I knew at Tenter Ground School only now the sulky intimidation that I have become accustomed to is manifestly more threatening because these are young men between the ages of fourteen and twenty. The possibility of verbal and physical conflict is constant and respect for the authority of the youth workers is virtually non-existent so the atmosphere is typically volatile.²⁷⁰ Added to the palpable tension in the room is the excitement created by the DJ on the decks, music pumping loudly from the

in Bermondsey and is recognition of the fact that the legitimacy of my participation depends on an appropriate, in this case, sonic exchange.

²⁶⁸ *Tear up* means destroying the competition.

²⁶⁹ The different sessions in the youth club are organised on the basis of age and gender. The nights I attended were mixed nights but the girls only rarely attended and boys were in the majority. The age group was over fourteens. When the girls did come to the youth club they complained that the boys wouldn't let them have a go on the decks even though particular girls felt confident that they could give the boys a run for their money on the mic.

²⁷⁰ All the youth workers in the beginning of their employment at the club had to go through the humiliating and frightening experience of being terrorised by the *bods*. Only after a youth worker had proved his or her staying power was a measure of respect afforded to him/her by the *bods*. Male youth workers who were weak and unassertive were continuously harassed and one young man in particular continuously had the back of his head slapped by *bods* when they walked past him. His refusal to stick up for himself only made matters worse for him.

speakers, *bods* gathered around, respect for, and rivalry between, those that can *spin tunes* and/or *chat on the mic* unfolding.

Seeing the decks in operation I begin to learn about the special talent of the DJ and to appreciate something of the phenomenal popularity of UK Garage amongst young people. In terms of the social integration of a teenage peer group it evokes exactly the same fervour as the Pokemon craze did for younger boys. Only this is Pokemon grown up. The excitement is muted, in part because all the youths are *stoned*,²⁷¹ but also because of the necessity for reserved cool. Nevertheless the enthusiasm and preoccupation of these youths is complete and the social processes in which peer groups are formed are the same. Here just like at school respect between friends is predicated on a finely differentiated mastery over specific objects of shared significance. A limited sphere of social exchange is being created in the club not with trading cards now but with *tracks*, *decks* and *mics*. *spinning* and *chatting* the new dynamic. The possibility for creating and transforming personal value, for gaining respect and having prestige is being made in the moment out of Garage music. "Everyone wants to be a famous DJ now," a *bod* tells me. "Everyone wants to be famous because then you've got respect, and everyone talks about you using your name. There's even respect in having someone give you a *shout*"²⁷² on one of the pirate radio stations. Your name is heard, you are known and *checked for*. You're not a nobody." DJs, then, are the new heroes.²⁷³ Making a name for themselves is what matters to *bods* because they've got a reputation to keep up; making Garage music has become one means among others of getting respect.

A passion for making music is new for young people in Bermondsey and it is extraordinarily productive, redefining in more creative terms what hanging out on

²⁷¹ *Stoned* is to *puff* what drunk is to alcohol.

²⁷² To give someone a *shout* means to mention his or her name on air on the radio.

²⁷³ I realise now why Lee and the other *bods* were ready to talk to me when I first went to the club. Once they were sure I wasn't *the old bill* my participation in the youth club was accepted because I was writing a book about *bods*, it fitted in perfectly with their desire to make a name for themselves. This was serendipity indeed because without the small measure of respect my work afforded me I would have got nowhere with the youths in the club.

the street produces. It conjures up a time evoked by elderly men when music proved to be a seductive force equal to the territorial violence of young men on the streets whose bloodlust was dissipated in social club dances. Liberated now from the labour of making music with instruments, the DJ comes into his own making music accessible to anyone. Being a part of the UK Garage scene has become easily one of the predominant means of getting prestige in Bermondsey even though as yet only a few can use it to make money. Making music in youth clubs becomes at least one solution to temper the destructive developmental cycle, which some young men in Bermondsey do not survive.

Black People's Music?

As I watch the young *white* DJ it strikes me as ironical that so many young *white* youths who pride themselves on how much they supposedly despise *black* people, are simultaneously captivated by the skill of the DJ. Vehemently racist talk appears to be contradicted by *bods'* participation in practices that demonstrate increasing familiarity with what were once commonly thought of as *black* people's, and specifically Jamaican things to do like smoking *weed* or being a DJ. The DJ, facilitator of *black*, specifically African-Caribbean and African-American music in London for at least the past fifty years now takes his place behind the gangster as a local hero in Bermondsey. This surprising development reveals the extent to which the interface between *black* and *white* youths in Bermondsey is as extraordinarily creative as it is hostile and defensive. A closer examination reveals the deeply personal struggle of individuals trying to cope with a rapidly shifting social landscape in inner London that is exciting and threatening in equal measure.

The Crew

On another night in the youth club one of the self appointed Garage crews²⁷⁴ comes in; the crew takes its name from the Road where they all grew up on the

²⁷⁴ A *crew* is the name used to describe a group of youths, boys who come together to practice *spinning* and *chatting* and creating a distinctive sound.

Eastern periphery of Bermondsey. This is a *mixed* group of *black* and *white* youths. Dominant among them is Winston, a young *black* guy who confidently walks into the club with his *crew* and takes up the *mic*. He begins to *chat* over the tunes that the same *white* DJ is spinning. No one disputes Winston's right to take the mic. because he is known and respected, good enough to have a spot on one of the local pirate radio stations. Requiring dedicated practice and lyrical creativity, the *chat* is an exchange between the DJ and the MC (Master Controller – of the mic.). The MC chats a fast-syncoated lyric rapped to the distinctive beat of the Garage track. *Chatting* is derived from a combination of *Black* American rap and Jamaican toasting styles. Unable to understand the lyrics because they are chatted so fast and too closely into the *mic*. I ask Winston later what he chats about. "Sex, drugs and the way life is," he replies matter of factly, explaining to me that *breaking into a chat* is about having the confidence to get up, knowing that you can deliver and being able to lead, by '*showing people a way.*' I ask him what he means by that and amused by my naivete he spells it out, laughing at me. "Young people want to hear about in music ways to deal with the things they have to cope with in real life." Winston explains, "Things like money, the opposite sex, drugs and the police." I tell him that it amazes me to see him and his crew in the club because Bermondsey has such a *racist* reputation; isn't he bothered about that? "No." he replies, "I know that people here talk *rash* but that's just stupidity. If they don't want to know me that's their loss." He adds, "Everyone here knows me anyway." I ask him if Garage music is *black* people's music and he vehemently denies it, "Garage music is for everyone," he says.

Because *black* and *white* youths alike are now involved in the production of Garage music and it is an exchange, which they participate in together, the evolution of Garage as a musical form understood in *racial* terms is obscured. Because it is the means by which *black* and *white* youths are coming together *racial* differences become the background against which getting to know each other via participation in highly specific and competitive forms of exchange, comes to the fore. Winston, whose parents are of Jamaican origin, moved to

Bermondsey when he started secondary school. He explains that before Garage, he was only into Rap which, he says, “People think of as being more *black* people’s music.” The *white* boys in Winston’s crew, who are listening to Winston talking to me, chip in asserting, “Look at Eminem though.” They are referring to the *white* American Rap star who makes satirical mileage out of his place as a *white* ‘*gangsta*’ rapper in a medium dominated by *black* people. Winston ignores them and tells me he used to think Garage was soft until someone dared him to have a go at chatting and then, realising how hard it was it became like a challenge to prove himself.

New stars like Eminem and *white* UK Garage DJ heroes like the Artful Dodger are catalysts of change. They show through their ability to do well what was once thought of as ‘*black* people’s music’ that appreciation of musical style relates more to a particular shared history than it does to skin colour. I would argue that their huge success lies in their translation of the segregation that *race* imposes into a bridge between *black* and *white* youths that shared participation in musical exchange makes possible. *Race* as a mutually exclusive category of biological difference recedes into the background whilst what *black* boys and *bods* share in this moment, their participation in a common *youth* phenomenon comes to the fore. To a much greater degree than Rap, the UK Garage phenomenon enables young *white* and *black* youths to come together in mutual appreciation of music that may have its roots in what was once thought of as ‘*black* people’s music’ but which is no longer understood in those terms.²⁷⁵ What is important about the

²⁷⁵ Levi-Strauss (1978) points out the relationship between myth and music and limits his analysis to certain classical music, but I would argue that underground music, which arises from particular experiences of youths on the street, is also a form of myth making. In the face of the irrelevance, to youths, of dominant *cultural* forms street music becomes the continuously evolving myth in relation to which they make sense of their experience. This has both a discursive and an audio-visual aspect. Youths make sense of their experience on the street in terms of the history of the kind of music other people have made in the past and in terms of a highly competitive trading relationship amongst themselves. This making of myth through music is an ongoing, never ending process in which a particular idea of the person is structured in the present via the embodiment and transformation of the sounds of the past. Peter Gow (2001) introduces, in his book, *An Amazonian Myth and its History*, the idea of mytho-poeisis to describe the way in which people bring themselves into being in relation to continuous, historically informed, understanding of what myths mean. Transposing the idea to music I would suggest that young people’s involvement in street music is characterised by the phenomenon of musico-poeisis.

Garage music phenomenon is its accessibility in terms of production and the way it has been incorporated into the prestige system of urban youths, *black* and *white*. In music the conflict between *black* and *white* youths is transposed into a more creative medium of competitive exchange. It does not displace territorial conflict, which retains its relevance on the street, but Garage music makes possible the transposition of conflict and creates the opportunity for *black* and *white* youths to overcome the constraint of *racist* ideologies via particular kinds of exchanges and differentiated competencies. That is what getting to know each other is all about.

The *white* boys in Winston's crew reject the *racist* hatred they feel is typical of certain kinds of Bermondsey boys. Paul is defiant in this respect, "The Blue is not the centre of the world; they're all racist cunts down there." I ask him what makes him different and he explains that his Mum told him he should make his own mind up about *black* people and he has. "How can I be racist?" He asks, motioning to Winston, "I've grown up with him haven't I?" "Yeah," says Winston as he leaps on his friend from behind getting his neck in a vice like grip and wrestling him hard to the floor. Waiting until Paul is really nearly choking and I am scared for his life Winston laughs, letting Paul go, pleased to have suffocated any sentiment out of the declaration of friendship between them. I am reminded then that no matter what the latest craze is or how *racism* might divide them, these young men growing up in Bermondsey share in common a deeper relationship to their developing masculinity which requires from them the capacity for violence as a particular kind of participation. It is in relation to this fundamental potential that friendship between boys becomes a hierarchy of fraternity.

The experiences of Vince's Garage crew demonstrate that at the periphery of the territory *bods* from The Blue struggle to define what belonging in Bermondsey means. Where *black* and *white* youths grow up together on the same estate, there is the permanent possibility that *racist* discourses will begin to break down. The *racist bods* who control the centre (The Blue) appear to be fighting a losing battle to govern relations at the periphery of Bermondsey where the majority of outsiders, like Winston, are likely to be found. As attempts are made to shore up

the boundaries of the actual and ideological space, the more vociferous *racist* discourse amongst *bods* becomes. It is no surprise therefore that boundary issues feature prominently in *bods*' talk, but against this background a history of shared experiences is gradually building up between young people in Bermondsey. What is important to emphasise here is that via the medium of specific exchange relationships people make sense of each other's social practice and that's what getting to know someone who appears to be radically different is all about. Fault lines, like those evinced by the UK Garage phenomenon, fracture the ideal identity of a *racist* ideology and mark the points at which young people break through boundaries which can only ever be impermeable in discourse. The actual frontier between apparently opposing groups is continuously breached by the necessity for people living in similar conditions, under the same constraints, to negotiate what humans have in common, which are the shared material conditions of existence. The defensive desire to keep the idea of and hatred for *racial* difference alive in Bermondsey competes on the streets, schools and landings of estate blocks with the overwhelming likelihood that tolerance and sometimes friendship grow out of having things and practices, like UK Garage music, in common.

Part I v Culture – A Man's Ways

Pub Culture

Patrick (see chapter five) is a Bermondsey man in his early forties. He has witnessed in Bermondsey the transformation of what he calls the *pub culture*. Where contemporary Bermondsey boys' fathers would, when young, have been in the pub making manhood out of beer, they are more likely now to be indoors with friends enjoying a pizza, a *puff* and a video. Patrick remembers smoking *weed* in his pre/early teens but in those days, he tells me, you couldn't buy *puff* in Bermondsey. You had to go all the way to the *West Indian* café in Deptford to get it. If you wanted something more exotic you had to go as far as Leicester Square, to get *speed*²⁷⁶ or LSD for example. When Patrick was young, smoking *weed* was something associated with *black*, specifically Jamaican men and *bods* like Patrick had to be exceedingly street wise to get hold of it. Having a *puff* was something boys could do long before they were old enough to be allowed in the pub for a pint. Patrick recalls being fourteen years old, doing Penny for the Guy with his mates, desperately trying to get ten shillings together so that they could send someone running down to Deptford to get some *puff*. In those days it cost 10 'shillings' an ounce whereas now it costs £60-£80 and like harder drugs it's freely available and widely consumed all over Bermondsey and London generally.

Because *puff* is illegal, takes time to consume and has a pungent smell, consumption of it usually takes place behind closed doors. As a result the economy of Bermondsey leisure time is changing rapidly. Where once there was a thriving *beer culture* with the pub at its heart, a pub on every street corner and people drinking to the sound of live music and prepared to get up and sing a good song themselves, all that is now changing. The traditional practices associated with going to the pub, such as getting dressed up for a Sunday lunchtime drink and perhaps pub-lunch, are in decline. Pubs are closing down by the month and are snapped up by housing developers. Only the middle aged and elderly remain staunch regulars in pubs where space is plotted according to who's who and which regular has sat where for the past thirty years. Closed down pubs awaiting

²⁷⁶ *Speed* is one among various types of amphetamine drugs used as a stimulants.

conversion or demolition, are covered immediately with fly posters advertising the latest music and club raves. It is the same all over London. Gravestones of a bygone age, buildings that were once public houses bear witness to the birth of new forms of entertainment for a younger generation. Older people lament that whilst country houses are preserved for the posterity of the *nation* the social and architectural heritage of inner-city *working class* London goes largely ignored. Everywhere beautiful Victorian pubs are demolished and replaced by new apartments for the wealthy.²⁷⁷ The only possible chance for a reversal of the pubs' fortunes in Bermondsey, I would argue, is if proposals for the legalisation of cannabis go through and restore to the pub its function as a place where young people would want to meet.

A Man's Way - Cocaine

Terry, aged 31, is a Bermondsey man who lives in the neighbourhood of Tenter Ground school; he has two children under the age of five. He explains to me how, for men of his age, taking drugs goes hand in hand with rather than displaces the *pub culture*. This is possible he says because the drug he is talking about – cocaine – is illegal and classed as a harder drug than *puff*, but is more easily consumed in the pub. I quote at length from the interview with Terry because it reveals his experience of the way that Bermondsey boys, via shared consumption of particular substances, beer and drugs, become men in the pubs.

“T: [In the pubs] You got the piss ‘eads, who you take no notice of, they get a bit lairy, you just give ‘em a slap. Then you got, you got them categories, you got lairy ones, rowdy ones and the quiet ones they all mix together, they’re all Bermondsey people. They’re all Bermondsey people but ‘alf of ‘em, well 99% of ‘em, are all

²⁷⁷ The transformations in the economy of Bermondsey leisure time point also to a more significant change in the country as a whole. The demolition of pubs with names like The Royal George, which were once the architectural embodiment of *working class* deference for the British aristocracy, comes at a time in which the influence of the monarchy, both socially and politically, is in decline. Traditional ideas about British hierarchy based on a *class* system which has a Queen at its apex are in a state of transition and conservative values in particular seem suddenly behind the times. Whilst people are seen to cling nostalgically to the past, and the idea of its unchanging traditions, the social structure in and through which people embody their value as particular kinds of English/British people is as it has always been continuously contested.

taking cocaine anyway. They're all, if you walk in, ideally The King's Head,²⁷⁸ down The Blue, that's a Millwall/Bermondsey pub, everyone's *smart, sorted*,²⁷⁹ cocaine. You walk in there everyone's on it and I'm talking from fifteen up until sixty - everyone. If you ever go to a pub in Bermondsey you just watch how many men go to the toilet together. [Laughter]... I'm being serious you go to, well anywhere, it's not just Bermondsey, its any *white* male dominated pub, everyone's on coke, you watch how many men go to the toilet together and its all little packets. And that's it. You've got your alcoholics who are *low-life shit* you know who let their self go or you got alcoholics who are smart, on the gear, *faces*,²⁸⁰ because everyone drinks, everyone, but in Bermondsey it's the *culture*, you're brought up on the drink, cocaine. And you got two ways of doing it you're either going to end up dead, heart attack, alcoholic, lose everything or you could say, "No, I don't want that." Now I'm lucky I said no. I was an alcoholic. I was there, I was suicidal mate, I was going to commit it, 'cos I was doing it but I'm 31, a lot of people couldn't handle it, they can't handle it because everyone's on it, that's why you got so many people fucking losing it in Bermondsey now. But you can either say no, I was lucky, I got a second chance at life, half the people I talk to or see now, they're gonna go one way, ... either way you look at it, even though they've got a good life now, 'cos they're drug dealers. As I say they ain't doin' nothin.' but they're on the gear,²⁸¹ it only takes so long and you're dead, but the drink, once you have cocaine you can drink as much as you want. So where ... everyday you're an alcoholic but when you're on cocaine you don't think you're an alcoholic because that hang over's gone, you're there.

G: So you don't feel like an alcoholic, you feel like a million dollars?

T: Yeah all the time, oh yeah, but then that's only paranoia, you get paranoid about it and then you need more and more, until the end of it, bang! You're gonna lose it, you're gonna die. Not so much die, yeah, well, that's the way I perceive it, 'cos that's where I was heading, that's where I would 'ave been. If I'd been, if I'd still have been drinking I think I'd 'ave been dead now, Christmas I think I would have lost it, but that's through abusing myself you know? But I was lucky; I stopped,

²⁷⁸ The names of pubs have been changed for the sake of confidentiality. When I quote verbatim speech at length like this it is always an extract taken from a taped interview. Elsewhere where I quote short sentences in speech marks these are usually extracts from fieldnotes written up at the end of a day in the field.

²⁷⁹ *Smart, sorted*, refers here to the fact that the way you dress stands for how much money you've got. If a person dresses smartly s/he must be 'sorted,' or, in other words not short of money.

²⁸⁰ A *face* is someone with a reputation, a name who people respect, usually because of successes as a gangster of some kind.

²⁸¹ *Gear* means drugs.

thirteen months. First six was hard but where I broke up with all that shit when I was 21, got out of all the gang shit but, see I got married young, 24.

G: So you broke up with your gang before you got married?

T: Oh yeah, she was the barmaid in the pub we used to drink in. But even though I broke up with them I still (used to) see her every now and then but I was in my own world by then. I still see my close mates but I used to be taking cocaine, drink drink drink. I got made redundant in 1985, that's when it really hit me 'cos I got ten *grand*²⁸² and then another eight so I had eighteen *grand* in my pocket, done that within six months - horses, coke, booze, phew - gone. Jack the Lad then... You know for that six months period I can't really remember a lot, then I had a fit. It got me. I was indoors, like, with me wife but I just woke up, phew, I'm gonna die. That's how I felt, couldn't feel myself. Went to have a bath, next thing I knew I woke up in hospital but ... pissed myself, shit myself, broke my nose, bit my tongue, ambulance, bang! I went no, that's it, I'll stop. Stopped for six months, no drinks no drugs, nothing, got back in work... by this time I'd done eighteen *grand*, it was playing on my mind... but no, I blame it on my childhood, not my childhood, can't blame that, but where I thought I was one of the boys. I thought I could handle that. You got two people [in Bermondsey], three people, doughnuts [people who don't get any respect in Bermondsey], people who think they're gangsters, or not gangsters, a *face*, or think they're something. And you've got people who are something but they're not really, everyone's just wankers, everyone's wankers. I look at them now and I'll be honest with you they don't bother me. You know? A lot of people go, "Oh, but ... Frankie Frazer, cos he was a nutter, but anyone can be a nutter, anyone can take an axe to someone. So that doesn't..."

G: Doesn't impress you?

T: Nah.

G: So what does impress you now?

T: What impresses me now? When I wake up every morning and look at my kids. Me, I impress myself, 'cos I'm alive, stopped the drugs, I'm brave enough and I've admitted that I'm an alcoholic, told my family. Don't bother me to tell anyone that I'm an alcoholic 'cos its not embarrassing to me, I took the wrong road and I'm not afraid to admit it... No but I explain that on me thinking I want this life, I want to be one of the lads.

G: What I've seen is that the schools blame the parents, the parents blame the school but on the street boys are constantly vying to see...

T: You're seeing if, whose the gov'nor? Where you want to be in, you know...

²⁸² A *grand* is a thousand pounds.

G: Whether you want to compete or not. It's about being a boy really isn't it?

T: Its about being a boy in Bermondsey, Peckham, Brixton, you know you've got it all. You've got it everywhere it's just that Bermondsey is Bermondsey. Everyone knows Bermondsey is a racist area, everyone looks after each other, that's a load of shit, that's gone, that's finished, that finished ten years ago, that don't work like it anymore. Bermondsey's basically finished.

G: So what's finished it?

T: Drugs. A lot of friendships have split up 'cos of drugs.

G: So it's almost like its caving in from the inside?

T: Yeah, it started, you had the villains in the 60s, 70s, ... do the armed robberies, that's where they get their names from, your family (name) brings up 'cos his Dad or his Uncle is an armed robber, he's got a name. So that's where it starts from, in them days I s'pose I would have done armed robberies in the 70s. I would have done that. But why go and do that with a gun when you can sell drugs. This is where it's gone over. You see? So from the early 80s up until today, its drugs, drugs, drugs, drugs. So that's, and that's where its fucked up because people on drugs turn to crackers, you lose your self respect and you lose your respect for other people and people are competing...

G: So it's like the closeness is being worn away?

T: Oh it's gone, its finished, that finished when cocaine...

G: But it's almost as if it is collapsing from the inside but everyone is blaming what's coming in from the outside.

T: Nah, nah, nah...Everyone blames *black* people, brown whatever, it's nothing to do with that it's that they (Southwark Council) moved other people, and they fucked the housing estates up, they fucked, they fucked it up. That's the way people will, are perceiving it now, everything's gone. So that's why you get all this *race* hate shit going on.

G: Its not really about racism though is it?

T: Yeah, it's *race*, it's colour, colour of your skin that's the way I see it when I was a kid, you know you could be Irish, you'd be all right, you're *black* or a *Paki* or Greek, or foreign, Italian...

G: Dark basically, if you look dark?

T: If you look different, or talk different, that's where it started, but racism to me is its own worst enemy, I don't believe in racism, I think its a load of hyped up shit personally. That's my personal opinion. But as I said that's where it starts from, it's the drugs that's blowing Bermondsey apart, and that's the truth whatever you look at it that's the way it is. You can't blame coloured people, or you can't blame police, it's the drugs.

Bermondsey Culture

Terry is proud to have survived what Bermondsey *culture* means for young men, dicing with danger and death through involvement in crime, violence towards others or via the self-destructive bravado that being 'one of the boys' in the pub demands. His idea of Bermondsey's *culture* is gendered because it is the things that boys do to become men that in his mind have the most influence over the kind of place that Bermondsey is. Luckily he has emerged on the safe side of the developmental cycle which transforms at about the age of 24 either because of death, imprisonment, overdose or if a boy is lucky, marriage to a *nice* girl. Terry now works two jobs; a regular day job and a night job 'in the print.' He is saving up to put his baby son through private school because he knows he has got a fight on his hands to save him from what being a *bod* implies. His ambition is to get away from Bermondsey, to move to Cornwall (which Terry has discovered because of his passion for fishing) or to emigrate to America. Terry is prepared to do whatever it takes to secure his children's future because Bermondsey, he says, has become a 'shit hole.'

Race and Culture

The close relations which once existed amongst and were the pride of Bermondsey people, have in Terry's mind been eroded by the paranoia and havoc that drug abuse wreaks in people's, and especially young men's, lives. Drug abuse is a more important factor in Terry's assessment of Bermondsey's demise than the arrival of outsiders of which *black* people are just one kind among many. The racist reputation that Bermondsey has, once stood in Terry's mind for the way that Bermondsey people looked after their own. Now it stands simply for the failure of the council's housing policy, the decline in living conditions on the estates and the reluctance of Bermondsey people to face up to what drug and alcohol abuse is doing to the *community*.

Although Terry classifies outsiders on the basis of skin colour and other differences, emphasising that the Irish were in a special position because they were *white*, these differences between people are not in Terry's mind insurmountable. He hastens to emphasise, like many Bermondsey people, accused of *racism*, that he has *black* friends. For him (like Lee) the intimacy of personal experience penetrates the defensive shield that racial hatred creates between people. Terry refers to his mate Darren, "I don't see his colour, to me he's just another mate, he's like me. There's always been *black* people coming and going in my house." He then mentions the Parekh²⁸³ report on the future of multi-*ethnic* Britain that causes a furore in the press during my fieldwork. He says,

"What about the British flag being racist? What a load of rubbish that is. We watch those *black* athletes at the Olympics wrapped in the Union Jack and we're proud of them. We cheer them on like anyone who is doing something for the country. If you come to another man's country you've got to take up his flag and his *ways*, that's the way I see it. It's true you've got to respect your roots but if you park your car in Bermondsey with a Jamaican flag in it then that means you don't care much for your windscreen if you know what I mean?"

For Terry then the idea of *race*, based on skin colour is only important in so far as it is indicative of other kinds of differences, especially in a man's *ways*. Racism is a nonsensical concept to Terry because it is obvious to him that most Bermondsey people know and have *black* people as friends. What's important to Terry is that the *black* men he knows personally are his mates because he grew up with them and they behave just like he does, like a *proper* Bermondsey man should. What matters to Terry is whether or not an outsider and especially a man whose parents come from another country, is ready to take on the *ways* of the people he finds himself living with. For Terry it is a question of recognising the precedence and influence that Bermondsey people have in their own *manor*. Outsiders who have different *ways*, different *cultures*, and are proud of it, represent a threat to the reputation of Bermondsey men in their own *manor*, it is a question of the

²⁸³ The Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain. (2000) The Commission, chaired by Professor B. Parekh, was set up in 1988 by the Runnymede Trust, an independent think

competition for influence which is a permanent feature of Bermondsey street politics regardless of *race*. The intersection between locality, *nationality* and *culture* assumes more importance than the idea of *race* as long as outsiders do their best to take on Bermondsey *ways*. In all other cases *race* becomes the defining criterion of a defensive reaction. It's the specificity of the Bermondsey way of life that matters to Terry because it represents to him what he understands to be an acceptable way of being a specific kind of English person.²⁸⁴ Bermondsey pride is symbolised everywhere by the ubiquitous St George's flag, the red cross on the white background, flying from most of the remaining pubs. It stands for pride in the English *way* of life, which Terry has experienced in various specific *ways* as Bermondsey *culture*.

Understood ethnographically, *culture* is inseparable from gendered, local, *national* and *racial* ideas about what belonging means. Just like Lee, Terry struggles to understand what *racism* means because *racism* implies a consistent hatred and disgust for all *black* people at all times and this has not been his experience because some of his mates are *black*. The point is that what matters about a person, their *race*, *culture*, gender, locality or *nation*, are variously emphasised in the shift that occurs between figure and ground in different social situations. In Terry's eyes the sacrifice an immigrant must make in order to belong in 'another man's country' is to prioritise learning about local *ways* over holding onto *national roots*. In the end it is a question of the deference an outsider is expected to show to the means by which respect is gained in Bermondsey. It is resistance to this kind of influence that *bods* are worried about. Their real fear is of a *black* presence that won't pay respect to the criteria of what belonging in Bermondsey means. *Black* boys' resistance to what being a bod means, by definition, contests competitively for control over the *manor*.

tank devoted to the cause of promoting racial justice in Britain.

²⁸⁴ The shift between figure and ground with respect to local or *national* allegiances is another interesting case in which people are confused by the apparent paradox of their situation. Terry laughs about the way Millwall supporters are practically at war with West Ham supporters until there is an England match on and then they find themselves all in Spain having a drink together in mutual support for their country's team at an away match. The St George's cross gains a

Roots - Cultures of Resistance

Terry reflects upon and has developed a critical perspective on what Bermondsey *culture* means for young men, but he does not extend this critical capacity to consideration of whether the way of life in Bermondsey is something an outsider would want to emulate. The point (as I explained in chapter two) is that people usually resist the form of participation that is required of them in one situation because the social values they hold dear in another situation represent an alternative and more acceptable means of gaining social status. So it is that immigrants are able to resist the aspects of the host country's *culture* that they find unappealing and unconstructive. This kind of resistance is the reason that certain kinds of *white working class* children are being left behind whilst the sons and daughters of particular immigrant families begin to do well at school and leave their peers standing. It is the conventional and legitimate achievements of boys from immigrant families that makes them, in the long term, valued as British subjects with equal status not their accommodation of a Bermondsey man's *ways*. The advent of *racism* and *multi-culturalism* in *working class* areas simply transforms and makes more complex the means with which boys compete for prestige – on the street or through school work – and there has always been more than one way of being English/British. That is what the territorial rivalry between *white working class* people from different *manors* has always been about.

Unfortunately the arrogance that xenophobia implies prevents Bermondsey people from recognising the possibility that the resistance of outsiders can be constructive. Unconsidered prejudice fails to account for the likelihood that there are often things to be learned from outsiders and that not all change is bad. Perhaps if outsiders and *black* people in particular had met with a more wholesale welcome in Bermondsey and in England in general, this sacrifice of their *roots*, that the idea of the person in Bermondsey requires of them, would have been easier to

heightened significance in Bermondsey because of the passion for football. For an analysis of

contemplate and accomplish. Generally speaking, however, their welcome was far from warm. Immigrants from Ireland and the Caribbean arriving in England in the 50s and 60s were lumped together in the public imagination with dogs, placed at a remove therefore from common humanity and considered to be the most undesirable kinds of residents for landlord's accommodation and neighbourly status. No surprise then that many immigrants turned to each other and to their *roots* for sustenance, solace and in defence against the hostility of the English people.

Linford, a *black* boy in Year Five/Six at Tenter Ground is the son of a first generation immigrant Jamaican mother, Eunice. She remembers the first week when she arrived in England how she couldn't wait until Sunday to get dressed up and go to church. The thrill of it for her lay in the fact that she would be able to pray for the first time in a Church of England church in England itself instead of in Jamaica. Eunice describes how proud she felt when Sunday finally came, and how when she arrived at the church, her pride turned to fury when she was turned away. She was told that only English people were allowed to join the congregation. Ever since then, she says, she has given up on the Church of England and takes comfort in the Pentecostal churches and her *roots*, which she is keen for Linford to learn about.²⁸⁵ Eunice wants Linford to know that he is a 'Jamaican boy.' For Linford, however, it is perhaps not a question of being either English or Jamaican but of being both English and Jamaican. This is the possibility

Millwall football supporters' social relations see Robson (2000).

²⁸⁵ Eunice was dejected during this interview, which took place in her home. She explained that she was working as a care assistant in an elderly people's home run by a Christian mission. All the elderly people were *white* and the care staff was divided between *black* and *white* workers. Linford's mother felt that although she was the one cleaning *white* people's 'backsides' and making their beds comfortable she was still treated 'like dirt.' The *white* carers, in contrast, were respected and treated personably by the old people. Despite the fact that she had been working with the same residents for a long period of time not one of them had bothered to learn her name. When she confronted one man about it he said, "I can't tell you apart, you all look the same to me." The resentment and fury this caused in Linford's mother led her to want to look for a new job. She tells me that she is continuously astounded that so-called Christian people can be so hateful. The perception that *racism* is a greater problem for the elderly generation in England means that research in care homes for the elderly should prove productive. I conducted one interview in a care home with an elderly lady and her perception was that the care home system was segregated because she rarely saw elderly *black* people admitted. I have not assessed the veracity of her claim.

that figure/ground movements allow. The differing aspects of his developing understanding of himself that Linford chooses to emphasise at any time will depend on which social situation he is in, what form of participation is required of him and the degree to which he acquiesces or resists it.

Against this background of *cultural* and *national* prejudice and *racism*, it is clear that participation in specific kinds of social exchanges between adults become constrained. Linford's mother fears for her son growing up in Bermondsey; her friends warned her not to move here because of Bermondsey's *racist* reputation and so Linford is not allowed to play out. Eunice keeps a cutlass by the door so that anyone who comes knocking will think twice about messing with her. "Still," she says, "The children on the estate, keep coming to knock for Linford." The children are curious about Linford and he wants to go out but adult preoccupations and concerns stand in his way.²⁸⁶ At least at school Linford has the opportunity to make sense of himself in relation to his peers and the preoccupations they share in common, computer gaming, for example, and satellite television programmes.²⁸⁷

Upon analysis it becomes clear that the failure to integrate immigrants from other countries arises from their exclusion from or resistance to participation in the kinds of exchanges between people in which being English, understood as leading a particular *way of life* in various localities/*manors* like Bermondsey, is constituted. Out of this failure a so-called crisis of 'Englishness' emerges.²⁸⁸ This is because

²⁸⁶ During the summer holiday when I visited Linford once a week he had to stay in and watch television all day while his mother was at work. This isolation is the product of prejudice's effect.

²⁸⁷ Linford is a gentle boy who shows no inclination towards participating in fighting and intimidation as a means to gain respect at school. He started Year Five/Six at Tenter Ground half way through the school year and became friends with another new boy, a child of recently arrived West African immigrants.

²⁸⁸ An analysis of English 'identity' cannot therefore ever be separated from a thorough empirical investigation into the social relations particular persons are engaged in, in a multitude of settings, over time. It is the rigorous requirement of this kind of analysis that quite often makes 'cultural studies' inadequate to the means for understanding 'culture.' These kinds of studies are fashionable precisely because *culture* is fashionable but they are usually devoid of any systematic analysis of the social relations in which the term 'culture' comes to be meaningful to people, if at all. There is a lack of critical analysis of what *culture* actually means either to people for whom the term is relevant or to a discipline which propagates its existence as a taken for granted aspect of everyday life. (For examples of critical analysis of the *culture* concept see Baumann (1996) and Kuper (1999)). Anthropologists on the other hand have, I would argue, done themselves a disservice by

the visible presence of *black* people from other *cultures*, who have different *ways of life* and varied *national* origins, impinges on the idea of Englishness and forces people to reflect upon what it means.²⁸⁹ If *black* and *Asian* people have different *cultures* what, we ask ourselves, is our own? In the desire to find *culture* we emphasise difference and the similarities between us easily recede into the background. In response to the crisis of Englishness the myth of a *nation* united by a harmonious, if hierarchical, way of life arises, one that supposedly pertains only to so-called *indigenous white* people. Witness the revival of the British National Party during the election campaign of 2000.

Out of the desire to belong to what being English means people with immigrant ancestry, the *white* Irish for example, may choose not to emphasise their *roots* whilst their current residence and the status of their children raised in England comes to the fore. People with immigrant ancestry often display the most hostility to recent immigrants in the effort to conceal the history of their own alienation

practically de-constructing *culture* out of existence. In so doing they have failed to capitalise both on the ethnographic relevance of the term in Euro-American life and the possibility that multi-culturalism presents for the revival of the discipline, via investigation into what it means to be an English person. I am dismayed in bookshops to see a tiny bookcase devoted to anthropology whilst whole aisles are given over to cultural studies. I see an opportunity lost to anthropology whilst its practitioners engage in a specialised sphere of exchange in which they read each others work but have no popular appeal outside the discipline. This is not the case in other countries, like Denmark, where anthropology is amongst the most popular disciplines for undergraduate study.

²⁸⁹ The presence of *black* and *Asian* people in England brings to the foreground what was always implicit and hidden before and that is the fact that the British Empire and the processes of colonisation, in India and Africa for example, united disparate peoples under one Queen and her country. What is certain is that English men, as conquerors in other people's countries, did not take up those people's *ways* which is what Terry insists people should do in another man's country. On the contrary the English constituted the sense of their own superiority in relation to the difference, usually conceived of as primitivism, of the people who had been conquered. The question of expecting someone to take on your *ways* is really more a question of differential power relations than it is about the etiquette of *national* behaviour. The presence of *black* people who embrace their *cultural* difference poses a threat to the dominance of Bermondsey people and their way of life in their own *manor* and that is the real issue – street politics – not *racial* and *cultural* difference. The arrival of immigrants in England after the end of Empire signals only that the chicken has come home to roost and the eggs it has laid are *racism* and *multi-culturalism*. When I ask Patrick (see chapter five) how he, as a Bermondsey man, has overcome the history of a *racist* past, he tells me that he changed his mind in prison. There he took courses in feminism and realised that, "At the top you've got rich *white* men and after that what you've got is the history of resistance to that power by poor *white* men, *white* women, *black* men, *black* women and so on." "Power," Patrick says, "Is the interesting question."

from insider status.²⁹⁰ In response to the danger that multi-culturalism is perceived to pose to local English *ways of life* there is a renaissance of *working-class* consciousness, reborn as the *white working class*, cultural and *nationalist* politics begin to go hand in hand.²⁹¹ In this light of this development complex categories like *gender* and *class*, *religion*, *race* and *culture*, *community* and *nation*, are best understood as intersecting schemes of differentiation, in relation to which the idea of the person in England is continuously contested and transformed over time.

²⁹⁰ In discussion with Patrick, he explains to me that most of his friends when he was a boy had Irish parents, but he perceived them, like himself, to be Bermondsey boys. His *mixed race* friend, in contrast, was excluded from Bermondsey boy status because of his colour.

²⁹¹ This is the case not just in England but throughout Europe where the far right begins to raise its head again

Part I vi) Politics

The General Election

A few weeks before the general election I am sitting with a youth worker, Max, in the club waiting for the *bods* to arrive. We are discussing my map of Bermondsey, which is laid out in front of us. I am explaining to him how the idea of the space and its boundaries are inseparable, in Bermondsey people's minds, from what it means for them to be the particular kind of people they are.²⁹² Max finds it difficult to imagine that people could have such a close attachment to the place where they grew up. He was born and grew up in southern Africa but does not define himself in relation to any special affinity for the place he calls home. Not surprisingly, because of his personal experience of the contested status of *white* Africans, he is interested in racial and *national* politics and supportive therefore of my work.

A group of *bods* enter the club and Max calls three or four of them over to the table where we are sitting. They check for Max, greeting him, "All right Max?" They make their way over and Max introduces them to me, telling them that I'm writing a book about Bermondsey *bods*. Sceptical, they look from me to Max, sizing me up, looking for signs that it might be a scam. They like the idea of the book but they're not about to be made fools of getting excited about something that's not for real. As usual we have to go through the - 'me looking like *the old bill* thing' - and once we've got over that the *bods* sit down and Nick, the dominant youth among them, asks me, looking cautiously at the map, what I want to know. I ask him to look at the map and tell me about the important places in Bermondsey. Leaning over, getting their bearings on the map, they soon become enthusiastic insisting in unison that The Blue is the heart of Bermondsey. I ask them why and Nick says, "Because that's where we all meet up, that's where it all *goes off*."²⁹³ For them The Blue is a territorial heartland and also therefore a trouble spot. Over the Christmas holiday a Turkish man had been stabbed in the

²⁹² In fact when I asked people to draw, onto my map of Bermondsey, the boundaries that they perceive to be relevant, each person's map came out differently. See for example the difference between Anita and Jean's map (map 1 P.9) and Nicole's map (map 3 P.254).

²⁹³ *Goes off* means *trouble happens*.

eye during an altercation in Bermondsey and he later died. It was reported in the press as a *racist* murder. Two *bods* were later convicted and are serving time for the offence in a young offender's institution. *Bods* on the street felt that after that *the old bill* had a point to prove which was experienced by them as an increase in stop and search tactics, tense and antagonistic interactions which happen most often 'down The Blue.' "What are the police looking for?" I ask, "*Puff* and knives," Nick tells me.

Even by mid-March the atmosphere on the street is still highly charged as it always is when something has 'kicked off' recently. During the end of the winter months in the light of the longer spring evenings everyone in Bermondsey is talking about the groups of up to fifty or sixty teenagers who are meeting up to hang out 'down The Blue.' This show of solidarity amongst them antagonises the police, intimidates local residents and makes an undeniable statement about the intentions of Bermondsey's youth to command its centre. It is in this atmosphere that we are now pouring over the map. One among the *bods* looks for and points out Millwall football ground and emphasises its importance. Max interrupts pointing out that the Millwall football ground is not in Bermondsey. It is outside the boundary they have drawn on the map but the *bods* insist that it doesn't matter because it is an important place that *bods* go to and it means a lot to them.²⁹⁴ They go on to highlight key roads, well known or notorious housing estates and before long the conversation comes to settle on the question of Bermondsey boundaries. Max asks them where outside the boundaries they will not or might be afraid to go. Tentative and cautious until now, Nick raises his voice, moving forward, stabbing at Peckham with his finger on the map. "I'm not afraid to go anywhere, I'll go where I fuckin' like but we don't go there because that's where all the fuckin' *blacks* are." His mates look furtively at each other knowing that Nick is breaking a taboo by speaking openly about his hatred for *black* people in a public space with

²⁹⁴ Millwall's address is Zampa Road, SE16. All of SE16 is Bermondsey; it's just that Zampa Road doesn't fit into their idea of Bermondsey's boundaries. Long term residents, who live on the Silwood Estate, which is close to the south-eastern boundary expressed outrage and protested against the proposal of Southwark Council to give half of Silwood to Lewisham Council. People felt betrayed because of their allegiance to Bermondsey.

strangers present. They smirk, presumably glad that he is their daring spokesman, taking risks whilst they look on.

Nick continues, raising his voice, stabbing the map with his finger as the passion of his invective mounts. "Something's got to be done because they're fucking everywhere, taking over, but I'll tell you this, they're not having Bermondsey. All the other *white* people in London are watching us to see what we're going to do because they know that we're the last stronghold and we've got to fight for it because some of our Granddads went to fuckin' war to fight for Bermondsey and we're not gonna give it up so that the fuckin' *blacks* can take it over and turn it into a dirty smelling shithole like Peckham." For a moment there is a speechless silence. I want to come back at him, tell him that *black* people fought in the war for England just like Bermondsey boys' grandfathers did. I desperately want to give him the history lesson that he needs, but I know that if I resist the form of participation that he has initiated he will close up on me, and I will learn nothing more about his beliefs. Nick's friends sit quietly, nervously smirking. Max pursues the point asking Nick if there is anywhere else he is afraid to go and, calming down for a moment, Nick admits he wouldn't go to Cold Harbour Lane in Brixton because he says, "That's their *manor*, if I went there I'd be fuckin' asking for trouble."

I ask Nick what it is about *black* people he doesn't like, and he says, "They're wild, that's why, they fuckin' stab you for nothing. Like that ten-year-old boy [Damilola Taylor], they stabbed him for no reason, and he didn't do nothing to nobody. They're wild, they're fuckin' animals, that's why and it's time we did something about it, it's time we started burning down some fuckin' houses." I look into Nick's face, twisted with hatred and frustration, and try to conceal the horror of my own reactions, the nausea I feel and the fear. I imagine innocent people, my own children, burning in terror, and realise with dread in my heart how acts of inhumanity are committed. First comes the conviction that certain groups of people are in fact inhuman, followed by the conviction that they deserve to be

treated like dangerous animals that pose a threat to humans. From this point it is not difficult to imagine how Nick convinces himself that *black* people should be killed. I try to reassure myself that youths like Nick are simply frustrated because they are dispossessed of all but the ideology of their *manor* and are burning their bridges to the outside world whilst they imagine that they speak for the whole country.

Nationalist Politics

Nick is shouting now, other youths in the club are looking over to see what's *going off*.²⁹⁵ He is stabbing the map vociferously, spitting judgements, casting aspersions on the government, which he perceives to be doing nothing about all the immigrants and asylum seekers who, he says, are flooding into the country. He expresses his worst fear that soon *black* people will come to dominate the whole of London. Max tries to reason with Nick, telling him that the proportion of *ethnic minorities* in England is only about 6%. Nick scoffs at this idea, "You're having a fuckin' laugh mate," he says, "*Blacks* and *Pakis* are pouring in every fuckin' day in them lorries."²⁹⁶ On my way home from the youth club, trying to assimilate all I have heard and felt, I think to myself how frightening and truly threatening it would be if angry young men like Nick were to organise and find a political voice. Only three days later and in the light of the imminent General Election the proposal for National Front marches in Bermondsey is announced under the banner: Keep Bermondsey *White*. Because of the degree of recent racial tension there is a lot of concern about the marches, how many people will turn up and will there be any trouble? People remember how previous the attempts of the British National Party in the 1990s to use The Blue as a recruiting ground, were thwarted by Bermondsey people. The BNP recruiters had been kicked out partly because of a generalised suspicion of outsiders but mostly because the majority of Bermondsey people feel that *racism*, although prevalent, is not the answer to the

²⁹⁵ *Going off* means trouble happening.

²⁹⁶ Although the 6% statistic is relevant *nationally* on a local level the implication is different because a majority of so-called *ethnic minorities* are to be found in the inner cities. In Southwark, for example, the percentage is more like 24% which is why youths, like Nick, feel so strongly about it.

issues such as the maintenance and allocation of social housing that concern them. Bearing in mind the history of previous efforts by the BNP to hijack Bermondsey's *racist* reputation, hardly any Bermondsey people turn up for the National Front march. The majority of people have little faith that the problems they are preoccupied with will be dealt with effectively by the National Front.

In the week following the NF march, Gareth, the senior youth worker at the club, tells me about a conversation he had recently had with Nick about the National Front. He had asked him what he thought about the march and Nick had replied, "They're fucking useless, what good is marching? What we want is proper action." Gareth explains to me how he had then spent a considerable amount of time trying to reason with Nick, trying to find out about the deep-seated reasons for his discontent. Max interrupts Gareth and suggests that Nick is simply spouting the *racism* that has been fed to him by generations of his family. Gareth, who is personally interested in the alienation of young people from the democratic process, tells us how he had tried to persuade Nick that there are legitimate means through which he can channel his grievances and that they deserve to be heard just like any other person's. He explains that he had attempted to get Nick to see the consequences of his *racism* in terms of his own and other people's 'suffering and asked him if he is really ready to face what a *racist* future means. Was Nick ready, for example, to sacrifice the friendship he enjoys with one of his best mates – Tahar - whose parents come from Turkey and with whom he has grown up? Gareth tells us that Nick had replied calmly, telling Gareth that when the time comes he will write a letter to Tahar and explain things to him. Already, then, Nick is anticipating the refusal to participate in exchange that uncompromising *racism* consists of - no talking, no seeing, no liking, just hating and the attempt to objectify *black* people as other than human.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁷ Of course the refusal to participate in exchange is a form of exchange in itself, one that leads to the likelihood of violent conflict because the denial of the legitimate subjectivity of the other is resisted.

Deeply concerned that his efforts to reason with *bods* like Nick are in vain, Gareth distributes the Anti-Nazi counter demonstration leaflets to the young people in the club. They, in return, are dismayed and seriously doubt that outsiders like Gareth, who know nothing about what goes in Bermondsey, can do anything about Bermondsey people's problems. Youth workers are well meaning, but for the most part they have little understanding of the part that violence plays in the way *bods* work things out in Bermondsey. Street politics have very little to do with the democratic process. The only thing that tempers the vehement *racism* and street violence characteristic of youth in Bermondsey is the presence of a more moderate middle-aged constituency many of whom have a firm commitment to local politics. This generational difference conspires against the violent radicalism of young people's exploration of extremist *nationalist* movements. In the end, even though the press reports that it was Bermondsey youths who asked them to come in, the National Front's march and those that followed subsequently were ill attended as predicted. They reflected the *racist* rage in Bermondsey but were not supported by it.

Liberal Politics and Patriotism

The massive police presence on the day of the first march was a response to the necessity to prevent the anticipated clash between the National Front march and the Anti-Nazi demonstration. The full measure of what was avoided became clear during the course of the summer months as so-called *race* riots erupted across the north of England in the old mill towns of Oldham and Bradford. The presence of the BNP in Oldham and the measure of their relative success there since, reflect the increasing scale of *white-working-class* disenchantment with liberal politics. The problems of a newly self conscious *white-working-class* living side by side with but often segregated from similar housing estates where particular *ethnic minorities* reside are brought to the fore. Reports revealed the extent to which even the confused and cautious *racism* of youths like Lee and the more vehement hatred of *bods* like Nick, are reflections of a wider conservatism masking as patriotism in this country. The possibility of an alliance between the conservatism of the poor

and that of the wealthy raises its head in the ambitions of the British National Party led by Nick Griffin. He is not a dispossessed youth from the inner city; he is a Cambridge law graduate whose father was recently dismissed from the campaign office of the Conservative Party because of his ties to Italian fascists. Meanwhile, in Europe, parties of the far right gain legitimacy, votes and influence because of the populist appeal concerning the issues of asylum and immigration which liberal politicians are perceived to be too scared to tackle head on.

During campaigning for the year 2000 General Election, the Conservative Party attempts to fight for a cohesive *cultural* vision of England/Britain, which they portray as being under threat from the twin evils of liberalism at home and uncontrolled immigration from abroad. Labour struggles meanwhile to side step the delicate ground of *racial* and *cultural* politics by sticking to rationally calculated economic agendas. Liberal Democrat Home Affairs Spokesman and Member of Parliament for North Southwark and Bermondsey, Simon Hughes, accuses William Hague, of inflaming *racial* tension with ill chosen words about asylum seekers. Simon Hughes is then accused in the press of playing the *race* card himself. Most people however are not fully aware of the extent to which potentially *racist* rhetoric poses a very real danger in the constituency that Simon Hughes represents. A focus on *race* undermines the solution of the more worrying and deep-seated economic needs of Bermondsey's people, which Simon Hughes is attempting to convince his constituents can be resolved through the dedicated application of democratic process to the assessment of social need. Many Bermondsey people have a lot of faith in him.

Local Politics – *Community* Leaders

Most people imagine Bermondsey to be the Labour heartland it once was, but the success of Simon Hughes' political campaign here, demonstrates, I would argue, what Bermondsey people value about a person and especially a *community* leader. Apart from the obvious dedication he demonstrates to his constituents' problems what matters to Bermondsey people is that Simon Hughes lives in Bermondsey.

He is resident and therefore genuinely meets part of the criteria for belonging in a place where residence and kinship mean everything to people. Simon Hughes' residence, pride in and dedication to Bermondsey suffice to make him more like kin and his achievements are widely acclaimed. All his campaign publicity makes careful mention of the fact that Simon Hughes is a local man with an intimate understanding of local life. He is not an outsider who thinks he knows what's best for people.

The threat to Simon Hughes' democratic popularity in Bermondsey arises from the fact that *bods*, like Nick, at least during the warrior years of their lives, march to a drum that has very little to do with liberal politics. There is no doubt that the streets of south east London are becoming a *racial* and *cultural* battle ground and that for youths in Bermondsey, being a *bod* is tantamount to being a warrior at war. My hope is that music and well-trained, properly informed youth workers might make a difference to *bods* because politics probably won't. Music, and specifically UK Garage music, provides the common ground which enables young *black* and *white* people to come together voluntarily and to pick up on the friendships they made when they were forced to spend time together at school.

Through the seductive mediation of music and dance, which is another form of competitive exchange, UK Garage also becomes the medium through which Bermondsey youths' peer groups, organised in part on the basis of gender differences, are disorganised by desire. Ironically it is at the boundary in the nightclubs of the Old Kent Road, The Gin Palace and The Scene, that the things that young people are preoccupied with become the means for the possibility of desire between *bods* and *birds*. UK Garage, drinking, taking drugs, having money and having the right designer clothes, hair styles, *race*, *culture*, local *manor* and manner and avoiding *the old bill* are what MCs chat about and there's plenty to say. Gender matters.²⁹⁸ Sex counts. Music mediates. Once he's met a *bird* and got

²⁹⁸ Actually it is heterosexuality that counts. Terry explains to me that even though Bermondsey people are widely accused of *racism* they are not as *racist* as they are homophobic, that, he says, is the last taboo. I am told of two villains notorious during the 50s/60s/70s, old men now, who had a

to know her well enough and introduced her to his mum at home, a *bod* just might end up wanting to have a pizza, a *puff* and video indoors rather than hanging out on the street with his mates. Then there's a chance for change.

gay brother. They never spoke to him, or of him. He was disowned, shamed and verbally abused in the street by them or their sons.

Part I vii) Desire

Desire, Marriage and the Household

Nicole was born in Bermondsey and brought up in Rotherhithe.²⁹⁹ Her mother, her mother's mother and her mother's father were born, grew up and still live in Bermondsey and her father is from Peckham. Nicole is nineteen years old; she is a youth worker studying for her youth and *community* work degree and spends a few nights a week working in the youth club where I met Lee and Nick. Like her mother Nicole is a volunteer leader in a local girl guides group and has already been awarded for services to the *community*. She is engaged and will be married to her fiancé, Martin, a local boy, within the year. After the wedding the young couple are going to move in with Nicole's Nan because even though Nicole has put her name down on the council list she knows she doesn't stand a chance of getting a place of her own in Bermondsey. Neither can she afford to rent or buy a flat privately.

Nicole's Mum, Margaret, describes the young people who frequent the youth club where Nicole works as *street-rakers*. Given, or claiming from their parents, the freedom to hang out on the street with a group of friends, they rake it over, like turf, to see what interesting distraction might come up. Nicole laughs at her Mum's description and tells me, "She can talk, like she wasn't a serious *street-raker* herself." Nicole laughs about her Mum's past because she knows that no harm necessarily comes of *street raking*, but she is also aware that there's a fine line between being a *street-raker* and becoming a troublemaker. Parents have cause for concern when their teenage children are hanging out on the streets making their own amusement. Nicole, her

²⁹⁹ Although people at different times emphasise the difference between Bermondsey and Rotherhithe there are also situations in which the two terms are mutually inclusive such as when a boy from Rotherhithe wants to claim association with Bermondsey *bods*. Nicole's mother, Margaret, is very aware of the differences; she grew up in Bermondsey near Guy's hospital and after that lived on Frean Street. She remembers that when she was a child Bermondsey people never had any reason to go to Rotherhithe because in those days it was cut off when the bridges were up. Rotherhithe was, in Margaret's mind an isolated place whereas it has now become a desirable place to live because of all the riverside housing. She says, "Bermondsey people were really factory people whilst Rotherhithe people were Dockers." When she first moved to Rotherhithe, Margaret found it difficult to be accepted until people realised that she was the daughter of the butcher whose shop used to be in Rotherhithe. She remembers when one of the older women came knocking on her door when she first moved in to tell her about cleaning of the communal areas and they were quite hostile to her. Once she proved herself, however, things began to get better. Margaret puts the demise of Bermondsey and the breakdown in neighbourhood

younger sister and her brother certainly weren't allowed to do it. Margaret made sure that they were preoccupied with other pursuits, sports for her brother who is a keen swimmer and Brownies and girl guiding for Nicole and her sister.

Margaret has raised her children as Church of England Christians and the youth club requires a Christian commitment from its youth workers.³⁰⁰ Nicole emphasises that what she refers to as 'your classic Bermondsey girl' of her age, is not involved in the church and is usually a person who has had her children young, early on in a relationship and later separated.³⁰¹ Nicole and her family are, in her opinion, typical of a different kind of Bermondsey person and she puts the reason for the difference down to the strength of her nan's values. Margaret stresses that in Bermondsey the family traditionally centres on the mum and the grandmother. She goes on to tell me how all the people she knew in her family were reckoned through her mother's relations. Even though she carried her father's surname she always thought of herself as belonging to her mother's family and as being a girl under her mother's maiden name. Margaret explains that whilst most men were out drinking in the pubs after work and spending money on gambling, her mother refused to participate in the *pub culture*. She quickly let Margaret's father know that she wasn't prepared to watch him and his brothers drinking and singing in the pub every Friday night. Not wanting to lose her, he decided to follow her example. Nicole's grandfather became a butcher, worked for himself and was further set apart therefore from the camaraderie men enjoyed during and after work.³⁰² This soon meant that whilst other families were often living in

relations down to the failure of the system for cleaning communal areas. "It was like a village," she says, "Once people stopped caring what the neighbours thought it was over."

³⁰⁰ Youth clubs, which have Christian funding, are the evidence in Bermondsey of the tradition of Victorian philanthropy in cities throughout the country. Nicole is not critical of the Christian mission but is sceptical that outsiders, and especially university educated *middle class* outsiders, could do what they set out to achieve, which is 'to help people in Bermondsey.' Nicole resents their intrusion and says, "We can help ourselves."

³⁰¹ A priest explains to me that his congregation consists largely of older people and mothers in their twenties or thirties who attend out of the instrumental desire to get their children into the church schools. He stresses that people refer to the church as their own, rely on it to perform important life cycle rituals such as marriages, births, christenings, funerals etc but don't make the effort to attend regular services. This is a source of frustration to the priest who struggles against low attendance and a lack of fit between the congregation and the diversity of interests in the parish.

³⁰² Mrs. Waldman, the elderly lady I refer to in chapter two, explains to me that men working on the dock enjoyed such camaraderie that the idea of coming home to the stress of a poverty stricken

poverty and going without Margaret's parents were able to enjoy a better standard of living, saving money and buying things, like a car, that other families didn't have. Margaret remembers when her Mum had a joint of meat for a Sunday roast she would go out onto the stairs of the flats to sharpen her carving knife so that the neighbours would know they had meat on the table. Margaret says, "Where it was keep up with the Joneses we were the Joneses." She explains that people thought her family was rich because her Dad was a butcher and put their good fortune down to luck, but it wasn't that Margaret says, "It was just that my father didn't spend his money like other men." The example illustrates that whilst young men's influence among peers on the street and in the pubs is all important to them, the influence of Bermondsey women lies for the most part in the home. Margaret emphasises that the difference in her father was the result of the strong influence of her mother.

Fur Coat: No Knickers

Nicole explains that in Bermondsey now everyone is obsessed with keeping up with the Joneses, concerned about having the latest things, especially designer clothes, wanting everyone to know about what they've got and being seen to have money to spend. Even young people on the social are concerned about their image and beneath this façade she says, everyone is in debt and parents buy everything on credit because they don't want their kids to go without. Margaret explains that her mother calls this phenomenon, 'starving behind lace curtains,'³⁰³ whilst other people call it, 'fur coat: no knickers,' or 'fur coat and nothing in the fridge.' This means that looking good on the outside is more important than what's going on underneath and there is a risk therefore of being exposed and shamed as someone who really has nothing to show off about.

and over crowded home was often too much to bear. They stayed too long in the pub after work to escape domestic crises and in those days, she says, there was a pub on every corner. Pubs served as landmarks by which people were given directions in Bermondsey. 'The Blue,' for example, is an area so-called after The Blue Anchor pub and 'The Red Lion' is an area named after The Red Lion pub, which is now an estate agent's office.

³⁰³ Lace curtains are what are now called 'nets.' Nets are the main means with which some privacy is provided in council flats and there is a multitude of styles for decorating the inside of windows with nets. Nets are also a means of discerning the standard of a woman's cleanliness because nets must be spotlessly *white*. When a location finder from a film company knocked on my door about the possibility of shooting a film in one of the flats in the block I asked her why she had chosen my flat. She replied, "Yours is the only flat without net curtains and so I thought you would be more amenable." I have *white* Venetian Blinds.

Looking good becomes more important than making good and there is a danger, therefore, of being consumed with desire. The value of conspicuous consumption rises against the background of a relatively recent history of desperate poverty in which going without was the norm for almost everyone. Now nobody wants to be seen to be going without, only it is not food now that people lack. Parents worry now about whether or not their children have the prestige items they need to compete for influence in teenage peer groups.³⁰⁴

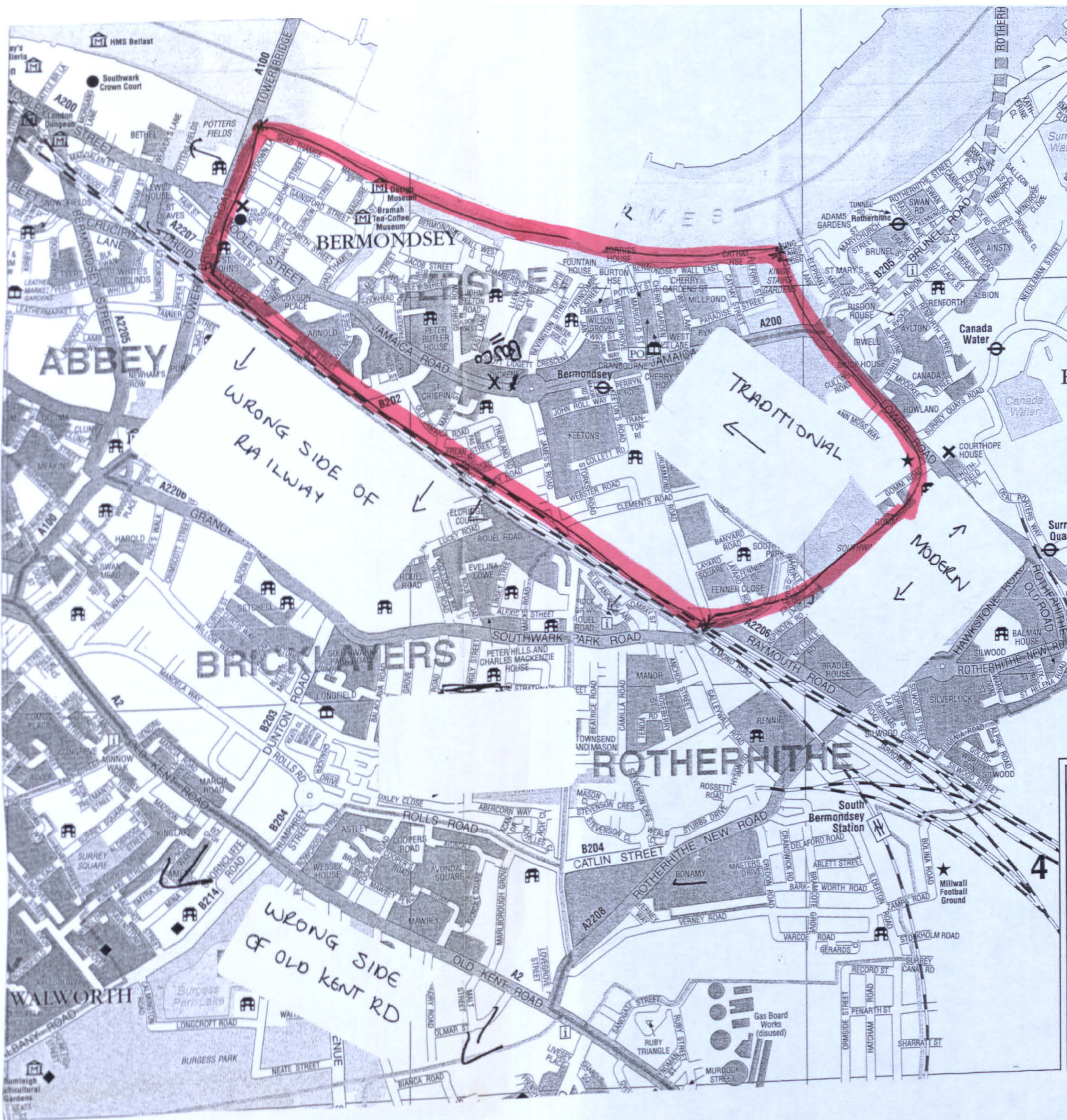
Thrift - *Traditional and Modern People*

Nicole explains how her mum has tried to save her from keeping up with the Joneses by teaching her to manage her money and to resist the desire to have what everyone else has got. Nicole has learned the value of thrift.³⁰⁵ She has no credit cards, no switch card, operates on a cash only basis and is trying to save for her wedding. She tells me of the difficulties she is facing with her future mother-in-law because her fiancé's mother is, she says, a typical Bermondsey woman. She wants the best of everything even though she can't afford it; is determined to have a big wedding for her son so she can make a big show, impress her friends and neighbours and keep up the family's reputation. Nicole in contrast wants a quiet, affordable ceremony that doesn't leave everyone 'in debt up to the eyeballs.'

Trying to explain the dilemma she faces with her future in-laws, Nicole explains to me that there are two kinds of people in Bermondsey, the *traditional* and the *modern*. On the map of Bermondsey she draws for me (see overleaf) the area that demarcates for

³⁰⁴ Meanwhile manufacturers of prestige goods and designer items such as Burberry and Tiffany worry that the kudos that comes from possession of luxury goods is being undermined by the wholesale adoption of such items by *working class* and street youth *cultures*. Burberry has now lost its 'prestige' and its image of *class* and what it is supposed to epitomise, which is English elegance, has been lost.

³⁰⁵ It is interesting that the values Nicole describes, temperance, thrift and educational aspirations are the core values associated with the achievement of *middle class* status, but Margaret and Nicole both insist on the pride they feel about being *working class*. Whilst it may appear that it takes three generations to change *class* position in either direction, Margaret and her family have no ambition to become *middle class*. On the contrary their position emphasises a further division amongst *working class* people between what are considered to be church going, hard working, respectable and decent people as compared to feckless, drinking, gambling, criminal, drug taking people. In reality however this apparent dichotomy is subject to the same figure/ground shifts as all other conceptual schemes for the differentiation of persons are.



MAP 3.
NICOLE'S PERCEPTION OF BERMONDSEY
BOUNDARIES.
© SEE MAP 2.

her where the *traditional* people live and who the *modern* people are likely to be. *Modern* people, she says, want to keep up with and have all the latest things. Her fiancé's mother, for example, has to have laminated wooden floors, Ikea furniture and a Dyson vacuum cleaner to impress her friends when they come round, even if they suspect that she can't afford any of these things. *Traditional* people are more likely to be *die-hard* Bermondsey people, usually older people, who still get dressed up to go to the pub on a weekend night and drink in the kind of pubs where the women wear all their gold at once, sit in the same spot they've always sat in and get up to sing along to live music in the same order they've always sung in.³⁰⁶ Nicole explains that traditional Bermondsey people struggle to conserve things as they have always been whilst *modern* people aim to demonstrate how they are keeping up with the changing times. It's the *modern* people, she tells me, who are struggling to keep up with the Joneses. "This side of Southwark Park," Nicole says, "People are *modern*, they don't mind *culture*³⁰⁷, wear clothes from Next and will chat to new neighbours." The other side, she explains, is more *traditional* because of its proximity to the dock. Nicole points to the railway that runs through the centre of Bermondsey from London Bridge to south Bermondsey and beyond, "Mind you," she says, "Once you go through the railway arches people are different again." Nicole's understanding of the relationship between the kinds of people that there are in Bermondsey and the places they live in demonstrates the point made earlier about the way that loyalties develop outwards from the mother, the home, the street, the estate, the borough, etc. Nicole is so loyal to her small patch that she perceives a difference in people who lives only blocks away.

³⁰⁶ The tradition of live music in pubs is participative. When I spent time at the Dockers' working men's club, I was expected to be able to get up and sing a song, but much to my embarrassment I was incapable of doing so. The way men, and especially women, wear gold is characteristic of which *manor* they belong to and, within that manor, of what kind of person they are. Good quality gold jewellery is given as presents and has sentimental value; the jewellery is the substantiation of a person's kin relations. A mother who has just given birth may be given a ring saying 'Mum' on it, a boy may be given a sovereign on a particularly important birthday like his eighteenth and gold jewellery is given as a present to a newly born child. Nicole describes how she and her fiancé had been to Hatton Garden to choose her engagement ring. When Tom's mother (see chapter two) was in dire straits she resorted to taking her jewellery to the pawn shop and dreaded that her mother should find out because she was conscious of the fact that her gold stood for her familial relations. Note that jewellery rhymes with foolery, hence the slang 'Tom' meaning gold: Tomfoolery = jewellery. A 'Tom shop' is jewellers, or a 'Tommers.'

³⁰⁷ *Culture* here has two meanings, referring either to the practices of people from different *cultures* or to *culture* as the kind of pursuits associated with *posh* people such as listening to classical music, going to art galleries or the opera etc.

Notice, then, how different Nicole's map (map 3) is to that drawn by Anita and Jean (map 2 P.9).

Respect

Nicole emphasises the differences she perceives between the kinds of people to be found in Bermondsey, but essentially she is preoccupied with the difference between 'classic Bermondsey girls' and girls like her from *respectable* families like hers. These families are opposed in Nicole's and her mother's perceptions to those in which the woman's efforts are thwarted by a man's allegiance to his male friends who spend money recklessly on drink and horses. *Street-rakers* whom Nicole describes as *hard kids* because they're tough, more likely to end up in trouble, to be taking drugs and become involved in crime form part of the opposition that Nicole perceives between different kinds of young people in Bermondsey. At the same time she recognises that the *bods* who frequent the club are desirable to young girls in Bermondsey because they are young men with influence, a reputation, respect and independence on the street. Parents like Margaret worry that their teenage children will fall in with the wrong crowd and be exposed to bad influences while they are out *street raking*. That's the danger that the street poses to parental ambitions for their children's future and the family's *respectable* name. A dichotomy emerges between the different means of gaining *respect*, through *decent* law abiding family life or through being *hard* and having a reputation on the street. The tension between the different means of gaining respect reaches its highest point when girls and boys start going out because *bods* know the security of their future lies in their desire to make households with *nice* girls. The danger for a *bod* on the street comes from involvement in violence and crime, whilst teenage pregnancy quickly becomes the biggest risk to the reputation of a Bermondsey girl. Even though Margaret worries that Nicole is getting married so young she is relieved that her fiancé is a *decent* boy whom she is confident will be prepared to follow Nicole's example.

Bermondsey Girls ³⁰⁸

Nicole emphasises that what they look like, their hair cuts, dress sense and style and their image is everything to young people in Bermondsey. One of the youth workers, Mark, a colleague of Nicole's who has come to London from the countryside remarks that where he comes from teenagers do everything possible to mark themselves out as individuals. In Bermondsey he is amazed to see youths struggling to look exactly the same. Nicole repeats the often heard adage, "You can tell a Bermondsey girl a mile off," and she describes the Bermondsey girls' uniform to me. Teenage girls wear tracksuit bottoms or three quarter length jeans with turn ups, designer shoes, such as Patrick Cox or Gucci loafers, trade mark trainers, denim jackets with the collars turned up, Burberry scarves and Louis Vuitton handbags. Girls wear their hair long, preferably blond with highlights tied in a ponytail sometimes pulled through a baseball cap and tucked in the jean pocket is the obligatory latest model of mobile phone. Usually, Nicole says, she can tell which school Bermondsey girls go to by the way that they dress when they are not at school and there are rivalries between different schools.

In the youth club Nicole introduces me to a group of girls who are mates. They are all fourteen years old and most of them attend Porter³⁰⁹ school. Some of the girls are *born and bred* Bermondsey and others have moved into Bermondsey with their families from other areas. I ask the girls when they first became aware that they were Bermondsey girls. Nancy, the chattiest among them replies, "We get classed as Bermondsey girls." I ask, "Who by?" Nancy says, "Like, girls from Camberwell, Lewisham and Peckham, they call us *kitchen germs*.³¹⁰" She explains how they get taken for being Bermondsey girls because of the way they dress, the way they talk, like when they say *baked potata* (see ya lata) and *sweet* which means thank you. Nancy

³⁰⁸ The idea of the Bermondsey girl made the headlines recently because of the success of Jade, a competitor in The Big Brother House, Channel Four's reality television show.

³⁰⁹ The names of schools have been changed for the sake of confidentiality.

³¹⁰ The self conscious awareness of being a Bermondsey person develops quite late in childhood often when children get to secondary school where they meet children from other boroughs/*manors*. A man explains to me that he didn't know he was a Bermondsey boy until he went to school in Walworth. He tells me how much he hated it and how he used to run home in his lunch hour just to be back in Bermondsey for half an hour. When a Walworth boy asked him if he wanted to come home to his house after school he replied to the invitation, "No I fuckin' don't," and the man laughs, telling me how he ran straight home after school everyday.

goes on to explain Bermondsey's *racist* reputation. She tells me, "We had *black birds* coming in before, when the Aylsebury [an estate in Walworth] was going to be knocked down and there were National Front marches and that, but I don't agree with it." Nancy tells me she has got mates who are *black* and cousins who are *mixed race*. "Racism is the older people's point of view, it's just the problem is that *black* boys come *bowling* into Bermondsey and then wonder why people are *rash*, we wouldn't go *bowling* into Peckham like that."³¹¹ Nancy explains that they couldn't go and *plot up*³¹² in Peckham, anyway because a friend of theirs got mugged for her trainers and she had to come home with no shoes on. Nancy goes on to explain that it's 'the Africans' she's got a problem with. "They've got too much attitude, thinking they can rule it. Just 'cos I go to Porter and wear designer clothes *black* girls *come down on*³¹³ me." I ask Nancy how much her shoes cost and she lifts up her foot to show me the beautiful Patrick Cox loafers she is wearing telling me they cost £100.³¹⁴ "How can you afford it?" I ask and she tells me her Mum and her aunt buy all her clothes for her as gifts. She says, "At least we ain't got our clothes from drugs money," and she emphasises, "You've got to wear it so everyone knows what you got, so people can see you've got money."

Objects of Desire

The desire for, and possession of, prestige items of personal clothing are the means whereby Bermondsey girls create and transform their personal value in relation to their female peers. This desire for particular things and achieving the right look through wearing them, becomes the means through which confidence and desirability are, in part, constituted. The difficulty girls face is how to continuously constitute their desirability whilst at the same time maintaining their reputation as *nice* girls, i.e. *decent* girls who are not *slappers* who 'give it [sex] up' too easily. Negotiating the difference between their desirability to the opposite sex, their own desire for sex, and their own and their families' reputations becomes the source of a joking relationship between

³¹¹ The girls mention the difference between the way *white* boys *bow* and the way *black* boys *bow*. They explain that the way *black* boys *bow* is heavy, 'like they've got rocks in their trainers.'

³¹² *Plot up* means hang out.

³¹³ *Come down on* means to criticise heavily.

³¹⁴ It is possible to get designer clothes by other means, as stolen goods or by buying imitation goods, which are sold cheaply in the street markets – these goods are described as *moody*.

girls and women. They tease each other mercilessly, calling across the street to a friend, for example, “Oi Janice, you *slapper*.”

I show Nancy the map of Bermondsey asking her about the important spaces and she points out the various estates and the different reputations they have, showing me which ones, for example, are renowned for *scag heads*. I ask Nancy if she smokes *puff* and she tells me that they are all *on the puff* even though the boys think that girls shouldn't be doing it. The boys, she explains, often don't let the girls smoke when they are hanging out together. She tells me that on one Friday night her and her mates might pay £40 for 2.5 grammes of *puff*, enough for 3 wraps and some ‘pills to pop.’ They pay for it, she says, by saving up their school dinner money. Nancy tells me about the clubs they get into on the Old Kent Road and how most of them get away with drinking Bacardi Breezers. I ask her what the difference is between Bermondsey girls and boys and she explains that the main difference is that girls don't really get into trouble on the streets. The problem, she says, is with the boys, “They're flash, they've got big heads and don't settle down until they meet girls.” Nancy tells me about the curfew ‘down The Blue’ and about how they get searched if they go down there on a Friday night because the police are looking for *puff* and weapons. She says that when boys are found with weapons they tell the police they're just trying to be prepared because on Fridays *black* boys from Peckham come down armed with axes, baseball bats and knuckle dusters. “Boys are always trying to prove themselves,” Nancy says. She explains that girls do fight but only when they have to, “There are some girls who are just two faced *shit stirrers*³¹⁵ but you stay away from them.” I ask Nancy if there are families in Bermondsey with names everyone recognises and respects and she says yes. “What are they respected for?” I ask and she replies, “They're all gangsters.”

A Good Girl

Nancy says that the problem in Bermondsey is that, “Everyone knows everyone and there's nothing to do. A lot of the boys,” she explains, “become *bums*, they sit on their *arse* all day, take the social and deal in *puff*.” In contrast, she says, it's easier for girls

³¹⁵ *Shit stirrers* are trouble makers.

to settle down and get a good job. Impatient now to go outside for a *fag* with the other girls, Nancy introduces me to Louise, saying, "Have a chat with a *good* girl while we go out for a *fag*."

Nancy and the others go out, leaving me to talk to Louise alone. Louise tells me she gets called *good* because she doesn't smoke, doesn't drink, doesn't go to clubs, isn't on the *puff* and hasn't had sex yet like all the others have. She tells me that of her mum and dad's generation there are two kinds of families in Bermondsey - those who live a *normal* life, having a family and working and those who are on drugs. She explains sadly that all the friends her mum grew up with are on drugs. She tells me she's terrified that her friends are going to end up being *druggies*. I ask Louise what makes her different, how has she learned to be good? "I'm good," she says, "'cos I've got the trust of my parents." She is proud of the fact that her Dad is a black-cab driver and her mum works in a bank. She goes on to explain that unlike her friends she is ambitious at school and wants to work in 'PR', but when she tells them what she wants to do they don't even know what it means and she gets frustrated. "I'm Bermondsey." Louise says, "But I've got to face the fact that my friends could be heroine addicts in ten years time and I don't want to end up a *Bermondsey tramp*, sixteen years old pushing a baby in a push-chair without the father to stand by me." She tells me that her Mum and Dad worry about the boys she's hanging out with in case they're not *decent*. I ask her what a *decent* boy is and she says, "A boy that's not into drugs, treats you well and isn't just after one thing. If you *plot up* in Bermondsey you get into bad habits by hanging out with boys. The trouble with Bermondsey boys is they're too flash for school or work 'cos they've got a reputation to keep up."

Before Nancy and the others come back Louise tells me that she thinks in the future Bermondsey will turn into a *shit hole*, and she wouldn't want her kids to grow up here. I ask her why her mates put up with her being good and why she hangs out with them if they're such a bad influence. She explains, "They're my mates, we've all grown up together." Nancy suddenly bounces boisterously back into the room and takes over the conversation again emphasising that she isn't a good girl like Louise, telling me how

she always gets into trouble because she has to lie to her mum to do the things she gets away with. She proudly shows me her necklace from Tiffany and explains that whereas older Bermondsey women are into gold 'big-time,' younger women are now wearing designer silver. I admire the necklace, wondering how much it cost and ask the girls if they think of themselves as being *working class* and Nancy replies, "Yeah, not rich and not poor. If you work for what you got you can be proud, but when you're young you rely on your mum giving you things." Nancy's mum is a cleaner, the other girls' mums are hairdressers, work in shops or are beauticians. It is impossible to imagine how their mothers have to struggle to pay for the prestige items their daughters desire but girls are differentiated on the basis of the gifts their parents and families can afford to buy for them, so most parents struggle to find a way. Conspicuous consumption becomes the means for the transformation and regulation of desire and self-respect during teenage years. A Bermondsey mother tells me that she would rather *go on the game*³¹⁶ than see her daughter go without the things she needs to have respect among her friends.

Boyfriends

Nancy's mates, except Louise, tell me something about their boyfriends, all of whom are between sixteen and eighteen years old. One girl tells me that her boyfriend is *doing time* at the moment, in Feltham Young Offenders' Institution. Clare, a girl who hasn't spoke yet declares, "I'm not racist but I don't think I could go out with a *black* boy." I ask her why and she says, "Because they're arrogant and rude especially the Africans." She goes on to explain that she would go out with a *half-caste* boy but doesn't find *black* boys good looking and she says, "They smell different," adding that, "Jamaicans can be more friendly than Africans who are ignorant." The girls explain that some of the *bods* are involved with the National Front because it makes them look big, but *black* boys they know well are *taken in* - accepted. They refer to boys from Pilgrim's School which, in their opinion, is a school "full of *blacks*, Kosovans, *Pakis* and Muslims," and compare it to another boys' school which they describe as *sweaty*

³¹⁶ *Go on the game* means become a prostitute.

explaining that this means a school 'for retards who are really naughty.' Porter, they say, is for flash girls. **Fur coat - no knickers.**

Mixed Race Relationships - Breaking Taboos

Nancy's boyfriend John, is one of the *bods* who frequent the youth club. He is sixteen and has a brother David who is nineteen. John aspires to be a Garage DJ has his own set of decks in his bedroom at home and a whole book filled with chats that he has composed. John and David were *born* in Bermondsey, raised in Rotherhithe and their mother can trace her family's residence in the same street and its immediate environs back over two hundred years. In an interview at their home David tells me that Garage music has done more than anything else to bring *black* and *white* youths together in Bermondsey. John remarks that at first when David started listening to it he had asked his brother, "What are you listening to *black* people's music for?" But now he says, "Everyone's into it." David has a long-term girlfriend Stephanie who is *mixed-race*; something he says that would once have been unheard of in Bermondsey. I ask him to explain more about how this transformation of a Bermondsey taboo has come about and the following interview ensues. I quote from it at length because the interview illustrates many of the points made during the development of the analysis in this chapter:

G: Do you get any stick from anyone about having a *mixed-race* girlfriend?

D: Not really, just 'cos I've got, like, my friends are my friends now. See at school I think you would have [got stick], like I said, a lot of our friends...

J: [Interrupts] I wouldn't have thought of him to go out with a *mixed race* girl three years ago. I would never have say like, "Oh!" But when I did find out I was a bit shocked. I didn't mind but I just thought that he was someone that you wouldn't expect.

D: At school it would have been a bit different I think but where I've left school and my friends are my friends now. Like at school everyone would just be, "Oh, I'll be his friend because he knows everyone," and when you do come out of school you realise who your friends are and you come even stronger with them friends and they just take you for who you are.

G: A lot of girls at the youth club, like, the *white* girls were saying that even if they fancied a *black* guy they couldn't go out with him because Bermondsey boys wouldn't have it. Is that true?

J: I think it's getting to be all right for boys to go out with a *mixed race* girl but not for girls to go out with *black* boys.

G: Why is that then?

J: Because Bermondsey boys are more protective over their girls.

D: They're from Bermondsey.

J: That's what I think anyway.

D: It is really.

J: Like they're a bit protective over the girls in Bermondsey, like and it's with Walworth Road as well, like a lot of Bermondsey boys go out with girls from the Walworth Road just to get on the boys from Walworth Road's nerves. I've done it 'aven't I? A couple of times just to get on their nerves. And made sure it's one of the best looking girls.

D: Years ago boys would never, even a *mixed race* girl, like they would say, "Oh, I'd never go with a *mixed race* girl but I think now because you do see pretty *mixed race* girls and some people would just blatantly say now, like, come out with it and tell people.

G: It's more acceptable?

D: It's more acceptable now than what it used to be especially for boys. Like you said, like girls, I s'pose if you see her walking down the road with, like a *black* boy and you can sort of tell he's got attitude or he's from another *manor* and you can just tell what he's like, the girl would either *get a lot of stick* or just people talking behind her back, wouldn't talk to her no more or whatever. Like, look, if a *white* boy does... Look at my mate's brother he started going with a *mixed race* girl but then he started to think he was *black* like and she don't even act like that she's just like Stephanie, she just acts normal, like, she's well spoken and that but he started going out with her and like obviously, I don't know, he liked the image I think and started trying to act sort of *black* and now a lot of people don't like him for that now. I think that's why a lot of people have accepted people like me and other people like me [going out with *mixed race* girls] 'cos they ain't changed their self. They don't mind. But this boy I'm talking about now it's weird how he's gone and I remember he used to run down the road singing skinhead songs and all that and he was a proper *nutter* but now no one really gets on with him too well or nothing. He's, what he's going on about, like Brixton boys, and all that and when we see him outside the pub he's changed completely. Its just an image thing I think, like, he thinks that's a better image but I like the Bermondsey boy sort of thing because I

find that a lot people from Bermondsey are loyal. I think when a lot of *black* boys' they'd just stab each other in the back anyway. I think when it comes down to the crunch you do get a bit more loyal, it's like Bermondsey people are a little bit more loyal, that's what I like about it anyway that's why I haven't changed or nothing.

G: What about racism in Bermondsey? In nearly every interview I do what comes up is how people are worried that Bermondsey is dying because of *black* people coming in and taking it over. Does that mean anything to you?

D: I don't really think Bermondsey people would let them take it over. It's just people, like, I don't know, see where there's more [*black* people] now...

J: [Interrupting] Bermondsey people can't say, "Look you can come in, you can't..."

D: Where you do, like, you meet so many *black* people now some of them generally are all right and so you take them in and you do get on all right with them and then you meet others and its just weird though a lot of people are sort of taking to them now and a lot of people like still don't like them.

G: Is it a generational thing? Were your grandparents a lot more racist than you are?

D: Yeah.

J: Yeah.

G: I've also found that being racist is about having a reputation for violence do you see what I mean?

J: Yeah, everyone has done that but you do grow out of it, you think it ain't worth it, is it worth it?

G: Some people have said to me that they don't like to see *black* people *lordin' it* in Bermondsey because they say it isn't even their *manor*. Can you understand that?

D: You get some *black* people like that, like, they're just genuine they won't, I don't know, act flash or try and barge through a crowd of people or, I don't know, it's weird isn't it? Some *black* people are just quiet and I think the majority of *black* boys that I see, anyway, or come across are *rude*. Like my age anyway.

G: It seems to me as if they've got their own bad-boy thing going on.

J: Yeah, they've got a different *culture* to us, ain't they?

D: But Bermondsey is about the only place that's got this sort of...

J: [Interrupting] What it is, I think, it's music as well that influences people. Like most *black* people listen to rap like gangsta rap and that and I think that's where they get their attitude and that from.

D: But now a lot of people listen to Garage and a lot of Bermondsey people get into Garage and DJ and I think that's how they're coming together as well, and MC-ing and things like that. It's bringing them together as well.

G: Would it be true to say that you fear *black* boys' violence?

J: When you're younger you think about that more, you think, "Oh, look, *don't give it* to the wrong person or something they might stab you."

D: Yeah but everyone's the same really. I don't think they're any different, more violent or anything - you can be as violent as you want, really, can't you?

G: Your family has been here for generations but as you said you can't control who comes and goes in Bermondsey, so how do you keep your *culture* alive in a place that doesn't actually belong to you?

D: I think Bermondsey's the only place that's got that *culture*, I'm proud of it really, but now it is falling apart a bit

J: It will fall apart though, it won't last forever, will it? Nothing lasts forever.

D: One day it will. I don't know really, it's weird Bermondsey is different from a lot of other areas I think.

G: Yes, it is different

D: Yeah that's what it is, but Bermondsey is the only place. Like you go to a lot of other areas where there is *white* people, *black* people, but they mix, or you go to, like, another area where there's *black* people and they know about Bermondsey and I remember when I, if I used to say I was from Bermondsey, someone would be like, "Oh, Bermondsey, Bermondsey's *rash* and all that, they don't like *black* people and all that." And I remember our mate *black* David who we've known since we was little when we used to live down by Guy's Hospital which is just like at the bottom of Bermondsey really ain't it? He wouldn't come down Bermondsey. When we used to come down he used to say, like, "No I won't go down there." Just 'cos of the stories you used to hear but now he comes down and it ain't nothing big at all.

G: Is it possible for a *black* boy to be a Bermondsey bod?

J: Not a proper Bermondsey bod, is it?

D: I don't know, like Neil is *mixed race* but he would never act *black* and, like, I don't know, he don't act like a *black* person he acts just like us.

J: If you act *black* and if you're *black* as well then you're never there...

D: Oh, if you act *black* you haven't got a chance.

G: So its not actually about skin colour is it?

D: It is.

J: It is to a certain extent.

D: Darren is *mixed race*, Darren ain't *black* but he's just, I don't know, it's weird.

G: He behaves like you?

D: Yeah, he just ...

G: But even if he behaves like you could he still be *real* Bermondsey?

D: No, I don't think anyway

G: Why?

D: I don't know, it's weird, really, I can't explain it. I don't think that, I don't know, I don't think that there would be a *black* boy that could ever be like the top Bermondsey boy, ever, because... I don't know, just... people wouldn't stand for it. But there are *mixed race* boys and that, the odd one or two that do hang about with Bermondsey boys and are just exactly the same as Bermondsey boys really. Like Darren and that but there's not many, one or two and I couldn't never imagine them being Mr. Big in Bermondsey, really, although they do like to hang out with a lot of people.

G: They probably feel they've got twice as much to prove

D: Yeah. They want to do more to prove a point.

D: Yeah it's well hard to explain the Bermondsey *culture*, innit? I've never tried to explain it before.

David realises upon reflection that the *black* people he finds acceptable are those who act just like him, are 'normal' in his eyes and fairly low down on the Bermondsey boys' pecking order. *Black* boys who don't have attitude, are not *rude* and know their place are acceptable, but David cannot tolerate *black* boys that have a different *culture*, no manners or respect and are unaccepting of *bods'* influence in Bermondsey. He recognises that segregation between *black* and *white* people is far less pronounced in Bermondsey now than it has ever been and his relationship with Stephanie highlights the marginal position of *mixed race* young people. *Mixed race* youths are more likely to be taken in and considered to be desirable precisely because they are not *black* and are perceived to be less likely, therefore, to 'act *black*.' Perhaps the increasing desirability of *mixed race* girls is representative of the apparent paradox that *bods* in Bermondsey are struggling with. How can a *bod* be *racist* and have *black* friends? How can a *bod* be *racist* and have a *mixed race* girlfriend? How can a person be both *black* and *white*? To call a person *mixed race* is to create a further *racial* distinction but it is also to recognise that *blackness* and *whiteness* are not mutually exclusive categories of biological difference.

Despite the confusion surrounding the semantics of *racial* description, it is clear that people reproduce the idea of belonging to a distinctive kind of *community* in part via the means for regulation of sexual desire and in particular through the constraint of female sexuality. That is the reason Bermondsey girls 'get a lot of stick' for going out with *black* boys whilst it is becoming more acceptable for *bods* to begin to have relationships with *mixed race* girls. Admitting that he finds a *mixed race* girl desirable, declaring it to his friends and committing himself to a long-term relationship with her, is a huge step for a Bermondsey *bod*. What matters to David is that Stephanie speaks *nicely*, (not like a *black* girl), behaves *normally*, ('just like us'), and doesn't challenge him to be anything other than himself. A xenophobic idea of the person creates sexual taboos against dating and marriage choices and in Bermondsey this makes outsiders, *Roaders* and *black* people in particular the most difficult people to desire. It is in relation to this extreme xenophobia that an endogamous ideal about choices of dating and marriage partners is emphasised, but as David has learned, desire has a way of undoing such prescriptions.

On the night in the youth club when I first met Lee, and was trying to appear to be listening dispassionately to the racist hatred he and his mates were espousing I was wary. *Bods*, for whom violence and intimidation are a way of life, are sensitive to the subtlest signs of fear in people and they enjoy playing on it. Because I don't participate in the exchange of conversation in which *black* people are rendered the enemy Lee becomes suspicious of me again. A refusal to participate is in itself an act of resistance. Watching me carefully he asks, "Are you still with the father of your children?" I answer calmly knowing that I am going to tell him my partner is *black*, because not to do so would be to betray the trust that is developing between us. "Yes I am." Lee pursues the point, "Where does he come from?" I answer, telling him, "He's a *black* guy, he grew up in the East End and his parents are from Nigeria." Lee stands up abruptly, pushing his chair forcefully back, recoiling from me, in disgust. Moving away from me he says, "That's not right. How can you do that? How can you sit here and listen to us talking *rash* like that and not say

anything? I think it's wrong what you've done. People should stick to their own. *White* people should have babies with *white* people. That's how it is." I explain to him that I didn't say anything when they were talking *rash* because I'm not a youth worker, I'm an anthropologist. My job is to try and explain what and how *bods* feel, not to tell them that the way they feel is wrong even if I personally think they are misguided. He then asks, "Are you going to put everything we said in your book?" "Yes I am," I say, but reassure him that nobody's name will be used. "What's the point of that?" he says, "We're trying to make a name for ourselves."³¹⁷

³¹⁷ I had the opposite problem to most anthropologists who worry about concealing the identity of people they have learned from in the field. Many people I worked with were disappointed when it became clear that for reasons of confidentiality I wasn't going to mention them by name.

Chapter Four Part II



Learning Culture: Lessons from Child Development.

**“Bermondsey can’t stay the same, it’s got to change.
You can’t stop your kids mixing with blacks anymore,
they’re all together at school.”**

Sharon, Emma’s mother, Bermondsey 2000.³¹⁹

The above quote illustrates the idea in many Bermondsey people’s minds that the increasing presence of black children in schools is indicative of a change that threatens the very existence of Bermondsey as they know it. The change is perceived to be profound because the intimacy that close contact engenders undoes a widely held taboo that Bermondsey people ‘don’t mix with blacks.’ I have shown, in part I of this chapter, how the taboo is rarely consistently followed in practice although it exists as an ideal to adhere to in frequently heard *racist* discourse. I also argued that the rule about not mixing with blacks is in fact only part of a much broader and historically older taboo about not mixing with people (black or *white*) from outside Bermondsey’s clearly defined boundaries. More recently a *community* based on the idea of *whiteness* is being created in Bermondsey out of the idea that the presence of *black* people is synonymous with the death of the traditional kin oriented *community*. In this shift of ideas about group relatedness from the idea of kinship to *race* what remains consistent is the preoccupation with boundaries both territorial and conceptual. The maintenance of these boundaries in Bermondsey depends on the idea that outsiders, of which *black* people are only the most extreme example, are a threat to the integrity and cohesion of the *community*. This makes it all the more pertinent to discover what is going on when children are ‘all together at school.’ The aim in this chapter is to investigate whether or not the intersecting schemes of differentiation, i.e. *race, culture, nation, religion, locality, gender, class*, in relation to which a specifically adult idea of the person develops in England, are relevant to the way that children make sense of each other.

³¹⁹ See chapter one.

Race Riots

A particular kind of political discourse has emerged in the *national* press following the *race* riots in the northern towns of England during the summer of 2001. It is the kind of discourse that Baumann (1996) describes as dominant, meaning that it is popular and persuasive because it draws on the power and legitimacy of *national* institutions and media. It is a discourse that makes *cultures* and *races* seem like bounded and unchanging things rather than social processes subject to transformation and it organises *cultures* unquestioningly into *ethnic* and *religious communities*. For example the front-page headline of The Daily Telegraph, Monday May 28th 2001, refers to the previous night's riots in Oldham and declares: "*Race* riot town on a knife edge," with a sub-title, "Worst *ethnic* violence in 15 years." The article goes on to say,

"Tension had been steadily increasing in Oldham for weeks and police and *community* leaders had feared that a full scale riot was virtually inevitable. Richard Knowles, leader of Oldham council, blamed far-Right groups for causing trouble in the town which has large Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities."

Baumann compares and contrasts this type of dominant discourse about so-called *ethnic communities* with those that occurred locally when he was doing fieldwork in Southall, West London. He describes the ways in which different groups of people contest the dominant discourse about what *culture* means and also the ways in which they make use of the discourse when it suits them to concur with it. For example he demonstrates how different South Asian groups make use of the dominant idea of their *communities* to compete against each other, in Southall, for local advantage and financial resources. At the same time he is able to show how, depending on the context, young Southallians can have a sense of themselves as belonging to any number of differently configured *communities*. Where young people might choose to emphasise their differences in one situation, they might be just as likely to identify themselves as being similarly from Southall or similarly *Asian* in another context. What is important about Baumann's work is the way he dislocates the homogenous relationship between ideas of *culture*, *community*, *religion* and *ethnicity* and argues that the complexity of the way these concepts work in practice can only be understood in local ethnographic context.

People who live and grow up in England are likely to classify themselves and others in terms of the kinds of dominant discourses Baumann describes and at the same time also be aware of locally informed perceptions about *culture* and *community* depending on the place of residence. Generally however people are not used to examining these categories of description critically in order to assess their explanatory value. They are the taken for granted terms in which we make sense of the diversity of people we encounter. This is one of the potential pitfalls of doing anthropology at home. It is often difficult to develop a heightened awareness of and therefore to investigate systematically the categories of understanding that one already uses to make sense of everyday life. In this respect Baumann's model for contesting the idea of *culture* is an invaluable tool for student anthropologists doing fieldwork at home and learning to investigate the meanings that people make out of the social relations in which they are engaged. I will argue here, however, that as an analytical strategy Baumann's model can be elaborated upon and *culture* contested further by means of an innovative ethnographic method for the analysis of conceptual development during childhood. The application of these methods (Toren 1990) involves generating a content analysis from data systematically collected during ethnographic tasks with children. The method is extraordinarily productive because it generates finely detailed developmental data from children and is designed to supplement but never to replace the insights gained from a prolonged period of participant observation during fieldwork.

The value of tasks analysis is that it enables the anthropologist to see how the taken for granted knowledge of adult social relations emerges out of the transformation of the often quite different preoccupations of childhood. The methods make possible what Kuper (1999), alluding to the work of cognitive anthropologist Roy D'Andrade (1985), advocates as a necessary methodological trick. That is an anthropological approach that breaks *culture* up into pieces and investigates whether, "...elements in the complex mix of *culture* may have their own specific (though not fixed) "relations to other things."(Kuper 1999 P.246) At the same time because Toren's tasks method is never separated from the analysis of ethnographic fieldwork it does not lead in this case to what Kuper condemns, i.e. an uncritical focus on *culture* for its own sake. It is only careful fieldwork and

critical attention to detail during task design that can lead to an adequate assessment of whether or not *culture* is a relevant term ethnographically and furthermore where it stands in relation to other perhaps more relevant terms of classification. Kuper notes with caution that, "...it is a poor strategy to separate out a *cultural* sphere, and to treat it in its own terms." (P.247).

In previous chapters I have shown how the meaning of concepts that are key to a people's idea of what makes them distinctive emerges out of the material practice of everyday social life. Having understood the relevance of particular ethnographic themes my aim in this chapter is to focus in on those themes from a different vantage-point and using alternative methods. The data I present here supplements that gained from participant observation and was collected during ethnographic tasks conducted with children at Tenter Ground School. Although the analysis is in its infancy and would benefit from subsequent attention I hope here to begin to demonstrate the productivity of a systematic content analysis that treats *culture* as an ethnographic term and considers its relation to other terms in the child's developing idea of the person.³²⁰ Such an analysis should enable further critical reflection upon what it is that anthropologists or *cultural* studies people do when they say they are studying *culture*.

'Culture Consciousness'

Gurbux Singh, ex-chairman of the Commission for *Racial* Equality argued in an article in the Guardian newspaper, Monday March 18th, 2002, that in the light of last year's riots in the north, "The *races* should be forced to mix." The problem he suggests is that *ethnic* families have not integrated with the *white working class* population and that therefore ways must be found to bring the *communities* together. What's needed he says, is 'a *culture* change.' He states,

³²⁰ There are several aspects of the task analysis, which require further in depth consideration. I am aware that the number of children in the sample is too small for the results to be statistically significant. I have been advised that the way in which I have represented the ratios on the axis in figure 4 needs to be modified in a way that lends itself better to comparative purposes. Unfortunately there has not been time to redo the analysis with this advice in mind but in subsequent papers I intend to re-do the analysis..

“The *white* kids were saying they have nothing in common with the *Asian* kids and the *Asian* kids were saying, “we have very little in common with *white* youngsters and there’s nothing that brings us together.” Yet all were from Burnley, brought up in Burnley, brought up in the same education system, within the same geography.”

Mr. Singh laments that despite their obvious similarities, growing up in the same place, going to the same kinds of schools, these young people were choosing to emphasise their differences. I would argue, based both on my fieldwork and ethnographic task analysis that Mr. Singh needs to know more about young people in Burnley. How, for example, is the idea of *community* imagined there and how has that changed over time? In addition he would need to know the ages and gender of the children whose opinions were voiced. I argue this because youths tend to have already accommodated adult ideas whilst younger children are often preoccupied with quite different concerns, as I showed in chapters two and three, and will demonstrate again here. It is important to emphasise that what children say and what they know is in part a function of their age and gender as well as the context in which their opinions are sought. In relation to the work presented in this chapter I hope, in future, to develop a comparative method of analysis that will be especially pertinent for cases, like that in Burnley, in which it is vital to know the conceptual schemes in relation to which young people are acting. What exactly is happening when they choose to emphasise their differences at the expense of what they share in common?

Baumann argues that by the age of 13 children in Southall understand that there are five different *communities* of religious *culture* in Southall. This suggests he argues, a ‘conscience collective’ among young Southallians, or what he terms *culture* consciousness, i.e. that youths who share the same geography of Southall share the same idea of their *cultural* differences. Baumann defines this consciousness as:

“... a heightened awareness that one’s own life, as well as the lives of all others, are decisively shaped by *culture* as a reified heritage.” (P98)

Baumann derived this conclusion from quantitative data from a sample survey of 350 young Southallians between the ages of 12 and 18 that supplemented his fieldwork. The question the young people were asked in the survey about *culture* reflected the kinds of ethnographic terms Baumann had heard them using in their interactions with him and each other during the fieldwork. He concludes that growing up in Southall means growing up with the idea that *cultures* are distinguished on a religious basis even though the results also reveal a lesser concern with differences of *nationality*, region, language and *race*.

Baumann’s results are interesting in themselves because they reveal the contents of young Southallians’ idea of *cultural* difference and point to the likelihood that in other places these *cultural* contents are likely to vary. I would argue, however, that because Baumann’s sample is of children between the ages of 12 and 18 it deals with young people at an age where they are more likely to have already accommodated adult ideas. In addition because it sets out explicitly to investigate the *culture* concept it misses the opportunity to assess the salience of *culture* as a concept in relation to other concepts that young people might be equally as preoccupied with, such as gender. Because the survey starts with children at the age of 12, it misses the opportunity to trace the development, in younger children, of simple concepts into more complex ones and to relate this development to a wider understanding of the relationship between perceptions of difference and sameness. My own work with much younger children aims to trace this kind of developmental transformation. It is only because of the analysis presented in this chapter that I have been able to incorporate, as a primary theme of the thesis, the idea of the shift that occurs between figure and ground. This idea was exemplified in part I of this chapter where examples were given in the youth club case study of people emphasising either similarity or difference between themselves and others depending on what is relevant to the social situation. This chapter represents the

beginning of my endeavour to clarify what kind of conceptual operation makes the figure/ground shift possible.³²¹

Analysis of just one ethnographic task³²² conducted with children between the ages of 5 and 11 has been extraordinarily revealing. I will demonstrate here how, at this younger age, an Equilibrium Effect characterises the development, in children, of classificatory schemes pertaining to *race, culture, gender, nationality* and religion.³²³ This means that whilst it is true to say that young children between the ages of 6 and 9 become increasingly preoccupied with differences in people's visual appearances this tends to become balanced by the age of 10 and 11 by an equal concern with similarity. I will now explain the Equilibrium Effect in detail.

Ethnographic Tasks

Tasks were designed to supplement my ethnography of the school classroom. The aim was to investigate what kind of conceptual distinction children refer to when they are making sense of visual appearances. I wanted to understand how these perceptions might vary across age and gender and to consider how the analysis might be relevant to the wider context of an ethnography of Bermondsey where visual appearance count for so much.

Five girls and five boys from each age range, 5-6, 6-7, 7-8, 8-9, 9-10, 10-11 (60 children in total) were included in the sample. Their teachers chose the specific children who participated from those who would be able to concentrate on the task at hand, not be disruptive to the others, and as a group be roughly representative of what she perceived the '*ethnic*' mix of the class to be. The implementation of the task took place in a designated room away from the class situation. Children were

³²¹ I am aware of the danger of extrapolating, from the results of this particular analysis, a more generalised scheme characterising all children's conceptual development. Nevertheless I do think that the results presented here provide sufficient reason for further investigation and experiment in order to ascertain whether or not the results can be replicated as significant evidence.

³²² I conducted five different tasks with children between the ages of five and eleven during the last part of my fieldwork in the school. The other tasks were designed to investigate children's developing understanding of kinship relations and children's ideas about their relationship to the spaces they live in: households, neighbourhoods and communities. There is not the space here to present the analysis of these other tasks but I intend to present the results in subsequent papers.

³²³ Piaget (1968, 1972) uses the term equilibration to refer to the balance that is struck during conceptual development between assimilation and accommodation of new experiences and previously constituted knowledge schemes.

separated from each other and sat one to a table so as not to be able to copy from or chat to their friends. When the task was complete, if it involved drawing or when verbal elaboration was required, I called each child up in turn to my table well away from the other children so that they could not overhear any of the talk. The task I analyse here is the fifth task I conducted and it was designed following the model devised by Juliet Krikeli (2000). When conducting the tasks it was especially important that the prompt be framed in as open a way as possible in order that the children didn't get any opportunity to tailor their answers in accordance with the kind of responses they thought I might be looking for. The prompt for task 5 was:

“I'm going to show you a photo and I want you to have a really good look at it because when you think you are ready I am going to ask you some questions about it. (30 seconds) Tell me as much as you can about this photo”³²⁴

Individual children's responses to the task prompt were taken down verbatim and later tabulated according to age, gender and types of responses made. Each stage of the task analysis is time consuming and requires meticulous attention to detail because the final analysis must aim be one that encompasses everything that children said in response to the prompt.

Stage One

Initially I isolated thirty different kinds of responses that children made and noted the number of children who made those responses as follows:

Content of Description	Number of children making this response
Child notices something about what the children in the photo are wearing	39
Child makes relationship between the children's clothes and	9

³²⁴ See photo at beginning of the chapter.

gender	
Child notices where the children are and what the conditions there are such as sunny or shadowy etc.	35
Child notices that the children all look different in general	7
Child makes a relationship between the differences in children's hair and gender	5
Child notices differences in the children's hair	27
Child notices differences in the children's eyes	5
Child notices that some children are wearing glasses	28
Child notices the differences in individual children's mouth or lips	3
Child notices the differences in individual children's teeth	2
Child notices that individual children are wearing jewellery	1
Child notices differences in the children's skin colour or <i>race</i>	20
Child makes a relationship between the children's physical appearance and association with some children being Muslim	3
Child makes a relationship between the children's physical appearance and association with some children being Christian	1
Child makes a relationship between physical appearance and association with some children having a different <i>culture</i>	1
Child makes a relationship between physical appearance and association with some children coming from a different country.	6
Child makes a relationship between physical appearance and association with some children having a different religion	1
Child notices something about the children's age	7
Child notices something about the children's size	2
Child notices something about differences in the children's gender	15
Child notices something about the children's emotional state, happy, smiling, etc.	22
Child notices that children are together in a school photo or	27

that the children go to a different school	
Child notices whether or not the children are known to him/her	17
Child notices that it is a photo of people or children	17
Child notices something about the technique which has been used to make the picture	3
Child notices similarities between the children in general	1
Child notices idiosyncrasies in appearance of individual children	3
Child notices the number of children in the photo	9
Total number of types of content in descriptions = 30	Total number of responses = 317

Once I had completed this tabulation I noticed that disregarding age and gender differences the following types of responses were the most numerous:

Content of description	Number of children making that response
Child notices something about what the children in the photo are wearing	39
Child notices where the children are and what the conditions there are i.e. sunny, shadowy etc	35
Child notices that some of The children are wearing glasses	28
Child notices differences in the children's hair	27
Child notices that it is a school photo or that the children in the photo go to a different school	27
Child notices something about	22

the children's emotional state, i.e. happy, smiling etc.	
Child notices something about skin colour or <i>race</i>	20

What is pertinent about this initial result is the observation that the kind of response in which a child notices something about skin colour or *race* is the least of the more numerous responses that children gave. From this point I went back and did the tabulation for the 30 different types of responses again including data about age and gender differences. I began to experiment with ways of tabulating results that could account for the individual responses of particular children. This produced a table too complicated to reproduce here which led me to look again at the children's responses in order to try and find the means of breaking down the number of types of responses into more manageable proportions. This had to be a means of representation that would lend itself to graphic reproduction but still remain true to the data.

Stage Two

A prolonged period of time spent familiarising myself with the children's responses, visiting and re-visiting the raw data, brought my attention to the way children expressed their responses during the task itself. Looking again at the verbatim data I noticed that responses took two forms. There are those responses which group the children in the photo together in terms of the different kinds of ways in which children are similar and in contrast there are those responses which group the children together in the various ways that they are different. In short I began to see that the children were identifying, in the photo, either groups formed on the basis of shared differences, groups formed on the basis of shared similarities or they were noticing individual differences between the children. So, for example, verbatim data varied as follows:

Girl, 10 years old.

G: Prompt is given

Girl: It's been taken in the garden

It's the school that your daughter goes to.

They have a red school uniform

There's quite a lot of children there
All of the children are different
G: What do you mean by different?
Girl: Skin colour, glasses, short hair, boys, girls, long hair.
G: What else can you tell me about the photo?
Girl: They're all smiling.

Boy, 10 years old.

G: Prompt is given
B: There's people in it
There's loads of flowers behind them
There's loads of different *races* there
They've all got a sort of uniform on
G: What do you mean by *races*?
B: Like, different colours.
G: What else can you tell me about the photo?
B: They're happy.

Boy, 8 years old

G: Prompt is given
B: Some of them have got glasses
Some of the hair is not cut, some is cut
Some of them have got red jumpers
Some of them have got light jumpers
Some of them have got these dresses
Some of them have got white t shirts
They got writing on their t shirts
G: What else can you tell me about the photo?
B: It's a picture of people
Some of their hair are not straight and some are
Some of them are *brown* and some are *white*.

Girl, 8 years old

G: Prompt is given
Girl: It's in the garden
Most people wear glasses in it
Everybody's smiling
Some are boys and some are girls
They're wearing red uniform
Some girls are wearing hair bands
The boys got short hair
G: What else can you tell me about this photo?
Girl: Some girls are wearing summer dresses
Some girls are wearing t shirts
Some boys are wearing their jumpers, some boys aren't

Girl, 5 years old

G: Prompt is given
Girl: There's people from another school
It's in the summer

Someone's taken lots of photos together all of them
 G: What else can you tell me about this photo?
 Girl: They've got red jumpers and red dresses instead of blue like our School
 There's dark skinned and light skinned people

Boy, 5 years old how many months?

G: Prompt is given

B: Picture of people

That one's got glasses on (points to individual child)

That one is a boy (points to individual child)

Picture of children

G: What else can you tell me about the photo?

B: That one has got a red jumper on (points to individual child)

With this new insight about the data in mind I endeavoured to find a way to represent it graphically. I wanted to demonstrate the way that children's responses take two basic forms, those categories of description referring to the ways in which the children in the photo are the same and those referring to the way in which the children are different. Furthermore I wanted to allow for the variety of responses within each type and then begin to experiment with accounting for age and gender differences.

Stage Three

I looked again at the tabulation of the 30 categories of description that the children used. I wanted to find a way to organise the children's responses in a way that remained true to the data but that would also enable me to investigate any relationship between the variety of responses and the more fundamental classification that I had discovered between sameness and difference. First of all I came up with a table to show the relationship between various types of responses and the basic classification between sameness and difference as follows:

Categories Describing Difference	Categories Describing Sameness
Responses in which children refer to the differences of individual children	Responses in which children in the photo are described as being similar in the ways that they are different e.g. "All the children are different"
Individual Differences	Similarly Different

<p>Responses in which children refer to the children in the photo having different emotional states, e.g. "Some of the children are happy and some are sad."</p> <p>Emotion</p>	<p>Responses in which children refer to the children in the photo having the same emotional state; e.g. "They're all smiling."</p> <p>Emotion</p>
<p>Responses in which children refer to the children in the photo having different skin colour/religion/culture/country of origin.</p> <p>Skin colour/ religion/culture/ country of origin</p>	<p>Responses in which children refer to the children in the photo having shared physical features and/or shared person/childhood in common.</p> <p>Shared physical features/ Person/childhood</p>
<p>Responses in which children refer to the children in the photo having different kinds of facial features e.g. "some of the children's got really red lips."</p> <p>Other facial features</p>	<p>Responses in which children refer to the children in the photo all being in the same kind of place or environment.</p> <p>Environment/Place</p>
<p>Responses in which children refer to the children in the photo being of two different kinds, boys and girls.</p> <p>Gender/boys/girls</p>	<p>Responses in which children refer to the children in the photo being at or belonging to the same school (a school that is not the one children making the responses attend)</p> <p>School</p>
<p>Responses in which children refer to the children in the photo as having different types of hair or hairstyles.</p> <p>Hair</p>	<p>Responses in which children refer to the children in the photo as being all in the same class or of the same age group</p> <p>Class/age group</p>

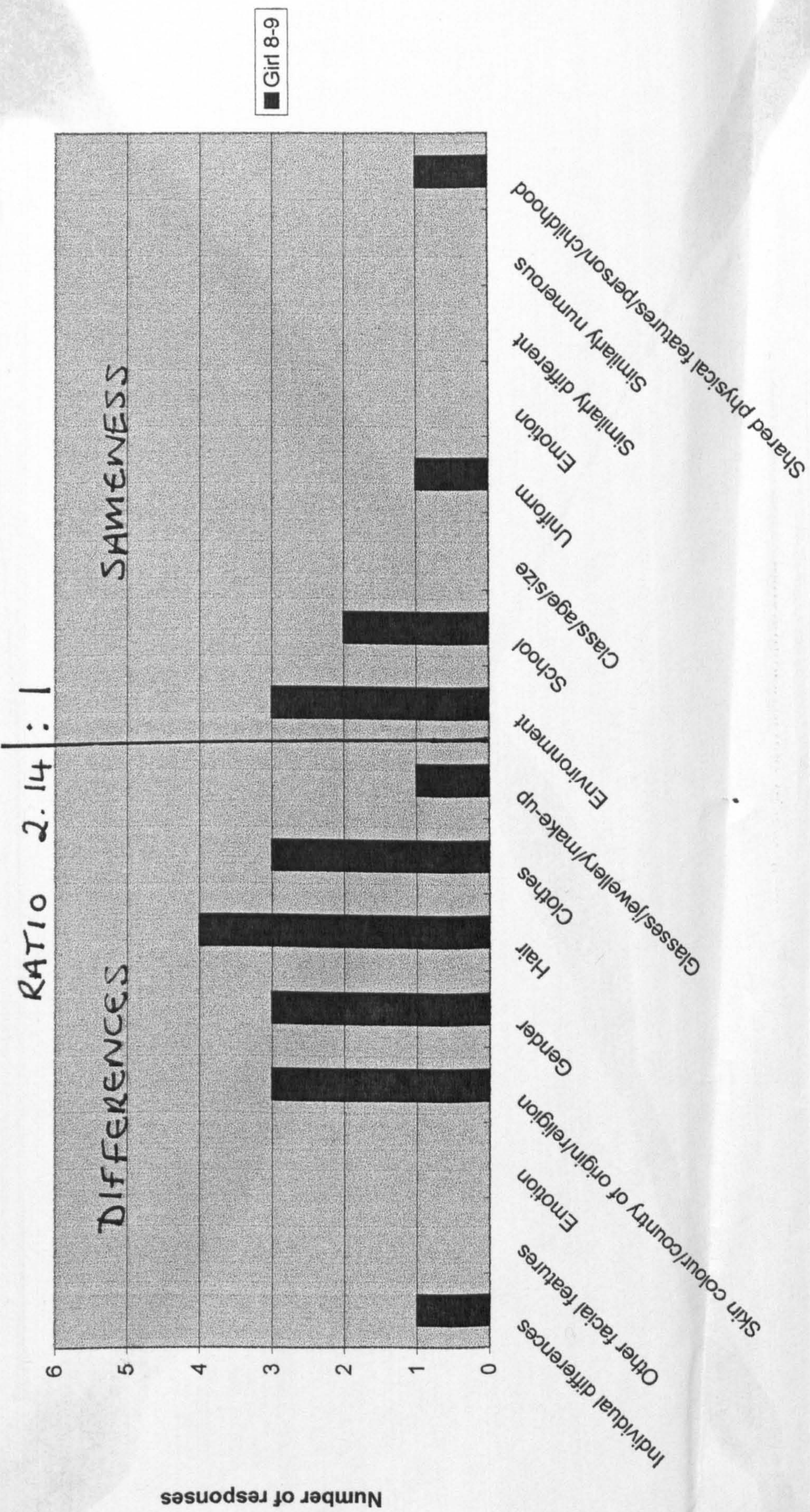
<p>Responses in which children refer to the children in the photo as having different kinds of clothes on.</p> <p>Clothes</p>	<p>Responses in which children refer to the children in the photo having the same clothes – a uniform on.</p> <p>Uniform</p>
<p>Responses in which children refer to some of the children in the photo being different because they wear glasses</p> <p>Glasses</p> <p>Total number of categories of difference = 8</p>	<p>Responses, in which children refer to the children in the photo as being similarly numerous, e.g. “There are lots of children,” or “there are 30 children.”</p> <p>Similarly numerous</p> <p>Total number of categories of sameness = 8</p>

Once I had produced this new representation of the data I then went back to the raw data for each individual child’s responses and plotted it on a chart (see figure 18 (P. 287) and figure 19 (P. 288)). Familiarising myself with each chart, of which there were sixty in total, one for each child, what became interesting to me, was the ratio between categories of difference and sameness. For example in figure 19 (P.288) the ratio of responses concerned with difference to responses that are concerned with sameness is 1: 1. In figure 18 (P.287) it is 2.14: 1 I then decided to try and plot these ratios on a separate graph in order to see if there was any interesting pattern emerging in relation to age and gender differences.

Stage Four (See Figure 20 (P. 289)).

On the vertical axis of the graph I plotted the ratios including three sections, one in which the ratio weights difference over sameness, one in which there is balance between sameness and difference and one in which sameness is weighted over difference. On the horizontal axis I plotted the exact age of the children so that between the ages of 5 and 6 years there is a mark for 5 years 2 months, 5 years 4 months, 5 years 6 months, 5 years 8 months, 5 years 10

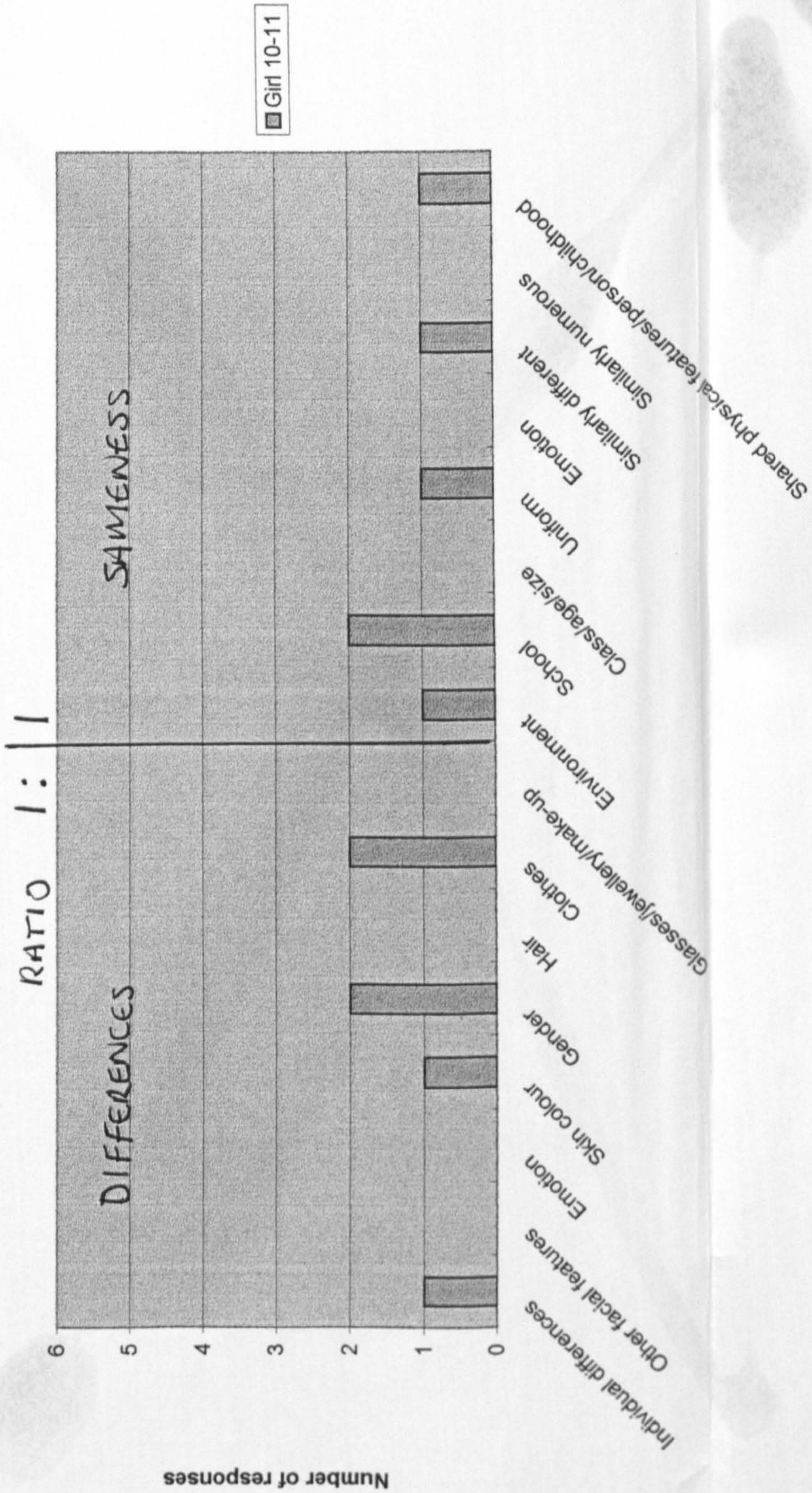
Balance between responses to do with sameness and difference (Girl 8 years 3 months)



Categories of sameness/difference

Figure 18 Page 287

Balance between responses to do with sameness and difference (Girl 10 years 9 months)



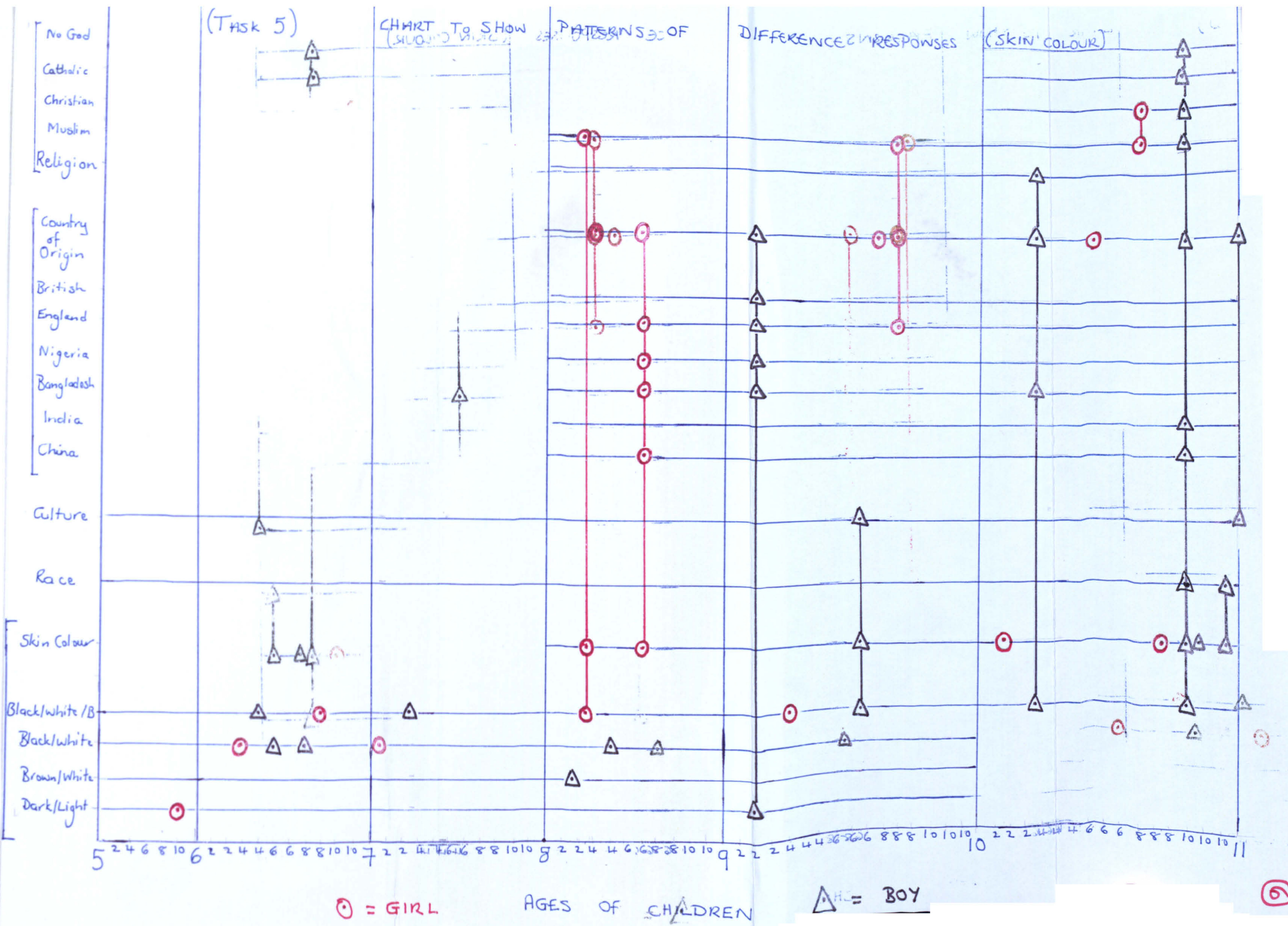


Figure 21

months. On the graph itself a girl is represented by a red dotted circle and boy by a black dotted triangle.

Looking at what the graph revealed about the girls' responses I noticed the following trend. Between the ages of 5 and 6 girls are mostly preoccupied with the ways in which the children in the photo are the same. Between the ages of 6 and 7 in contrast they are completely preoccupied with difference. The same is true between the ages of 7 and 8. Between the ages of 8 and 9 girls continue to be mostly preoccupied with differences but the ratios are beginning to cluster near the middle part of the graph where there is balance between preoccupation with difference and sameness. Between the ages of 9 and 10 this tendency towards balance is preserved whilst a new shift towards preoccupation with difference is re-emerging. This is changing again between the ages of 10 and 11 with a renewed preoccupation with or tendency towards balance.

The trend for boys is slightly different. Between the ages of 5 and 6 boys are mostly preoccupied with difference and continue to be so until the age of 7. Between the ages of 7 and 8 and 8 and 9 more boys continue to be preoccupied with difference than with sameness. By the ages of 9 to 10 this pattern begins to shift when responses tend towards, either a preoccupation with sameness, or a more balanced ratio between sameness and difference. Between the ages of 10 – 11 boys continue again to be more preoccupied with difference but this preoccupation clusters closer to the point in the graph which represents balance between responses concerned with sameness and difference.

Whilst I was excited and intrigued about these trends in the data I needed to know more about what kinds of categories of sameness or difference the children were preoccupied with at different points in the developmental cycle. Isolating the responses to do with skin colour, *race*, *culture*, country or origin or religion, I prepared another chart to see if anything interesting was going on with respect to these distinctions (see figure 21 (P.290)).

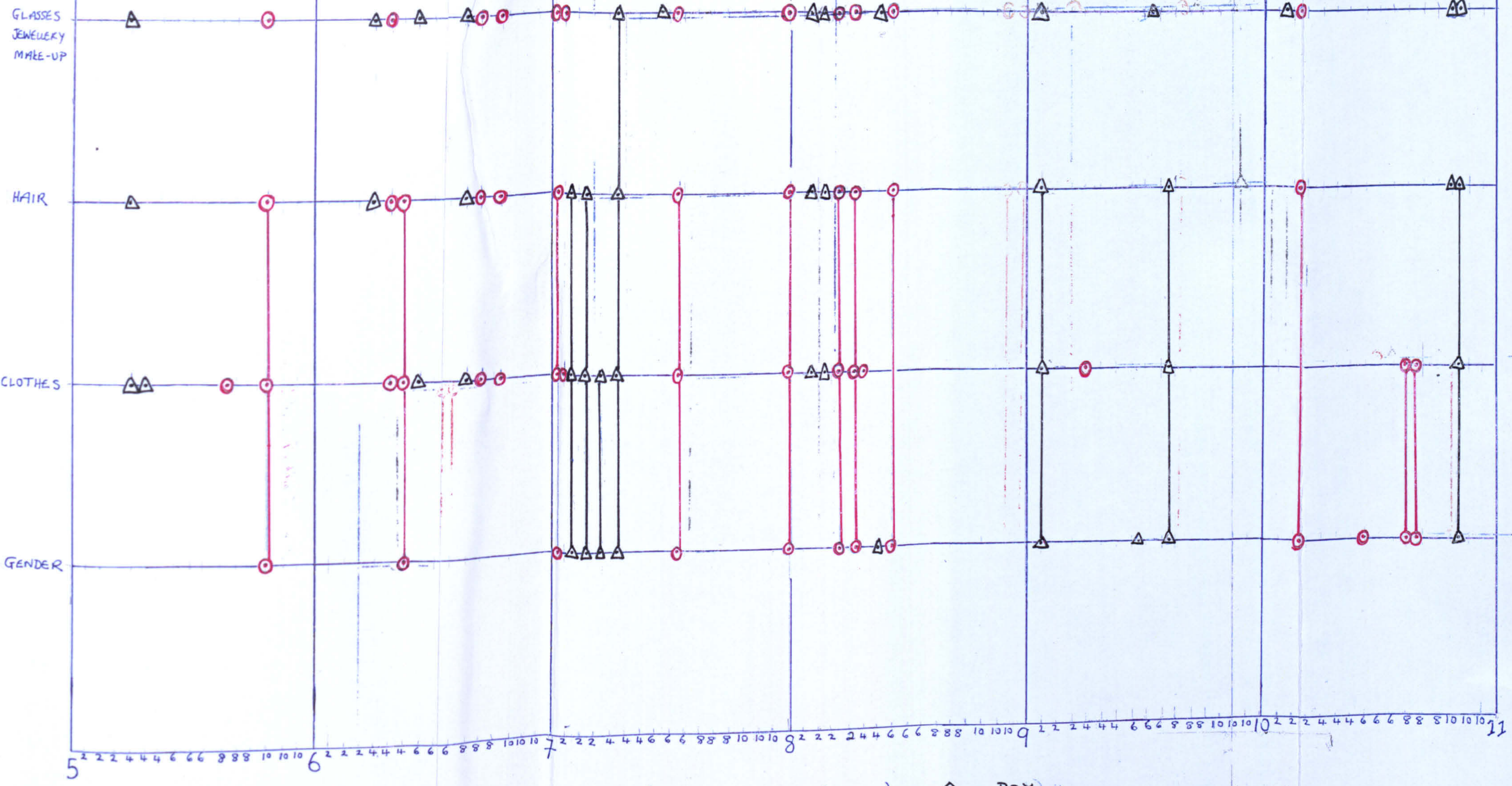
(TASK 5)

CHART TO SHOW

CHANGING PATTERNS OF DIFFERENCE

CATEGORIES (GENDER)

AGE OF CHILDREN



○ = GIRL

AGES OF CHILDREN (5 - 11)

△ = BOY

Figure 22

Stage 6 (see figure 21 (P. 290))

On the vertical axis of this chart I plotted all the various kinds of terms children used during the task to describe differences pertaining to skin colour, *race*, *culture*, country of origin, and religion. On the horizontal axis I plotted the exact ages of the children as before and gender was represented in the same way with a red dotted circle for girls and a black dotted triangle for boys.

Looking at the results of the investigation for girls I noticed that between the ages of 5 and 6 girls are hardly preoccupied with these kinds, (*race*, skin colour, *culture* etc) of differences at all. Only one girl made a response about difference in skin colour and the terms of description she used make a distinction between children in the photo having dark or light coloured skin without using *racial* terminology. Between the ages of 6 and 7 girls two girls referred to skin colour differences describing that difference as a distinction between *black* and *white* skin or *black/white* or *brown* skin. Between the ages of 7 and 8 however only one girl is preoccupied with this kind of difference. By the age of 8 to 9 something new and exciting is happening. Not only are girls increasingly preoccupied with this kind of difference but they are also making relationships between the various schemes of differentiation. Lines joining the dots represent these relationships. So, looking at the chart, one girl aged 8 years and 2 months refers to difference in skin colour, describing those differences as *black*, *white* or *brown* colours and relates them directly to differences in religion. Another girl refers to skin colour, doesn't describe the colour differences directly but relates them to countries of origin, specifying which countries she is distinguishing between, China, Bangladesh, Nigeria and England.

Between the ages of 9 and 10, however, this interesting trend in the data suddenly appears to diminish. As many girls are preoccupied with difference as before but they are not so concerned with the way in which simple concepts describing skin colour, for example, are related in complex ways to other more abstract aspects of the person such as religion and country of origin. Between the ages of 10 and 11 more girls are preoccupied with this type of difference but there is little evidence of the complexity in which schemes of differentiation intersect. Looking at what the chart reveals about boys' responses, a similar

pattern emerges. Between the ages of 5 and 6 no boy made any reference to these kinds of differences in skin colour, *race*, *culture* etc. Between the ages of 6 and 7 most of the boys are now preoccupied with this difference, but as for girls, by the age of 7 and 8 this preoccupation has suddenly dwindled. Between the ages of 9 and 10, and later than was the case for girls, boys are beginning to make intersecting relationships between the various schemes of differentiation. One boy aged 9 years and 2 months refers to skin colour in terms of dark and light skin and relates this directly to differences in country of origin mentioning specific countries, Bangladesh, Nigeria, England and Britain. Between the ages of 10 and 11 the trend towards complex intersecting schemes of differentiation increases for boys. One boy aged 10 refers to the skin colour differences as *black*, *white* or *brown* and makes a direct relationship between this and the term *race*. He then relates this difference to other types of difference including country of origin, mentioning China and India as well as religion referring specifically to Muslim, Christian, Catholic and 'no God' as particular kinds of distinctions.

What is pertinent about this chart is the fact that only one child (a boy aged 11) out of the whole sample of 60 children refers to *culture* as a significant term of difference between the children. Similarly only two children refer directly to *race* as a significant category of difference. Skin colour is a significant kind of difference for the children between the ages of 5 and 11 but the way they make sense of it is not yet expressed in *racial* terms. For very young children below the age of 8 skin colour refers to nothing other than itself, i.e. skin colour only means differences in the colour of skin, dark/light, *black/white/brown* and so on. It is not until the age of 8-9 for girls and 9-10 for boys that skin colour comes to stand for something other than itself, namely other kinds of difference such as *culture*, country of origin or religion.³²⁵ The other scheme of differentiation apart from skin colour that the children become most preoccupied with is country of

³²⁵ During data collection for this task there was no evidence of the negative ranking of skin colour or what it comes later to be associated with. This contradicts the idea that children instinctively ascribe negative connotations to differences in skin colour but it may also be a reflection of the fact that the task was conducted at school where children know that *racist* talk is forbidden.

origin. Ethnographically this pertains to the question that children ask of each other, "What country do you come from?"³²⁶

The chart in figure 21 raises some interesting questions. Both girls and boys, by the age of 6-7, are increasingly preoccupied with differences in skin colour, but by the age of 7-8 these kinds of distinctions are no longer significant, so what differences do matter to children of this age? I look again at figure 20 and notice that for both boys and girls the ratios between difference and sameness show that children between the ages of 7 and 8 are indeed predominantly concerned with difference. I go back to my data therefore and prepare another chart showing what other kinds of differences children between the ages of 7 and 8 might be interested in see figure 22.

Stage 6 (See figure 22 (P. 292)).

On the vertical axis I plot the other predominant categories used to describe differences, gender, clothes, hair, glasses/jewellery/make-up. On the horizontal axis I plot the children's ages in the same way as for other charts. Looking directly at what the children are preoccupied with between the ages of 7 and 8 I notice that both boys and girls are increasingly preoccupied with gender differences but also that they are making direct relationships between this kind of difference and differences in hair and clothing. The chart shows that girls are beginning to make this relationship before boys and that boys only begin to do it between the ages of 7 and 8. This result enabled me to understand that between the ages of 7 and 8 when the preoccupation with skin colour decreases in significance it is because children, both boys and girls, are preoccupied with constituting the meaning of gender differences.

Looking at figure 22 again I notice that girls between the ages of 8 and 9 are increasingly preoccupied with the relationship between gender and other kinds of differences but by the age of 9 and 10 only one girl is preoccupied with differences of this kind. I compared this to figure 21. There girls between the

³²⁶ In another part of the task I asked the children to point to each child in the photo and tell me which country s/he comes from. I have not yet analysed the results of this part of the task but it should prove to be revealing about the content of the relationship children make between visual appearance and *national* origin.

ages of 8 and 9 are beginning to be preoccupied with complex and intersecting schemes of differentiation pertaining to skin colour etc but by the ages of 9 to 10 this trend is not increasing as one might have expected it to do. This led me to wonder what happens between the ages of 9 and 10. I looked again at figure 20 and observed that between the ages of 9 to 10, girls are predominantly preoccupied again with categories of sameness in comparison to earlier ages where difference was more significant. I concluded that by the ages of 10 –11 girls are beginning to bring the preoccupation with sameness into balance with the significance of categories of difference. This means that between the ages of 9 to 10 when girls' preoccupation with gender differences recedes into the background and concern with categories of skin colour etc assume less significance the ways in which children in the photo are the same or similar comes to the fore. By the ages of 10-11 girls' earlier preoccupation with differences of all kinds is brought into balance with the ways in which children in the photo are the same.

Conclusion

Detailed analysis of children's responses to the task prompt lead me to conclude that the way in which children constitute the meaning of complex categories such as gender, *race* and *culture*, is characterised by an Equilibrium Effect. This means that even as children are being increasingly preoccupied with the significance of differences in visual appearances, this is not necessarily happening at the expense of similarity. The analysis has shown that gender differences are the first complex categories of visual distinction relevant to children undertaking the task and that the meaning of these differences is constituted primarily between the ages of 7 and 8. Between the ages of 8 and 9, and 9 and 10, skin colour as a simple visual distinction becomes symbolic of more complex schemes of differentiation such as *race*, *culture*, country of origin and religion. This is the ideological trick that *race* achieves. Appearing to be a self-evident description of biological difference, it masks the history of its development in relation to other kinds of complex differentiation. This history is understood here as a constitutive process. In this process skin colour becomes inseparable from and becomes a marker of other key categories of distinction including *culture*, country of origin and religion.

Between the ages of 9 to 10 girls' earlier preoccupation with gender differences recedes into the background. This is evidence of the shift between figure and ground that I argue is characteristic of children's conceptual development. The first signs of a figure/ground shift occur between the ages of 5 and 7 when girls' preoccupation with sameness shifts dramatically towards difference as they begin to make sense of gender and then between 8 and 10 when they make sense of what skin colour distinctions stand for. Between the ages of 10 and 11 this new understanding about difference is brought into balance with the earlier concern for similarities. There is evidence to suggest, therefore, that the following pattern characterises, the way that girls, for example, make sense of the visual schemes of differentiation that are used in dominant discourses to describe people:

Girls' Ages	Figure	Ground
5-6	Sameness	Difference
6-7	Difference/Skin colour as a simple concept	Sameness
7-8	Difference/Gender as a complex category	Sameness
8-9	Difference/Gender and Skin Colour as complex categories	Sameness
9-10	Difference/Skin Colour as a complex categories and increasing Concern for sameness re-emerging	
10-11	Sameness and Difference brought into balance = Equilibrium Effect	

The table illustrates the way that shifts are occurring between figure and ground with respect to gender and other kinds of complex categories such as skin colour, but at the same time a more fundamental shift is also taking place between sameness and difference. It is, I would argue, the attainment of an equilibrium between sameness and difference which makes it possible for children and young

people to emphasise either the similarities or the differences between them depending on what kind of participation is required of them in various social situations over time.

After a *race* riot it is no surprise that young people in Burnley choose to emphasise the differences between *white working class* youth on the one hand and particular groups of South Asian young people on the other. An emphasis on difference is what the current moment demands of them and therefore similarities between different groups of youths recede into the background. This does not mean however that similarity is not there to be drawn on in different situations at other times. The results of the analysis show that *race* and *culture* are largely irrelevant terms for children under the age of 12 when they are asked to describe visual differences between people in a task oriented situation.³²⁷ It would have been impossible to obtain this result if I had set out, uncritically, to investigate either *race* or *culture* for their own sake as distinct domains of knowledge. What has been most interesting about this analysis, I would argue, is the way in which it has shown the importance of what Kuper (1999) advocates when he suggests that we investigate whether or not *culture* has its own 'specific (though not fixed) "relations to other things."

The analysis given here suggests that when we, as adults, talk of the *multi-racial*, *multi-cultural* classroom we are imposing adult understanding about the significance of differences between people onto the space of the school as a particular place preoccupied by concern for child development. Ethnographic description (see chapters two and three) of what it is that preoccupies children of this young age has shown that apart from the centrality of gender differences, children are much more concerned with what a child can do than with what s/he looks like. Skin colour as a visual symbol of other kinds of differences has not yet acquired the potent relevance that it comes to have during the teenage years in Bermondsey.

³²⁷ Apart from the necessity to repeat these investigations in such a way that their statistical significance could be assessed, it would also be revealing to conduct them with older children too so that any transformation in the Equilibrium Effect could be traced.

The account of Bermondsey teenagers' preoccupations that I gave in part I of this chapter demonstrated that 'shared geography,' i.e. living and growing up in the same place, cannot be assumed as an adequate means for the production of a shared consciousness among youths. Such an assumption fails to account for the fact that place can be just as much the subject of contestation as *culture* can be. The ethnography presented in this thesis has shown that space - place - as a particular form of materiality, mediates social relations, and is the stuff with which territorial rivalries are made when ideas of belonging are contested and particular ideas of the person made anew in each generation. There is no room for complacency therefore about 'shared geography' or 'neighbourhood nationalism' (Back 1996) even if such ideas seem to be relevant in some situations. The existence of *born and bred* kinship in England makes the relationship between a place and its people seem self evident but upon investigation the significance of place is revealed only as the product of a consistent constitutive process subject to transformation over time. What is interesting about the task analysis presented here is children's preoccupation with country of origin, which seems to suggest that children constitute an idea of *nation* and *national* belonging before they begin to get a sense of themselves as persons belonging to clearly circumscribed boroughs like Bermondsey. This result corresponds with ethnographic data, which suggests that *white* boys from Bermondsey don't have an explicit sense of themselves as being *bods* until their teenage years. It is then, at secondary school, for example, that they are told who they are by people they encounter at the boundary of the territory they are allowed the freedom to move within.

In conclusion it appears that what children are doing when they are 'all together at school' consists, for the most part, of participating in the kinds of exchanges with each other which make the *racial* and *cultural* taboos of their parents irrelevant. This does not mean that in time they will not go on to reproduce the ideas of their parents but it does mean that children have, at school, the opportunity to learn, as the basis of their formative experience, an understanding of what they share in common with each other. It is this kind of knowledge that mediates Lee's (see part I) participation in the vehemently *racist* discourse of his Bermondsey *bod* mates. There is good reason, therefore, for adults to argue for

multi-faith; multi-racial, multi-cultural schools because children, from backgrounds in which these kinds of social distinctions matter, have the opportunity make sense of what being 'all together' implies for children in England.

Repetition of the kind of fieldwork I have conducted in Bermondsey and analysis of ethnographic tasks in areas where a dichotomy is perceived to be developing between *white working class culture* and *ethnic minority cultures* should provide an abundant source of comparative data. This would be relevant to the growing field of the anthropology of child development but also to the issues raised by dominant discourses about *racial* and *cultural* politics in England in the 21st Century. It is significant that of all the classificatory schemes pertaining to differences in visual appearance there is, for children of this young age, no explicit concern for social *class* description. Christine, the teacher in Year Five/Six at Tenter Ground, (see chapter two) explained to me that children from *working class* families don't have an explicit awareness of their *class* position until they leave secondary school. It is then that they realise that the qualifications they have gained are inadequate to the dreams they have nurtured through childhood. In this next and final chapter I explore the implications for *bods* of the discrepancy between their material desires and the gains they can make in the world of work.

Chapter Five

Ways to get Money: How to Buy Prestige.

WANA B A SELF-MADE-RICH-KID
4 THE WIFE – BUY HER A ROLEX MID
WITH ICE [DIAMONDS] LOTS OF ICE
FUCK DA PRICE
WORKED HARD IN LIFE
WOW IT’S...
MY TIME, 2 DO WOTEVER I LIKE
BUY WOTEVER I LIKE
SEE WHO EVER I LIKE
RIGHT?
TAKE NOTE – WOT I DO
WOT I SAY
COZ ONE DAY
I’M A DO THIS STUFF
DON’T DO DRINK
DON’T DO *PUFF*
ANYMORE.
YOU NO THE SCORE
I WANNA B RICII
DON’T WANA B POOR.

John, 16, Bermondsey *bod*, [A Coming of Age Chat]

Notes from an Armed Robber - Gone Straight

“It all starts in the pub, when a man pulls out a wad of notes fatter than your fist, ‘Fuckin’ ‘ell, ‘ow d’ya ge’ tha’?” you say and he tells you, ‘ ‘s easy,’ as he lays a *grand* on the bar and tells the barman to get everyone a drink.”

Patrick, Bermondsey, 2000

Patrick

Patrick is a Bermondsey man, *born and bred*. He served eleven years of a twenty-year sentence for armed robbery. He tells me that going to prison was the best thing that ever happened to him because, “If it weren’t for that I’d be dead by now.” The scar which runs from his temple to the middle of his left cheek gives testimony to a precarious past in which Patrick was stabbed on three different occasions and shot at three times during one altercation with a rival *firm*. Explaining his past he says, “When I was growin’ up all the people who ‘ad nice stuff, BMW car and all that, were armed robbers.” The problem as he understands it is that the desire to have nice things gets people into trouble. Gangsters, Patrick says, “Think they can buy prestige.” He explains that the armed robber buys prestige with big money and spends it in the place where it matters who sees it and takes note: in the pub. The man with the wad of notes as fat as a fist made it sound easy and had no qualms about explaining to younger men like Patrick how an armed robbery was done and who had to be seen to get what was needed for the job.

Patrick explains that once you’ve got the mind for it and the guts to see it through it is only then a question of getting a *firm* together from a few loyal and trusted mates and planning your first job. Having guns is what makes the job seem simple, the step a petty criminal takes, when he buys a *piece*, is to dare to purchase the power of an intimidation he knows no one can argue with. Patrick stresses that whilst street crimes nearly always involve violence guns are rarely used in armed

robberies, and in his perception, act more as a deterrent than a provocation to violence. He explains that guns are relatively cheap and easy to come by, but daring deeds require courage, in this case for crimes that carry steeper sentences and harsher penalties. A step up from thieving and scamming, moral qualms overcome by the eager desire for the good things in life and respect of peers, an armed robber graduates from other forms of physical intimidation learnt early in life.

I ask Patrick what it was like to do the job and he explains, "It was nothing like *Lock, Fuckin' Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*³²⁸ if that's what you mean." Somewhat wearily he resists my idea of crime, knowing that it is an idea that will have been naively formed out of media experience, watching gangster films. The question people always ask that dismays Patrick is whether or not he got a *buzz* out of doing the job, a question that implies to him that he committed crimes for the thrill of it, which is ridiculous. Patrick says that films make crime seem like a bit of a laugh but doing the job is never funny. He explains that its not until you're in the second getaway car that you get excited because only the elation of getting away with it changes the feeling of what it's like to do the job, "Shitting yourself with fear."

Daring to do the job and taking the risk of losing his liberty are the qualities that distinguish the gangster's way of getting money and that is why despite Patrick's efforts to emphasize the terrifying reality of violent crime, the gangster remains a local hero in Bermondsey and a feature of popular fantasy in Euro-American life in general. Because he doesn't sell his labour for a pittance in a market that places little value on the strength and fortitude required for bodily work, the gangster dares to carve out a different destiny than the economic system demands of him. As long as he is ready to take the risks and goes on succeeding, the professional thief is *Mr. Big Potatoes* in Bermondsey. Hard working men who notice the *grand* going down on the bar get vicarious pleasure from the glamour of the gangster's life and

³²⁸ This is a gangster movie set in South London and made by British director Guy Ritchie.

meanwhile take comfort in the safety and security of their own law abiding, relatively risk free but low paid employment.

Patrick's explains that an armed robber's job description might have included any one of the following tasks: planning the job, getting the guns and stolen getaway cars, intercepting security vans (when they stop to make or collect deliveries), terrifying the drivers into submission and/or using a chain saw to cut through the side of the van to get the money out and away. Rich pickings meant that in no time Patrick was living large, dodging *the Old Bill*, bringing in £5000 for a week's work and spending it in the same amount of time because *dirty money* can't be stashed. With flash suits and expensive shoes he became a proper *chap*, confidently chatting up the best looking *birds* in the pub, buying a brand new BMW car and taking 'the *bird*' to all the top West End clubs to show her off. Meanwhile, Patrick explains, the allure of gangster life pulled him in to a dangerous high stakes world, where he struggled to 'stay on top of his game' whilst drinking, taking drugs and making deals, all of which tested loyalties and defined *turfs*. It is not difficult to imagine how, in this fast and furious world, necessary guile and ruthlessness sorts the men from the boys. Odds were that Patrick would get wiped out quickly or learn all too soon of crime's proximity to punishment, carelessness born of self-destructive bravado, bearing fruit at Her Majesty's pleasure.

In prison, Patrick explains, the economy of self-esteem changes and crushes prestige, making way for a humble new beginning or it contributes to the reputation of the hard man made heroic by his ability to withstand the punishment of the state. He remembers all too well the tragic reverence of his son's friends, rising to shake the hand of a gangster, greeting him respectfully, on the day he was allowed out of prison to visit his dying father. Before long Patrick's son had fallen prey to the pathology of a Bermondsey boys' peer group making manhood out of danger, drugs, drinking and self-destruction. Patrick, a reformed man himself, is distraught that his teenage son is now one among many of Bermondsey's *scag heads*.

Doing Time

In relation to the violence of the crime they have committed men are categorised in prison according to the risk they pose to others and themselves. With good behaviour a man like Patrick can end his sentence in the company of category D prisoners who are inside for reasons of relatively minor crime such as fraud and corruption. There, in category D by virtue of his good behavior, Patrick met an Oxford Don incarcerated primarily because he lacked the criminal know how to successfully sell the rare and precious books he had stolen from a library. Despite their widely differing backgrounds what men in category D share is some appreciation and empathy for a past in which aiming for self-respect, they succumbed to greed and desperation. There they learn that deprivation is not the only motivation for crime as Jeffrey Archer's recent incarceration has shown. It is only in relation to money making potential that the different prestige systems of *upper, middle* and *working class* men become comparable. Money is the means by which all other exchange systems are rendered comprehensible in terms of a common currency. In the end a young man quickly learns that nothing is quite so important as a job (except perhaps a criminal *scam* or an inheritance).

Going Straight

Patrick explains that what distinguished him in prison was his obvious flair for writing and the Don, putting his privileged education to good use, assisted Patrick in his endeavours to write about his experiences for the sake of dramatic and personal transformation. Out of this unlikely encounter a friendship between Patrick and the Don grew so that when Patrick's parole came up again after five previously failed applications, the Don encouraged him to apply for university, a possibility that Patrick would never before have entertained. Not many Bermondsey people have been to university and Patrick is the first in his family to do so. Together Patrick and the Don filled in the application forms, Patrick underestimating the value of his previous employment history whilst the Don encouraged him to value the only legitimate work he'd ever had first as a barrow boy in the market and then as a dustman. The Don reassured Patrick that the sum

total of his life experiences combined with his determination to put it to a new and creative use would make him an outstanding university candidate. He was right. Patrick was accepted to read for a media studies degree and this fact influenced the parole board positively. Within six months Patrick was out of prison and in university.

Despite the difficulties of getting employment with a criminal record, Patrick continues to struggle valiantly to redefine the meaning of prestige. He specialised in film making at university and takes pride in his own and is supportive of the artistic endeavours of others. Patrick tells me that the effort to get money remains a difficult one because of his criminal record, but he fights the battle against the desire to buy prestige and wins it on a day to day basis. Avoiding places where the ghosts of a more hazardous past might threaten the hard won peace of mind he has found, Patrick is among a few men who are struggling to set a good example in Bermondsey by affirming the positive aspects of Bermondsey life in their work.

Crime, Morality and the Household

In Bermondsey households the question of ethical conduct, of knowing the difference between the right way of going about getting nice things and the wrong way, is played out in the tension between nominally Christian edicts and practical action. 'Thou shall not steal' commands that a person have respect for the private property of others and by implication grants in return the right to have one's own property secured simply by virtue of an agreed social contract. Straining against this commandment is people's involvement in a highly competitive prestige system and a history of desperate poverty which for many families meant (and often continues to mean) that the desire for nice things could be satisfied only through theft. People in Bermondsey are united, therefore, by their shared desire for nice things and differentiated on the basis of their ability to purchase them. Prestige demands the acquisition of particular kinds of desirable objects, but without satisfaction of desire there is only want and in the absence of more abstract ideals, material want cannot easily be withstood. Moral conventions are subverted in such

a way that 'good' becomes whatever has to be done to get money and 'bad,' therefore, means to go without.

A mother's aspiration to propriety is met in equal measure and often outweighed by her pride about personal possessions. Concern with the material quality of life constitutes the major means of gaining prestige and self-respect in Bermondsey, not the judicious art of thrift. The desire for nice things pervades all social evaluations from the housewife in all the latest clothes from the Next catalogue to youths competing for primacy in Gucci shoes, trademark trainers and designer label shirts. Improved living standards and increasing levels of disposable income make possible the finely differentiated concern with conspicuous consumption and materialistic display that preoccupies Bermondsey people. *Class* consciousness understood ethnographically in terms of the appreciation of a shared and *common culture*, appears to be well founded, but is thwarted at every turn because the competition for survival and prosperity is increasingly constituted at the level of the family rather than the neighbourhood or *community*. Each family is seen to be frantically struggling to differentiate itself from the idea it has of its neighbours' fate. The necessity to be seen to be escaping the possibility of poverty and deprivation leads to the flamboyant display of wealth which conceals the shared struggle of people living in social housing to make ends meet. **Fur Coat – No Knickers.**

Divided between the Catholic Church and the Church of England, congregations in Bermondsey tend to be sparse, composed for the most part of the elderly and mothers with young children. Priests bemoan the fact that people speak proudly of 'their church' referring to a particular church in which generations of their family would have been christened, married and possibly buried but this same reverence does not extend to the effort to attend weekly services. Young mothers tend to have an instrumental attitude to religion, seeing it as a way to get their children into the church schools which often offer a better standard of education than the state schools which have a reputation for being among the worst in the country. The

motivation of these mothers extends also to the desire to take advantage of as many of the opportunities as possible that are provided for children's out of school activities. Some of these activities are organised in clubs which have a Christian or Catholic orientation and there is an oversubscribed Brownies/Cubs and Guides/Scouts movement. Other activities are based on sports provision such as swimming and karate, all of which require the money for fees and the dedication of parents, usually mothers, to the idea that the only way to save children from the street is to give them something constructive to do. Often mothers make the distinction between children and families on the basis of whether or not children are allowed to play out. Anita, (see chapter one), tells me that she won't let her children play out on the estate and explains her fears, "The children round here are too *common*, I don't want them dragging through my house looking at what we've got telling their family about it and before you know it you've been robbed." Parents of children who are not given the freedom to *rake* the streets must find alternative activities for them to do, which is time consuming, tiring and expensive. A mother's struggle to bring her children up to be *decent* begins early and tests all of her resources in a place where the freedom of children presents the most subversive challenge to familial values.

Crime and Punishment

Bermondsey people realise their common plight in an inequitable economic system, but for the most part they are competing against each other to escape it. On the one hand there is something called the 'Bermondsey spirit' which people describe with some pride, telling numerous stories about what people have done now and in the past to help each other out in hard times. On the other hand the downside to closely-knit neighborhood life is constant gossip about 'who's who' and 'what's what' in a world defined by the daily struggle to hide the fact that it is often hard to make ends meet and maintain stability in an often-beleaguered household. When 'everyone knows everyone else's business' there's little privacy in the undignified scramble for self respect, a fact not lost on the creators of television soap operas which have as their subject, the dynamics of a close knit and at the same time,

ruthlessly competitive neighborhood. Tension is created between the idea of *community* spirit and competition between particular families. This drama usually unfolds in terms of the contrast between what happens in the privacy of the home and the public space of the pub or marketplace, for example.

Against the background of poverty and in the face of increasing consumerism, theft assumes its own legitimacy in Bermondsey. Ends come in time to justify the means because for many people getting nice things is all that matters. Knowing this is what makes law-abiding people turn a blind eye to thieving. In the intimacy of the household the ethics of a nominal Christianity meets and grapple with the social values of capitalism. The idea of their spiritual equality undone by desperation, the poor press against the limited exchange value of unskilled labour and discover crime as the means to have what rich people can afford to possess. An elderly woman tells me how she smuggled chocolate out of the factory she worked in when she was a younger woman. In specially fashioned undergarments she tucked away chocolates so that her children could taste what she couldn't otherwise afford to buy for them. She explains, "A bit of pilfering didn't do anyone any harm, it was expected." An elderly man, who worked on the Dock himself and whose father was a Stevedore³²⁹, reminisces about times when his father wasn't picked to work at the beginning of the week which meant there would be no food on the table. The man explains that in response his mother would make bags for the children out of old sacks and send them to the river where cargoes lay for weeks waiting to be unloaded into wharves. There the children would either shimmy down the ropes to the decks or test their swimming skills against the notoriety of the Thames currents, climbing aboard to cut holes in whatever sacks of foodstuffs they could find. Filling their bags with booty children would proudly take what they managed to get home to their mothers. The same man also remembers that his mother, striving for decency, would dispense a rough justice, chastising them for stealing when it wasn't necessary but would gladly accept the side of beef her husband had somehow managed to pinch. Ultimately, the man explains, the wages of work, if

³²⁹ Stevedore is just one among many of the labour specialisations on the dock.

you were lucky, provided for the 'bread and butter' basics of livelihood whilst everyone knew that 'cunning catered for the jam.'

Like it or not, then, the *tradition* of thieving, part of Bermondsey people's idea of what makes their history unique, was born out of the desire to partake of the unprecedented abundance of food and goods in the docks, wharves and factories of an invisible industrial elite. Following the collapse of the dockside industry thieving has developed into an increasingly differentiated economy fuelled now more often by sophisticated consumer desires than the necessity to obtain a varied food supply. Thieving exists in parallel to the legitimate means of gaining an income and there is some measure of local pride among thieves about the art of stealing well. It is a source of local humour that *nicking* things or devising a *scam* is an easy way to get money. Nevertheless the idea that crime pays is constantly set against the devastating effects of criminal prosecution. Everyone knows someone who is or has been *inside* and people dread the loss of public face for the whole family that a prison sentence implies.

In prison the economic and social fortune of a thief is transformed. Removed from both the legitimate and illegitimate economy, s/he faces the prospect of poverty once more as both personal and familial earning power is instantaneously severed.³³⁰ The only positive benefit of a criminal record comes in terms of an enhanced reputation on the street as young men eager to know what kind of crime *time* was done for glamorize a man's ability to withstand crime's punishment in a brutal male world beyond their imagination.

Making 'A Little Extra on the Side.'

Whilst Bermondsey's men have a notorious criminal reputation and the status of gangsters is mythologised, the truth is that most often the majority of men are struggling to make an honest wage and perhaps, a little something extra 'on the side.' Even a man who makes an honest wage will rarely turn his back on the ready

supply of stolen goods, "Why pay £100 for something in a shop when you can get it for £60 on the street?" Patrick's half-brother who has a perfectly legitimate job in television recalls having once had a lucrative sideline producing pirate videos. He reminisces about teenage years spent raiding warehouses and trying to explain to his mother why his bedroom was suddenly packed floor to ceiling with designer jeans, quashing her qualms with extra housekeeping cash. When I ask him what his father did for a living he tells me, "My Dad? He was a thief; he was part of the Quality Street Gang." Paul describes how his father capitalised on the closure of factories and warehouses, pulling up in their vans in broad daylight, stripping the place of all the metal they could lay their hands on, piping etc and then selling it for scrap. For years, Paul says, he thought his Dad had a proper job, believed him when he said he was going to work and only found out later that he was a professional thief. I ask him why they were called the Quality Street Gang. Paul says he doesn't know for sure, laughing he guesses that it was probably because, "One of them was light, one was dark and another was soft in the middle." Patrick explains that more probably the gang got its name because there was a chocolate advertising campaign in those days urging people to join "The Quality Street Gang," so any gang could be jokingly called that by others.

Patrick explains that the scale and scope of theft changes continuously in Bermondsey as the forces of law and order vary their strategies for catching and convicting criminals, making *the Old Bill* the enemy and the *grass* the scourge of the earth. Having once been dubbed the 'Bermondsey Triangle' because there were more armed robbers here than anywhere in the country, the nature of crime has changed. Armed robbers are few and far between in Bermondsey now and those who made a success of it are living in big houses in Kent or Spain. The combined technologies of CCTV, coding and tracking systems have made armed robbery a virtually impossible scam to pull off. What is easy, and therefore tempting now, is drugs crime. Age and gender further differentiate gradations of crime from petty theft to organised scams and violent robberies. Women are more likely to be

³³⁰ Usually when a man goes to prison there is a whip round amongst his friends to generate a lump

hoisting from shops than emptying warehouses of goods or robbing security vans or banks and crime is more usually the fervent activity of the young (12 - 25) and daring male. Older people tend to have the wisdom of experience, the desire to raise a stable family and/or a prison sentence behind them making them feel that *going straight* is the only viable option for a peaceful life.

Trevor, one of Patrick and Paul's friends tells me that he changed his mind about thieving the day he suffered the humiliation of seeing his wife and young children come to visit him in prison. He resolved never to 'go back' and he hasn't, managing to keep up a market stall 'down The Blue.' When I visit him there, and spend the afternoon at his stall, he points across the road to Iceland and beyond to Tescos at 'Surrey Dock.'³³¹ It is something of a local blasphemy to call it Surrey Quays because it is a euphemism for what it is - a dock that was closed down. Trevor says, "You've come just in time, you 'ave. Remember those old films where the wagons were turned over in a circle and people were defending themselves behind them, completely out numbered against the Indians but still ready to fight for their lives? That's what's happenin' in Bermondsey now, people are behind the wagons." I ask Trevor who the Indians are and he says, "Big business," and points across the road at Iceland again. "They are the super tankers on the ocean now." "What are you?" I ask, "A fishing boat?" "No," he says, "I'm not even a fishing boat I'm just a cork making a point. Every time they push me down I bob right back up again."

Trevor explains that he doesn't have a market stall for the sake of the profit because there isn't any profit in it for him. He only manages to break even, but he carries on doing it because he wants to make a point about a way of life that he feels is dying out. "Everyone will tell you that Bermondsey is dying because of all the *blacks* coming in but its not true," he says, "It's got nothing to do with skin color." Trevor is one among a very few people who explains the changes in Bermondsey in

sum of cash for the man's wife and family.

³³¹ The dock was called Surrey Dock because the boundary between London and Surrey was once as close as that whereas parts of Bermondsey are now classed as inner London.

economic not *cultural* terms. Perhaps that is because he is struggling to run his own business in the time-honoured fashion, selling goods through a stall in the market place 'down The Blue' which was once at the heart of Bermondsey's shopping economy.³³² Lamenting the loss of the market's customers to the big supermarkets, chainstores and shopping malls, Trevor depicts for me a time when the market 'down The Blue' represented everything that Bermondsey stood for. He explains that it was a personal way to shop, bumping into everyone that you knew and having time to chat. "Nothing's personal anymore," Trevor says sadly, "Its all about the individual now, no one cares about anyone else and the worst thing is that we're all trying to keep up with the Joneses. That's doing more harm in Bermondsey than anything else." I ask Trevor if keeping up with the Joneses is a new thing, "Didn't you have that before?" "No," he replies, "Nobody had anything so you didn't have to worry about who had what, you just got on with life and children made their own entertainment, but not anymore. Kids are killing each other over trainers that cost £100."

Trevor, like Patrick and Paul, is a man who is trying to set a good example to Bermondsey's youths. Feeling desperate about Bermondsey, the place where he was *born and bred*, Trevor tells me that he now calls it Dodge City, describing it as a lawless place ruled by ruthless vendettas so that young men here have become, ironically, the toughest but also the most vulnerable people. "Now," Trevor says, "If a *bod* has a score to settle he's got to finish it off good and proper and only a carefully placed knife can do that. If he doesn't take that desperate measure he can be sure the knife will be in his belly before the year is out." Trevor emphasises his belief that the only way to reach these young men is through music. "Music," he explains, "Is a new thing for *bods* in Bermondsey and it is a lifeline."

³³² People have said to me that it would take all day to shop in the market because most of the time would be taken up with greeting and exchanging news with people. One woman in particular said that when her husband became wealthy and moved the family out to Kent she still came back to Bermondsey to do her shopping 'down the Blue' because she was lonely and missed the camaraderie of the close relations she enjoyed in Bermondsey. She said she ended up spending more time in her Mum's council flat in Bermondsey than she did in her new four-bedroom house in Kent.

Street Rakers? : School Leavers

Reaching school leaving age the young people that Nicole's mother (see chapter four) call *street rakers* must of necessity concern themselves with work and other way to get money, but this specifically economic dilemma emerges out of and in relation to the much deeper concern with getting respect. By school leaving age *bods* have developed a generalised disdain for conventional figures of power and authority that is mediated and constrained only by the intimacy of kin relations. *Bods* begin to face a difficult paradox. On the street they have status and power which implies that they are becoming Lords of their own *manor*. Street politics follow the pecking order between gangs according to age and young gangs look up to and copy older gangs. The problem, however, is that having a reputation on the street is not a position conducive to the humility required for initial success at the bottom of the employment ladder, which is the place where *bods* with no qualifications find themselves.

Discussing this dilemma with a man, Phil, now in his early forties, he describes for me what it was like for him when he first started work. At school and on the street he 'knew the score,' get tough or get bullied and he survived in a world that he defines in terms of the ability to be constantly intimidating and to constantly withstand intimidation. When he left school he got an apprenticeship as a fine mould plasterer. On his first day, Phil tells me, he was ritually humiliated, stripped naked and dunked in the liquid plaster. He then had his 'bollocks' painted with lacquer by the older men. Phil explains that these kinds of ritual humiliations were standard practice for apprentices in the trades, but after that, he says, "I knew where I stood, I knew that at work I was nobody until I worked my way up."

The problem for *bods* is that their preoccupation with a subversive and dominant male peer group sabotages the chances of legitimate success at school, and by implication in conventional working life, unless humility can be learned or enforced. As a boy becomes a man the all-important respect gained through the

capacity for street violence must be matched with conspicuous consumption and so cash matters but is hard to come by with no chance of a well paid job. Little by little, therefore, the door opens wider to the world of illegitimate gains that *bods* are accustomed to through their fathers,' uncles,' cousins' or older siblings' lives of crime. The point is that in Bermondsey the development and reproduction of economic and political relations are inseparable from the specific means of getting prestige. This transforms from one generation to the next and evolves as a developmental cycle over time.

So, crime comes to seem like the easy way to get money and work becomes the harder option and harder still to come by if you're a young man who left school at fourteen or fifteen with nothing but a reputation on the street to trade by. Low wages and little opportunity puts a *bod* at the bottom of an employment pecking order that undermines his reputation and leaves him little choice but to continue living at home, dependent on a devoted mother whose patience is sorely tested but won't see him go without. Thinking of a way out of economic stagnation, desperate for the respect given to a self-made man, thieving and now especially drug dealing becomes the last resort of the daring dispossessed in Bermondsey. Once notorious for its armed robbers in particular the profession of crime in general remains a last chance choice for Bermondsey's young men who dream of a bigger and better life than menial or semi-skilled labour provides.

Making Ends Meet

Patrick's second cousins David and John (see chapter four part I) are nineteen and sixteen. They both work on a casual basis for a man who pays them £55 cash each per day for helping him to fit laminate floors. It's easy work, they say, because their boss doesn't give them any grief, but it's casual labour and some weeks they don't work at all. For now at least David and John are forced to continue living at home because without their mother's support they wouldn't be able to make ends meet. Her only stipulation is that now they've left school they have to give her housekeeping money every week. Support from the state in the form of *the social*,

isn't an option until the age of eighteen so younger school leavers like John are particularly vulnerable. Even for those *bods* who are old enough to claim it there's no dignity in scraping by on *the social* which involves continuously having to prove to the job center that you are job seeking. The problem is the discrepancy between the job centre's idea of what you could or should do and a *bod's* idea of what he wants or is prepared to do to get money. His reputation demands that he doesn't take a '*shit job*.' Patrick explains that being on the social is depressing because *they* threaten to stop your money if you don't make applications and go for interviews even for jobs you'd hate to have to do. Then, when all else fails, Patrick says, you are forced to think about taking a cleaning job, which rubs your face in the dead end of your employment prospects. For Patrick, and men like him, having a criminal record and having to go to the job center is a humiliating joke. Meanwhile everyone knows that only a cash-in-hand job on the side makes *the social* into a feasible scam. Only a decent wage makes going legitimate feasible but the chance of that, as young men who leave school early and empty handed know, is a fine thing.

Character Testimonies

David has a steady girlfriend who works in an office. She spends a lot of her spare time at his house; evenings are usually spent indoors with a pizza, a *puff* and a video. John has not yet settled down with a particular girlfriend and is still largely involved with his mates in a world, which unfolds on the street or in other places outside the home. David has just recently been to court, charged and acquitted of possessing cannabis with intent to supply. Police raided the house after a tip off, probably from an envious or revengeful acquaintance, but luckily there was insufficient evidence to prove that the cannabis found was not for personal use. David was fortunate to escape a custodial sentence, it was a first offence and his mother, Carolyn, was able to call upon the local priest to give a character testimony to the effect that leniency would be constructive. The priest argued that David lives at home, is working, and has a steady girlfriend and that a prison sentence would undermine, at such a young age, David's best chances of stability in life.

The priest is used to giving character testimonies, he is called upon regularly. He tells me about an occasion a long time ago when, after having successfully testified to the character of an accused young man, he was visited the next day by the boy's father bearing a gift of a beautiful solid silver antique candlestick wrapped in a cloth. The priest has little doubt that the candlestick had been 'knocked off' from somewhere but he graciously accepted it because to refuse the gift would have caused offence to the boy's father. On the day that I am at David's house with his mother Carolyn and her older sister Claire prior to the court case the priest arrives to talk about the testimony. Carolyn is already distraught because the boys had been involved in a fight the night before with *Roaders*, white boys who had come looking for trouble in the pub opposite where the boys live. Carolyn had been out to the opera with a boyfriend and was dressed accordingly. Arriving home late in the evening she found her boys involved in a brawl outside the pub. Kicking off her elegant high heels she got stuck into the melee, breaking up the fight, determined as usual to protect her boys from harm. While her companion stood on the sidelines not daring to get involved, Carolyn didn't hesitate to get stuck in. Both she and Claire have grown up tough and know how to handle themselves in a fight. When I arrive at Carolyn's door the morning after one shoe remains where it was thrown off on the lawn outside. Like Cinderella's slipper the elegant shoe bears testimony to a glamorous night out away from the troubles of Bermondsey life.

The priest asks to see David but David isn't there and the court case is the next day so he is worried that he might not get to see him. He needs to see David, not to dish out moral reprimands but to make sure that when he's in court trying to talk sincerely about him he is actually looking at the right person. The photos of David that Carolyn finds spark an exchange of reminiscences about the kinship relations that the priest, having been in the parish for decades, is familiar with. As they talk about the boys' father, whom the priest remembers marrying to Carolyn the priest laughs about the number of marriages that he has witnessed and since seen gone asunder, not just in their family, but in Bermondsey in general. Carolyn and

Christine laugh with him and remark on how rare it has become in Bermondsey for a child to be raised by two parents living together. They contrast this to their grandparents' generation when it was unheard of for parents to split up. They recall the scandal of an elderly female relative who, when she was a young woman, left home because she was in danger of her husband literally beating her to death. They tell me that in those days when teenage girls did get pregnant young men knew that they would be forced to do the honourable thing and marry the girl or their life wouldn't be worth living in Bermondsey. Nowadays, in contrast, teenage mothers are often raising young children without the father being either present or responsible and draw only on the extended network of their own kin to raise the child. Carolyn was at that moment waiting for the results of a genetic test to determine whether John was the father of a local girl's baby. She insisted on this test and was paying for it privately because she needed to know, for the sake of her own integrity, whether she was a grandmother for the first time in her life. There was no question of forcing her son to marry the girl but there was a point of honour at stake. The point is respect and support for kin, which is a core value in Bermondsey. With one son facing court and another facing teenage fatherhood, Carolyn is sorely tested.

The priest recalls the notorious reputation for violent crime of John and David's father who has long since had nothing to do with raising them. All the credit for getting two young boys close to manhood relatively unscathed, no mean feat in Bermondsey, goes to their mother and is testimony to her tenacity in the face of the seductive danger of their father's precedent and the street. After the priest has gone David's mother tells me about the time when she was still living with the boys' father and the priest called round. Cocaine lay in piles everywhere waiting to be weighed up and sold and whilst she got flustered about his presence, the priest calmly licked his finger and dipped it into the white stuff muttering appreciatively. Carolyn and Claire laugh in dismay about a priest without whom they would be lost but who has nevertheless been corrupted by his parishioners' *ways* and thinks

nothing of walking into Carolyn's house swearing and blinding about the 'cunts' that have parked badly outside her house.

When I ask the priest about his work and the parish he explains that whilst I, as an anthropologist, might tend to focus on what is different and surprising about Bermondsey what surfaces for him here is the constant of humanity. "No matter where you are, rich or poor," he explains, "Everyone grieves over death and mourns, people are joyful and anxious about birth and marriage and for assistance in all these crucial events in life people in this parish turn to me." His is a difficult task and he manages to be utterly profane whilst maintaining a sacred role. He strikes a necessary balance, but people are continuously amused by and feign shock at his conduct. Deeply implicated in local knowledge about the struggles of family life, he is witness to the intimate details of local kinship, which are perpetually conjured in the Christian rituals of births, deaths, marriages, divorces and christenings. In courtroom dramas, the moral sanction of the church is purchased in pragmatic gift exchanges. Appealing for sensitivity to the challenge that crime presents in Bermondsey the priest makes his case expertly and in return for this David must find a way to fulfill the request to get hold of and fit hardwood flooring in the priest's house.

The Future

Following the court case I ask David and John how they will walk the fine line between the choice of whether to make money out of crime or work. David does most of the talking because he is the older and respected brother and in his presence John defers to him:

D: "I don't know really, you just get on with both, like I work and think, I don't know, everyone wants money, it's just whether you choose to make money legally or illegally really in 'it'? Most of our friends that do things illegally a lot of them are in prison aren't they so...? A lot of my friends that are like a little bit older than John anyway, like a lot of your friends are still about ain' t they? But I've still got a lot of friends that

are about but a lot of friends that chose to like try and make big money at a young age a lot of them are in prison."

G: "Does that stop you?"

D: "It does make you think is it worth it? But then again you could go and work and work for like ten years for what? On the other hand there ain't no point in working either, you can't really win."

G: "So where does school fit in?"

D: "At school you don't want to lose face, everyone's the same really but that's in school it ain't too serious when you're in school you're just all trying to prove a point to each other like you ain't really got money or nothing at that point anyway so that don't matter."

G: "Is that more about having a laugh?"

D: "It's just making a name for yourself really ain't it when you're at school and then when you leave it's more people then want to earn money and that's when people make it in different ways?"

G: "So it starts out like just a bit of a rep at school?"

D: "You leave school and then it really does hit ya you think shit what am I gonna do now and you do see people earn money that are doing things illegal and then see some people that are earning money doing things legal but then again there's people like our friend he's like really brainy he stayed at sixth form and all that and now he's living with his girlfriend he can't get a flat, can't a job can't get nothing, and like he's always been our friend but he was really clever at school and he stayed on and it ain't got him nowhere. You're taking a chance really like people say it's a lot easier to go it legal but I think going legal..."

G: "It's harder?"

D: "It's hard to explain. You see people earning money like that what you'd be working like six months for."

G: "So why is it then that at school, you know the stuff you were saying about having name for your self, why is it that can't school work be part of that?"

J: "It's a *culture* in'it?"

G: "Tell me about that when you say it's a *culture*."

D: "We wouldn't talk about it like that, our friends wouldn't look at it like it's a different sort of thing."

G: "It's just what you're used to?"

D: "Its just when you do start secondary school and like you see the older boys and your older cousins or whoever you know that's older if

they're from round here that's how they're acting and really you're just following in their footsteps I s'pose. And its easier I s'pose in'it when you're at school to like not do your work and have a laugh than to do your work and study I mean if everyone's having a laugh it's a lot easier to just turn around and say look I can't be bothered to do that lets be naughty than sit down and do it. That's basically it. It starts from school don't it? In'it? But its when people leave school that it really hits ya like what are they gonna do?

J: "See your mates driving buff cars now and you think.... [Laughter]"

G: "How am I gonna get one?"

D: "I'll just wait 'til I can drive my Bentley. [Laughter]"

The interview demonstrates that making a name for their selves is what matters to young men in Bermondsey. Whilst they must of necessity concern themselves with work and other ways to get money once they leave school this emerges out of and in relation to the deeper concern with getting respect. David and John realise that the desire to make a name for themselves, which they have succeeded in, has at the same time thwarted their chances of getting or working towards a well paid job or profession. At the same time they struggle with the humiliation that taking a low paid job entails. Filled with a sense of loss about their unfulfilled potential I ask John and David whether their energies wouldn't have been put to better use doing well at school but they know that being a Bermondsey *bod* makes success at school impossible. Anyway, they are not convinced that the rationality of the education system is guaranteed. They reassure themselves that a million sacrifices made over thousands of days in school classrooms in order to work hard and do well may reap no greater reward for a boy than the pleasure of as many pranks. I ask the boys if they think UK Garage is something they can make money from and David tells me about a friend of his who just made a couple of *grand* out of a Garage night he organised at a club. John meanwhile has decks set up in his bedroom and dreams of getting out of Bermondsey by becoming a famous DJ. David, in contrast, wishes Bermondsey were a place where he could imagine his children growing up one day. I ask him why that's a dream, "Isn't that possible?" "Its not like it used to be," he says, "It's not a close *community* anymore, not like it used to be when everyone

looked out for everyone else. There's hardly any Bermondsey people left here now, look at it." He points out of the window at the cranes which reach out of the close by construction sites and over the place where he lives, "These are not Bermondsey people moving in here," he says, "The new Bermondsey is for *yuppies*."

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that mind is a learning phenomenon. Taking the idea of what it means to become *working class* and the practice of ethnography as case studies the thesis has demonstrated that learning takes the form of participation in or resistance to specifically structured encounters between people. The thesis asked a particular question: “Does learning, understood as participative phenomenon, necessarily take the form of an exchange relationship?” In relation to evidence presented in the preceding chapters the thesis concludes that with respect to discourse, bodily actions, particular subject/object relations such as the Pokemon and UK Garage phenomenon, working for money and writing to gain academic legitimacy, participation does, indeed, take the form of an exchange relationship. This means that mind is substantiated in the ongoing processes of exchange that particular persons are engaged in at any time. It is the past history of these exchanges and the structured form they take in the present that informs what sense children will make of who they are in relation to the idea that others have of who they can be. History, therefore, is the proper object of anthropological investigation (Toren 1990, 1993a, 1999).

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