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Builders: The Social Organisation of a Construction Site

A Dissertation submitted to the Department of Sociology in the
Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Darren John Thiel

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Abstract

This thesis is based on an ethnographic case study of a London building site. The social organisation of building work and building workers was framed by the city, and cross-cut by class, race and gender, the structures and processes of which are explored throughout.

The fieldwork site was characterised by racial divides between subcontracted trade groups, which were organised around informal networks within ethnic communities. Those communities, in their turn, were bounded by patterns of gift-exchange, reciprocity and ensuing loyalties. Networked contacts, which were predominately ascribed by social, ethnic and regional origins, formed an aspect of the perpetuation of race and class structures.

Strong notions of trust and loyalty fostered illegitimate activities because information concerning rule-breaking was kept within the communities and went undetected by agencies representing the formal law. Informal networks were also contrived and engineered by entrepreneurial subcontractors whose relationships with building contractors and consultants were characterised by gift-giving. This process shielded competition from rivals and closed down the competitiveness of the construction market. 'Embedded' economic relations excluded recent migrant groups and their subcontracted representatives by blocking access to jobs and contracts, despite the groups' ability to offer cheaper and harder-working labour.

Contractual arrangements were informal and sometimes illicit, and this erected barriers to legal and regulatory power. Coupled with short-term and ephemeral working practices, a social order partly supported by the threat of violence was established. The masculinity expressed by builders was, in part, a consequence of this display of violence.

The building industry was virtually a 'non-modern' organisation whose social relations were marked by network morality, nepotism, reciprocity, gift relations and the threat of violence. Yet, violence underpinned forms of social power, which manufactured the imbalance of false reciprocities.

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List of Abbreviations

CITB = Construction Industry Training Board

DTI = Department of Trade and Industry

OED = Oxford English Dictionary

OPCS = Office of Population, Census and Surveys

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Its inhabitants are, as the man once said, 'whores, pimps, gamblers and sons of bitches,' by which he meant Everybody. Had the man looked through another peephole he might have said: 'saints and angels and martyrs and holy men', and he would have meant the same thing.

John Steinbeck, 1937: 1

Introduction

Builders construct, repair and maintain the physical infrastructure of our societies. They work in the most private spaces of our homes and workplaces, and we rely on and trust their achievements in almost every moment of our lives. Despite this, we know very little about them because we take them for granted. Inevitably people have to build and maintain the buildings we live, work and play in, and it is their lives, cultures and actions that this thesis describes.

Originally, my aim was to tell a story about the lives of building workers through the tradition of the Chicago School of sociology so as to amplify builders' voices and communicate their social world to a wider audience. I intended to participate in the social life of builders, discover their thoughts and feelings and, extract form and social order from their discrete but complex social world. I had worked as a builder for some years previously and saw that a thesis about builders could be used to describe a section of the 'social mosaic' (Becker, 1970). However, in trying to tell their story, I came to realise that it was inseparable from stories related to class, race and gender. These elements structured and impinged upon their lives, and were further shaped by London, the post-industrial city that formed the backdrop to the set in which the builders lived and performed their lives, and which provided a site for my research. The city was further situated as a node in the intense global capitalist economy, and, like building and builders, it has had a long history. I could not tell the builders' story separate from these factors.

In chapter 1 the story begins with the history and structure of the building industry, which was almost pre-industrial, or non-modern, in its organisation. Although changes occurred across the period of modernity and industrialisation with the decline of the guilds and the emergence of general contracting companies, builders and the building industry revealed numerous continuities with the past. The building industry's archaic nature meant that builders could not be seen as part of the industrial proletariat. Their history was older.

Chapter 2 describes my position as researcher on a State-commissioned building project, my methodological and epistemological assumptions, and the problems and nuances of ethnographic research.

Chapter 3 describes the particular build that I participated in, and the relationships between the State, its buildings and its builders, set against the backdrop

of the hegemony of the free market and the marketisation of governance. I examine the complex organisational nature of the build and the problems encountered in reaching an agreement between all the parties involved, and I highlight how management theories, government legislation and bureaucratic regulatory measures were introduced (unsuccessfully) to redress and frame conflicts between the parties. I also describe how bureaucratic methods were underpinned by informal negotiations, and the formation and maintenance of informal alliances, alliances that functioned to skew formal organisational methods.

Chapter 4 examines the emergence, function and organisation of the subcontract system through which the manual workers were employed. The informal information networks that subcontractors utilised to recruit inexpensive and informally-controlled labour were related to the very tangible ethnic and geographical trade divisions present on the building site.

Chapter 5 addresses the diverse ways in which the builders became builders. They were found to interpret their life trajectories as contingent upon external social, political and economic circumstances. It is argued that their lives were indeed contingent upon these extraneous circumstances, which combined with the patterning of social networks and contributed to the reproduction of class, race and gender structures.

Chapter 6 analyses formal systems of work control and discovers an absence of formal managerial demands. Instead the builders possessed a high degree of autonomy and a 'craft work ethic', in which work conflict was kept to a minimum by informal reciprocal administration methods.

Chapter 7 examines workplace culture and the games played at work. This was related to the synthetic and imposed structure of time. The intensification of time was associated with modernity, and the relationship between time structure and 'shop-floor' behaviour and culture is explored. In both chapters 6 and 7, the creative and collusive nature of the builders' culture is emphasised.

Chapter 8 focuses on the gendered nature of building site culture with an emphasis on the body as economic capital, interactive power and a wider source of discursive status. Corporal capital was a valuable commodity, and the symbolic power of bodies in relation to bellicose posturing were associated with the pre-industrial non-contractual, informal and ephemeral nature of the building industry. Shop-floor behaviour was framed by this somatic and archaic culture.

Chapter 9 tackles issues of reciprocity and trust in relation to social networks, employment and social control. An ethnic subcontracting dynamic operated which reproduced ethnic divisions and formed a backdrop to expressions of racism and discrimination. The relationships between subcontractors, contractors and consultants are analysed, and it is revealed that they were contrived by gift exchange mechanisms predicated on trust and long-term relationships which negated the possibility of a fully competitive market.

Chapter 10 describes the builders' economic lives. Their incomes were not only made up of formal wages, but also of extra income acquired through informal means. It is argued that informal and formal ways of making a living were intimately tied to one another. Informal economic action did not necessarily secure direct and tangible forms of income, but acted to manufacture economic cushions and build network alliances which in turn patterned class, race and gender structures.

Chapter 11 brings the story to an end and draws together the preceding plot and subplots into a discussion of the builders' lives, set against the backdrop of intense modernity and its concomitant social structures.

Throughout the thesis I have ordered the social world of the building site through the linguistic categories that the builders themselves used. In this sense, the term 'builders' is a blanket term to describe all the actors involved in the collective product of building. This term is subdivided into trades and positions: management, quantity surveyors, labourers, and tradesmen; and these are further divided into particular trades, and further still into named individuals. All place, company and personal names have been changed, but I have tried to reproduce the flavour of the builders' terms and colloquialisms. To this end I frequently use parochial argot and apply nicknames to some of the characters. I hope to have remained faithful to their social world.

Chapter 1

Making Buildings: History and Overview of the Construction Industry

Nature, Society and Buildings

Buildings are central to social life. In their most basic form they serve as protective structures to house bodies away from nature (c.f. Giddens, 1991). Within buildings, internal layouts are fashioned to create organised and predictable spaces in which to undertake social life. In these spaces, physical action becomes habitualised and taken for granted, resulting in physical and psychological security and economy. Buildings are, then, tools utilised for risk reduction and the creation and maintenance of security; machines designed to regulate nature.

Dwellings are physical areas that provide organisational arenas for ‘the social’. They protect individuals and families, but also provide the space and symbolism to anchor and enclose the institution of the family. Physical spaces bind social institutions because (until very recently) people must be brought together in space to perform institutional behaviour. Thus for example, churches and temples symbolise the power of gods and dramatise the sacred relics they contain. Castles and palaces symbolise monarchical power and exemplify corporal power by housing armies. Prisons symbolise the power of the State and, by containing the deviant, radiate disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977), and massive office blocks symbolise, embody and contain the power of capital. Buildings are physical manifestations of the subjective world, arenas whereby the virtual-social becomes real and objective. In this sense, a building is part of what reifies the social, that is, a built structure works back upon social action by distributing bodies in space and providing a symbolic backdrop for social performances. In dramaturgical terms, buildings provide the set against which actors perform their show (c.f. Goffman, 1959).

Social Convention and Building

Buildings are designed for different uses. This is reflected in their internal structures, and these have altered substantially through history. Most of us no longer sleep, eat, work and have sex in a single space shared with our extended family as we did in the past. As Foucault argues, during the late 17th century the ‘tolerant familiarity with the illicit’ (1976: 3) became subject to disciplinary regulation. Consequently, throughout

the 18th and 19th centuries, sexuality became governed and segregated into specific areas in the home, brothel or mental institution. Associated with the rise of conventions of sexuality and the sacredness of the body, the internal space of buildings became divided and bounded. Modern family houses for example, are very similar in their structure (until very recently) because modern discourses, conventions, and monetary economy frame their structure.

The majority of European houses are based upon the Georgian plan, which created semi-public and private space within which to undertake conventional family routines. Bounded to provide specific sets for specific actions, social performance became ritualised in even the most private spaces: the bedroom for sleeping, dressing, being naked and having sex; the water closet for washing and ridding the body of waste matter; the kitchen for eating and preparing food. External spaces surrounding buildings also became bounded. With the rise of private ownership, fences and borders were erected as symbolic barriers to demarcate private property. The intensification of trade bought boundary roads between buildings and social centres, and boundaries channelled the movement of bodies in space, organising and speeding communication and interdependency. The intensification of modernity demanded that water and fuel were bought into dwellings, and structures were built and planned into buildings to deliver these materials.

Buildings and interlinking structures, such as roads and paths, routinise and regulate social and bodily movements by safeguarding and shielding against nature's hazards. As the modernist architect LeCorbusier wrote: 'The regulating line is an assurance against capriciousness... it is one of the vital operations of architecture' (1923: 75). It follows, then, that any space external to what has been built or doctored by human agency will be the converse of routine organisation. It will lie within the sphere of nature, the realm of multi-contingent complexity, unpredictability, danger and the resulting physical and subjective insecurity. It is in this realm that builders work. In constructing the physical manifestation of the social world, builders spend much of their time outside that world, on the margins of modernity¹.

Buildings are large, immobile and built into their place of consumption. If all parts of a building were pre-fabricated in a factory, someone would still have to assemble them at their final site of function. In manufacturing industry, where

¹ North American literature focussing on builders tacitly reflects this. Reimer (1979) and Applebaum (1981) present builders in the image of heroic frontiersmen almost akin to the Cowboy.

production is commonly organised by Fordist assembly-line principles, products are divided into small units and moved on a conveyor belt to a stationary worker. In the factory therefore, workers can be observed and tightly governed. A building however, cannot be subdivided into small units and moved to the worker. Builders must move around a structure taking the parts with them. Furthermore, because buildings make space private, builders work in private space. This makes observation problematic, and, observation is control. Foucault (1977) suggested that architecture assisted and conveyed disciplinary control: the school, prison and the factory relayed discipline through an architecture of possible observation.

It is builders that erect the architectures that provide the infrastructure of control. Consequently there can be little architecture to control builders. In this sense, they have quite an unrivalled freedom compared to other manual occupations; freedom of movement, culture, self-presentation, work task, and of who and who not to work for. Furthermore, in erecting a building, the workspace will be in constant transition because new parts will be added to the structure each day. The product is, in Reimer's (1979) terms, 'emergent', which can make for a hazardous work environment because the workspace changes shape from moment to moment. For example, a mason may move boards from parts of a scaffold to work on the masonry behind them. The mason may then vacate this space to fetch extra materials, leaving a large and hazardous hole in the scaffold. Builders must then be careful in habituating and routinising their behaviour on the fringes of modernity because it will be packed with unpredictable risks.

Gheradi and Nicoloni (2002) describe how builders learn to negotiate unpredictable workspaces. They show how working knowledge largely consists of skills that can only be learnt in practice and not prescribed beforehand because of the unpredictability of builders' workspaces. Builders learnt to avoid risks by seeing and imitating, following injunctions such as 'look' and 'be careful', which were enforced by phrases such as 'you must', or 'never'. The injunctions protect the immediate work group by producing on-going cognitive changes in their awareness. Gheradi and Nicoloni term these processes 'the tacitalisation of danger', 'in which feeling, knowing and understanding are intermeshed' (2002: 213). This is what builders call 'common sense' or 'being aware'. They must be constantly aware, and this awareness must be communicated to and by the work group (see also Haas, 1977).

The work world of builders is almost the converse of the security that is maintained by buildings. It is particularly insecure, physically demanding, risky, dirty and dangerous. Between the advent of the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act and 2000, three thousand building workers died in building site accidents in Britain (Higgins, 2000). As a percentage of total workers, building is second only to agriculture in its number of workplace fatalities, and 4 times higher than industry as a whole (Health and Safety Executive, 2003).

Making Society

George Orwell (1932) reasoned that the poorly paid and little respected coal-miner was the backbone of industrialisation. Without his hard labour, industrial society would be unable to function. The same could be said of builders, because, without their labour, recognisable social life would cease. There are other parallels between builders and miners in terms of their culture and work organisation (see chapter 6). Like the miner, in creating the physical structure of society, the builder occupies a workspace somewhere between nature and society. For example, builders' work lives are contingent upon weather patterns and the seasons. This was eloquently noted by Mike Cherry, steel erector and writer:

The most obvious, relentless, whimsically malevolent enemy of the man who works outdoors is the weather. He is more aware of the state of the weather than of that of the nation's economic health. The weather is more immediate. Construction slows in a recession and stops in a depression, but these conditions develop through longish blocks of time, and a man has an opportunity to make adjustments and seek solutions. But if the rent is due on Friday and he is rained out on Wednesday and Thursday, his problem is in the here and now... Still, financial vagaries aren't the worse problem. The worst thing is sheer physical discomfort. Hell, call it pain. Some people can take it better than others, but none of us is happy about it. (1974: 77–78)

Building tradesmen must be aware of weather patterns even from moment to moment. To plaster a wall for example, the plasterer must utilise a kind of informal, tacit and heuristic knowledge of the interactions between his materials and the natural environment. Plaster will 'go off' (dry) at different speeds depending upon the amount of heat and moisture in the surrounding area. The plasterer must be aware of these conditions when mixing up and adding the various coats that are combined to construct closed and level surfaces.

Building requires manual dexterity and heuristic handicraft skills to be applied directly and locally onto the product. In association with problematic observation, this

is why building is difficult to control at a distance; builders require freedom of movement and thought in their tasks. Bob Reckman, carpenter and writer, aptly highlighted this: ‘The working carpenter must decide a thousand times a day what is good enough – where to place himself and his work among the almost infinite possibilities of perfection or compromise’ (1979: 76). ‘Infinite possibilities’ negate the prospect of a managerial monopolisation of task knowledge and shield building work from bureaucratic control. The building industry has thus been quite immune to the dynamic outlined in Braverman’s (1974) thesis of the increasing control of work tasks (see chapter 6). Scientific management systems have not and cannot monopolise building knowledge because this knowledge must be mobile, localised and heuristic. Builders are therefore relatively autonomous, and this is exacerbated by the immobility of buildings, forcing builders to travel to different areas in search of work. They cannot live and work in homogenous occupational communities like the historical miner or factory worker because they travel to where building work is, and when the building is completed they must move to another job, another building, in another geographical area.

Continuity and Change

I tell you this tale, which is strictly true,
Just by way of convincing you,
How very little, since things were made,
Things have altered in the building trade.
(Kipling, quoted in Lynd and Lynd, 1929: 106)

The basic physical structure of buildings has remained much unchanged for millennia. LeCorbusier (1923) suggests that almost all built structures are based upon 5 basic geometric shapes combined in various ways. Thus a medieval house is recognisable as a house, and large office blocks and religious buildings may reflect the castles and temples of the past. Physical structures dictate how building work is done, and because basic structures have altered little across history, builders work lives bear strong continuities with their trade forebears almost since the very beginnings of the divisions of building labour.

The Beginnings

There are a large number of historical accounts of builders’ lives because their work survives their death, and documentation of church and state work survives in the

present. Historical documents suggest that the formalisation of builder's skills began in England around the 13th century with the establishment of guild groups (Woodwood, 1995). The master craftsmen who formed the groups were tightly knit, paternalistic and nepotistic. They monopolised building knowledge, controlling their own wages, work hours and recruitment patterns. There was a high status occupation, and some guildsmen rose to elevated standings in their towns, taking roles such as jurors, bridge-keepers, churchwardens and mayors. Since the medieval period the social status of builders has declined profoundly and is one of the fundamental changes to have occurred in the building industry during and after industrialisation. Labourers by contrast have always been awarded low social status. In medieval times they were a casual, unorganised, reserve army of labour. However, Woodwood (1995) reports that few labourers were solely labourers. Many were also agricultural workers, soldiers, and prisoners securing additional and vital casual income. Also, there are documented cases of women and children labouring on large constructions, and women are reported to have primarily specialised in collecting and applying moss to dam walls.

Building guildsmen's wills show great variations in wealth, much like the builders of today (see below and chapter 10). Some were able to bequeath property and excess capital, others only their clothes, tools and chamber pots. Medieval builders may be better conceptualised as entrepreneurs than wage labourers because they made additional income from by-employments including farming, spinning, brewing, opening their houses to the public and, selling and supplying materials and labour (Woodwood, 1981). Masters charged daily rates for their labourers, apprentices and journeymen, and it can be assumed they took a percentage of these payments, much like the modern-day building subcontractor (see chapter 4). In this sense, builders were simultaneously part of a household economy, a wage economy and an entrepreneurial business economy; economic characteristics that are still common for contemporary builders (see chapter 10).

According to Satoh (1995), the English guild groups remained relatively unchanged up until the late 18th century, but the intensification of capitalism and the industrial revolution led to a decline in guild power, usurped by the newly emerging armies of building professionals, general contractors, and speculative house builders. Kidder (1985) suggests that in North America, it was not until the mid-19th century /

that the master carpenter lost control of the planning and design of buildings to the new professions of architect, engineer, speculator and general contractor.

The reasons for the decline of guild power remains rather a mystery in the published history of builders. Satoh (1995) suggests that guild price regulation began to be undermined by a switch from 'measure and value' work (where guildsmen would be awarded a payment for the measure of amount of work done, the rates for which were set by the guilds groups themselves), to work '*in grosso*' (lump-sum pricing). Alternatively, Higgin and Jessop (1965) argue that guilds came under pressure following the mass rebuilding of London after the Great Fire of 1666, because their 7 year apprenticeship system could not provide sufficient labour for the rebuilding. Sir Christopher Wren, who designed much of post 1666 London, was himself an honourable grand master mason. Wren's emergence as an early planner and architect, but one which was incorporated into guilds organisation, marks the beginnings of the ascendancy of building professionals.

The decline of the building guilds is also associated with the emergence of general contractors. In England at the beginning of the 19th century, contractors were employed to provide the large-scale barrack buildings necessary to train and discipline men to fight in the Napoleonic wars. Cooney (1955) cites evidence from the *Fourth Report of the Commissioners of Military Enquiry* in 1807 that revealed the State's concerns about inefficiencies in building processes, and which led to legislation to place each job under the jurisdiction of a single responsible building contractor. Previous to this, large building works were overseen and organised by government and church clerks in consultation with master masons and carpenters. The masters organised large works more akin to work co-operatives than capitalist enterprises (Knoop and Jones, 1933). Higgin and Jessop argue that in the 'slow tempo' of the guild system, design was not separate from construction as: 'The master artisans worked it out amongst themselves and with the client as they went along' (1965: 39). Masters would hand out work to other small groups of guild-organised men rather than competing and undercutting one another through the competitive practices characteristic of the modern general contractor.

From 1800 onwards, competitive tendering grew, resulting in an explosion of general contracting companies. By the 1850s massive building contractors, such as William Cubitt in the Isle of Dogs in East London, were buying raw materials direct from the docks and pre-fashioning them in factories for the immense building projects

of the industrial revolution. Carpenters no longer grew and worked materials in their own (or common) woods and workshops, unable to compete with the new cheaper methods of mass production. In the 19th century, the centralised State replaced church and monarch as the major employer of building workers, and industry followed close behind demanding masses of building labour. Even today, public sector related work constitutes almost 60 percent of all building projects (DTI, 2001). Contemporary work for the State is the modern incarnation of the large church and monarchical works of the past. The difference between the modern and pre-modern State however, was the speed of constructions, churches and cathedrals were constructed in God's time, not man's (see chapter 7). The intensification of capitalism also changed the nature of building organisation. Cooney (1955) points to the doctrines of Smithian competition and Benthamite rational administration that were pervading the organisation of the state across this period. The ascendancy of these ideas were related to the subsequent reorganisation of the building industry.

Capitalism and State-commissioned building required an increasing number of ever larger physical structures, including factories, barracks, schools, workhouses, hospitals and prisons. The guild system of master, journeyman and apprentice began to disintegrate under the pressure of high labour demand. Professional knowledge brokers such as architects, quantity surveyors and building project managers invaded the traditional expertise of the master craftsmen and, began, in conjunction with entrepreneurial general contractors, to take control of the building industry. Master masons gave way to, and became, architects, and clerks of work transformed into the present day surveyor. The invention of the printing press in the 16th century and the ensuing wide circulation of literature might also have played a role in the decline of the guilds - eroding their scientific secrets and knowledge monopolies, thereby reducing their power. Furthermore, with the march of capitalism, time becomes money (Thompson, 1967), and guild organised building was quite a leisurely and sometimes drunken affair. For example, a 15th century bricklayer would lay 300 bricks in one 12-hour day, part of his wage being paid in beer (Woodwood, 1995). The early 20th century bricklayer was expected to lay 750 bricks per day (Price, 1980). While today, bricklayers lay on average 350 bricks per 8.5-hour day², and no

was

² Thanks to Andy 'Plug' Thiel, a long-time bricklayer, for this information.

longer receive beer as part of their wage. It can be assumed that the medieval guildsmen 'took their time' (see chapter 7).

In the 18th century, building masters took advantage of the intensification of capitalism, and many became affluent through subcontracting labour. By 1824, 'nearly all' Glasgow master masons employed between 70 and 170 journeymen each (Postgate, 1923), a number far in excess of the one or two journeymen employed in the medieval era. Some masters accumulated large wealth but ceded their traditional control over the building industry. However, the organisational system of master, journeyman and apprentice never completely disappeared. Even in 2000, almost 30 percent of officially recognised building firms were composed of two to three tradesmen (calculated from DTI, 2001). The Guild of Master Craftsmen still survives, 'City and Guilds' remain the standard formal qualification for builders, and the Masons endure as the secretive and nepotistic organisation it always was, although it may no longer consist of actual masons. It might be assumed that the masters who did not become subcontractors, moved into small private business. Chalkin (1974) suggests that many became speculative house builders in the 18th century, mixing this work with small-scale contract and repair work. Again, there are multitudes of builders who today operate similar small-scale enterprises.

It is poignant to note that the transition from guild control to professional and managerial control was associated with the emergence of strikes on large building sites in London in mid 18th century. Postgate (1923) describes how the building trades unions grew from the trade-based Friendly Societies which were originally formed by journeymen as informal self-help groups and that acted as labour exchanges. The Societies sought to prevent encroachments into their work by other trades, 'blacks' (the non-apprenticed) and 'foreigners' (guildsmen from out of town). Price (1980) suggests that competition between general contractors forced down profits, resulting in the 'sweating' of workers, who, growing from the Friendly Societies, became unionised. Tressell's ([1914] 1965) graphic description of the lives of housepainters at the beginning of the 20th century illustrates that they did indeed work under austere conditions in a position of almost absolute poverty. Tressell wrote, bemoaning the competitive contracting system, and the tendency of the men who accepted its dominance, that: 'The men who become managers and foremen are selected not because of their ability as craftsmen, but because they are good slave drivers and useful producers of profit for their employers' (1914: 488). In medieval Britain,

becoming a master or grandmaster had its basis in building expertise and skill, yet, becoming a contractor or subcontractor in intense capitalism required business acumen and entrepreneurial skill (see chapter 4). Methods of success had altered.

By the early 20th century, the power and logic of the market partly replaced medieval notions of quality, honour and duty. Price (1980) argues that the impersonal economic ties of employee and employer on large building sites succeeded the personal and indentured ties of master, journeyman and apprentice. The changes in power relationships between subordinates and superiors facilitated tensions over work control, which were eventually institutionalised into the building unions. However, contemporary subcontractor-employee relations continue to be based on personal ties (see chapter 4), and the question remains as to who the new, early 20th century, proletarian builders working on large building sites were? Guild training restricted numbers of apprentices such that the new mass of building workers could not have emerged through the guild system. Were they a new kind of builder unrelated to the guild system, perhaps new migrants or the labourers, sawyers, brick makers, tile makers, stone polishers and plaster mixers whom had been superseded by machinery? Tressell notes the conflict between apprenticed housepainters and the informally trained 'brush hands' whom were undercutting wage levels, and Swanson (1988) argues that late medieval guilds were not as monopolistic and rigid as traditionally imagined. Groups such as plasterers and tillers tended to encroach on one another's spheres of work, and, informal roots into learning building skills existed, just as they do today (see chapter 5). Furthermore, in the *Builders Weekly Reporter* of 1877 it was said to the striking builders that: 'between 400 and 500 men are now on their way to this country (from Italy and the USA)' (Price, 1980: 138). Many of the newly unionised builders of the late 19th century might not have been guildsmen at all, especially given that the majority of the original successful general contractors set up business in Lambeth and East London (Satoh, 1995) where guilds' power was negligible. This facilitated informal employment practices and would have by-passed guild regulation (see also Booth, 1895).

Although trade unionism had its genesis in the building trades, trade unionism and strikes by builders as a proportion of the total proletariat has historically been relatively low. Austrin (1980) points out that a closed shop has never operated in the building industry, and, he argues that small firms (which are, and have been, the

majority of building employers, see below) never paid much attention to the centralised bargaining machinery of the unions, employing casual labour and renegotiating wage contracts at the start of each job. Furthermore, most building trades were not impoverished by new industrial technology, in fact, masters profited from the building boom associated with industrialisation. It was this that prompted Engels to argue that builders: ‘form an aristocracy among the working-class; they have succeeded in enforcing for themselves a relatively comfortable position, and they accept it as final’ ([1892] 1969: 31).

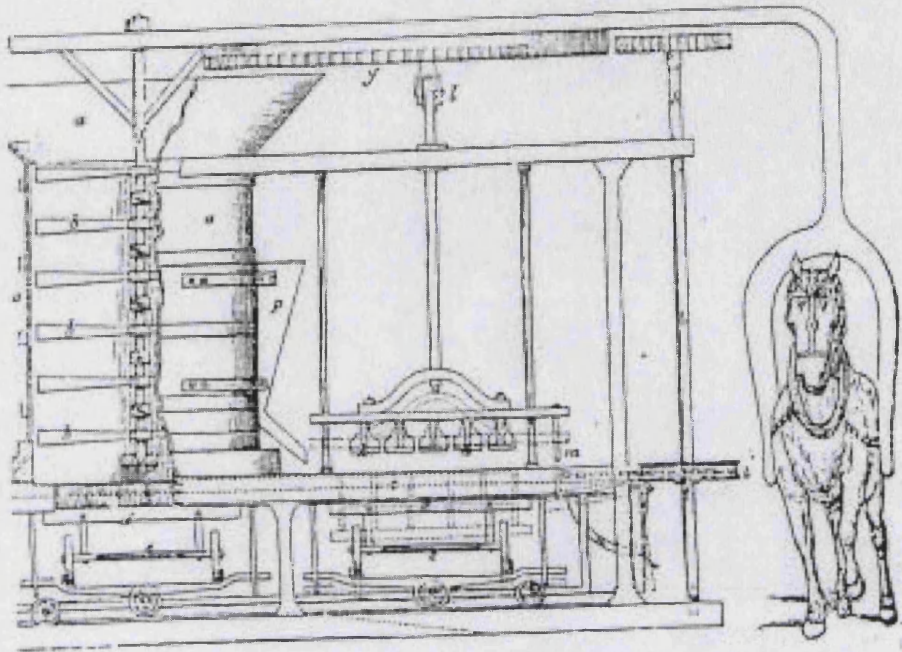
Industrialisation, Prefabrication and New Technology

As regards machinery little need be said, for the building trade is not an industry that is being revolutionised by the introduction of mechanical appliances, nor is it likely that this will ever be the case. (Booth, 1895: 134)

Although industrialisation led to intensified mechanisation of the production of building materials, mechanisation began long before the advent of the steam engine. Water powered machinery was designed and put to work making bricks, sawing wood and cutting and polishing stone early in the 18th century. Previous to this, horses were used as the motor for machinery, and the ancient Greeks used human powered treadmills to drive cranes and pulley systems. However, the steam engine increased the efficiency of the production of pre-fashioned materials, and, by 1810, steam-powered saw mills and joinery machines were in common usage (Sato, 1995). In the 1860s, portable steam engines were employed on construction sites to move earth, pull heavy objects and pump water. It is no coincidence that early steam earthmovers were called ‘steam navvies’ in North America where human labour was scarce (Coleman, 1965).

Machines reduced the number of ‘bodies’ required to do what had previously been very labour intensive work using wooden cranes, buckets, horses and people. Conversely, the development and application of new technologies also created new-work roles such as the electrician and machine operator, and massively expanded the numbers of trades such as plumbers. The invention of Portland cement in 1824 radically transformed building processes, speeding efficiency, and, whilst this reduced the numbers of bricklayers and mixers, with it came new trades and new experts in the form of concrete workers and engineers.

Fig. 1.0: Brickmaking Machine, 1825.



(Lyne and Stinford, 1825. From Satoh, 1995: 163)

Moving the preparation of materials from the hands of craftsmen, to the control, efficiency and predictability of machines, substantially altered building work organisation. Evidence from North America illustrates that one third of new residential house building is prefabricated (Bosch and Philips, 2003). In 21st Century London, even the small quantities of cement required to lay bricks were delivered to most building sites ready mixed and packaged. This freed the bricklayer's labourer from the task of 'mixing up', and ironed out human inconsistency from the mix. Yet, despite the changes outlined above, actual building work, in Britain at least, bears striking continuities with the past. The bricklayer still spreads cement to the surface of a course of bricks with a trowel and places every brick by hand; the ancient Egyptian plasterer performed almost identical tasks with similar tools to the contemporary plasterer (Postgate, 1923); and the tools, materials and work processes used by colonial and 1970s carpenters were very similar (Reckman, 1979). Since the 1960s, many handicraft tasks have been mechanised by the invention of electric hand tools, but this, along with innovations in the design of building materials, sped up building processes, but, did not alter the fundamental tasks required to build something.

Pre-fabrication facilitated increased control of some kinds of building work, primarily through the application of piecework ('price-work'). On large building developments, 'new-build' constructions (making a new building from scratch) can be organisationally divided into smaller standardised sections. The building of each section mirrors the next, and because of this, the work can be rationally organised and accounted for. Trade-specific work to each section is estimated at a standard cost by quantity surveyors, and the tradesman paid a set price for their work. 'Price-work' represents an ultimate form of work-rate control, enslaving the body through economic mechanisms where money mediates between worker and his work (c.f. Simmel, 1896). Price-work cannot however control minds; the builder remains outside of possible observation because of the sequential and emergent nature of building processes (see chapter 6). Furthermore, 'new work' accounts for less than fifty percent of total building work (DTI, 2001), and a large proportion of new work is specialist, 'one-off' work, which for the most part cannot be sub-divided and standardised (Bresnan, 1990).

Contemporary Construction

The size and type of contemporary building companies vary substantially. In the third quarter of 2000, 95.9 percent of all registered building firms employed only between 1 and 13 people, and, just 0.5 percent employed over 80 (calculated from DTI, 2001). In this sense, large building firms look to be the exception rather than the norm. However, the statistics hide the reality of what Harvey (2001) terms 'false self-employment', meaning that builders are the only self-employed group in Britain to have tax deducted by their employer. Thus, the companies reported to employ over 80 people actually subcontract most of their manual workers who do not appear in the companies' employment statistics. The 80-strong workforce represented by the statistics are predominately office staff, managers, general foremen and quantity surveyors, not tradesmen and labourers.

Harvey (2003) puts the numbers of self-employed builders in 1995 at over 60 percent of the total construction workforce. This accounts for 70.5 percent of all manual building workers. However, Moralee (1998) indicates that the 1995 Survey of Personal Incomes showed 240,000 more self-employed builders than the Labour Force Survey. The statistics are therefore quite misleading, and further obscured by

the substantial amount of building work that resides in the informal economy (see Pahl, 1984, and chapter 10). In my own anecdotal experience, working for large contractor companies is the norm, although this is frequently mixed with private client work, speculation, and subcontracting (see chapter 2). Technically however, builders own their own businesses and employ themselves. Because of this, contractors or subcontractors have no formal responsibility to their workers. Contemporary British builders are almost completely 'casualised' (paid by the day or by the job); they receive no sick or holiday pay, and have no rights to company pensions or liability schemes (with the exception of surveyors and site management who are directly employed). The lack of formal working rights and the problems associated with this are exacerbated by (and perhaps a function of) building work being highly seasonal and closely tied to economic fluctuations. The carpentry and general foreman at my research site, Jamin, vividly expressed the problems of casualisation:

Apart from in that office you look at everyone else yeah... all the labourers, my chippies, what security have they got? What security have they fuckin' got? When you were working here as a labourer, what security did you have? They could have told you at three o'clock, 'you're down the road mate' [laid-off]. And while you were working here, what if you broke your foot and you was at home for three weeks, whose gonna pay you? Nobody's gonna pay, no fucker's gonna pay. They don't give you any notice [of leave], there's no security, no pension, no holiday, no fuck-all. Why is that? Why when everybody else gets it... I suppose this is with other industries as well, but the wages go up and down. I mean it's not to bad at the moment, but I tell you what it's not looking good for the future, wages will go back down.

The uncertainty of building work is perennial, stretching deep into history. Woodwood (1995) states in his analysis of medieval tradesmen that their working lives were: 'casual and intermittent... it was an uncertain world in which weeks or months of regular employment could be followed by a bout of prolonged idleness' (1995: 116). Tressell presents a similar picture of the early 20th century builder: 'It was over a month now since he had finished up for his last employer. It had been a very slow summer altogether. Sometimes a fortnight for one firm, then perhaps a week doing nothing; then three weeks or a month for another firm, then out again and so on' (1914: 35). Bosch and Philips aptly sum up the relationship between building and economic cycles: 'In most cases, when the economy gets a cold, construction gets the flu' (2003: 5). Economic cycles have an impact upon casualised builders directly and detrimentally, partly because buildings cannot be made to be stored, and consequently, when demand is low, buildings are not made, and builders find themselves out of work.

Adhocracies

Building projects represent a very uncertain product environment, particularly in repair and renovation 'old work'. Building project management will be explored in detail in chapter 3, but it should be noted that large contractor companies must necessarily localise their management. Bresnan's (1990) analysis of building project management utilises the term 'adhocracy' (from Mintzberg) to describe how management power is parcelled out to small semi-autonomous localised units because of the impossibility of standardised control from a distance. Bresnan describes how higher management cannot dictate or standardise most construction jobs because they tend to be large one-off projects characterised by uncertainty, complexity and the interdependence of many agencies.

Related to complexity and interdependence, building work is characterised by 'sequentialism'. For example, a carpenter must build a roof frame before a roofer lays the tiles on top. Each trade builds on the previous trade so that, for instance, carpenters are not required at the site whilst the bricklayers erect the walls. Sequential building methods increase complexity, and make organisation problematic through producing knock-on effects between the separate trades. If, for instance, a concrete pour is held up by inclement weather for two weeks, the steel erectors will not be able to do their job at the time originally specified. They may then go onto another job and not return to erect the steel for six weeks. This could form a knock-on effect to all the following trades *ad infinitum*. Illustrative of this are Graves *et al* (2000) case studies of civil engineering firms which reveal that small problems in the build process that tend to go unnoticed, accumulate to produce amplified knock-on effects that create big problems.

Mobilities

New technologies and organisational methods have not contained the builder's skill and working-life because the nature of building work lies on the fringes of society. Builders own their means of production, their tools, and related to this, they are geographically mobile. They must necessarily be mobile, and essentially they are able to live in any geographic area because they will always have to travel to different workplaces. Furthermore, the building worker population, in London at least, is culturally and racially heterogeneous (see chapter 4). Ephemeralism and cultural

heterogeneity have an impact upon social relations between builders, and facilitate particular forms of interaction and cultures that will be discussed in detail throughout the thesis.

Builders are only required on a building site for short periods of the project, and employment practices are thus casual, and construction working life ephemeral. Builders move frequently from one work site and employer to another in pursuit of work. Harvey (2003) cites evidence from the *Disparities* survey showing that on average, a self-employed builder works for a single firm for only 1.2 years. Booth (1895) made a similar observation over 100 years previous.

Sequentialism, ephemeralism, casualisation, and its flip-side, autonomy, can be viewed as antecedent to building work organisation, and thus to builders' working lives. Buildings perform the functions they have always performed - the regulation of nature. Thus the antecedents of building work organisation have remained unchanged for millennia. In this sense, contemporary builders' work-lives may be termed 'pre-industrial' or 'non-modern'. Such a terminology can only be analytical shorthand because old forms in a new world become new forms through their interaction with that world. However, the work lives of builders appear quite analogous to their historical forebears.

20th Century Nation Building

Despite relatively insignificant changes in actual building work, there were shifts in building work organisation throughout the 20th century. This occurred in particular in the organisation of State-commissioned building work, and the State was, and is, the largest employer of building work. The focus of my following case study itself was a State-commissioned building project.

The State promoted the development of general contracting following the Napoleonic wars. Yet it was also the State that began to notice the problems of private general contracting, and at the close of the 19th century concerns were raised at the poor quality of private contractors' work for the state. Competitive tendering for government contracts was beginning to be seen as non-competitive, and the intellectual wing of the direct labour unions, The Direct Labour Collective, stated that: 'the [general contracting] tender system was a farce, and on many occasions municipalities received identical tenders – clearly fixed by agreement – from a

number of different [contracting] firms' (1978: 10). The perennial problem of corruption in the building industry (see chapter 9) inspired the newly-formed late 19th century local governments to set up their own direct labour organisations (DLOs). The London County Council was the first to employ direct labour in 1892, which was a radical idea for the times. John Burns, an early advocate of Fabianism, said of it: 'The new department has completely revolutionised the old corrupt order of things' (in Langford, 1982: 2).

DLOs worked mostly on 'old work' (the repair, maintenance and refurbishment of pre-existing structures), which was less appealing to private contractors because of its complexity and smaller profit margins. DLOs did however, undertake some new builds. Battersea Power Station remains a testament to their skill, as do the 'homes fit for heroes' constructed (particularly in the north of England) following the First World War. DLOs constructed public housing new-builds at a significantly smaller cost and to a higher standard than private contractors (Direct Labour Collective, 1978; Langford, 1982). As a result, and in association with the growing numbers of physical structures of the welfare state, the numbers of direct labour workers increased steadily throughout the 1940s, 50s and 60s. DLOs worked to maintain and refurbish the mass of public owned houses, hospitals and schools that were part of the post war reconstruction. They reached a peak of 200,000 workers in 1967, representing 15 percent of the total construction workforce, and, the 1960s saw, for the first time, stable, non-casual employment for State-builders. However, this was not to last. The creeping intensity of globalisation, resultant industrial restructuring, and ensuing industrial unrest, signalled changes for the organisation of State-commissioned building.

Since their inception, and in periods of economic slow down, DLOs came under attack from private contractors and Tory politicians. Contractors wanted to undertake less profitable State-commissioned work in economic slow-downs because private building ground to a halt at these times. Further, during periods of economic boom, the DLOs lost skilled workers to private contractors through workers chasing the larger wages that private companies could offer. By the late 1950s, intense marketisation began to infiltrate DLO organisations, and the Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, passed a bill stipulating they competitively bid for every third contract. By the 1970s, DLOs were to bid for all contracts, and the instabilities of the market

began to reduce their numbers. In addition, union control in the building industry was declining by the early 1970s, crumbling under the pressure of higher wage-packets paid by non-unionised private contractors (Austrin, 1980). However, those employed direct by the State, of whom 85 percent were unionised (Langford, 1982), clung onto their jobs until new market-led government policies began to take hold.

Marketisation

In 1979 Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party were elected to Parliament. It was a period of global economic slow-down following the 1973 oil crisis, and the British manufacturing industry was crumbling irrevocably. The Conservatives felt that Britain was 'diseased' by strikes and low productivity, and that under the Labour government of 1977-9, the Treasury had fallen into unsustainable debt. The world was changing and the Conservatives came to government promising radical economic and political solutions.

Thatcher attempted to untangle the powers of local government and remedy the flagging economy by selling off what were defined as burdensome nationalised industries. British Leyland, British Steel, British Gas and local authority housing were sold, and instant cash raised for the Treasury (Feigenbaum *et al*, 1999). Thatcher smashed much of the power that labour unions and local governments held over industry and the State, and she laid the foundations for a more privatised and individualised society based on owner occupation and consumption. She began the implementation of a new market driven governance of Britain (Rhodes, 1997), and one which had a direct effect on State-commissioned building.

By 1981, Thatcher abandoned deflationary monetarism because it became associated with growing unemployment and high public sector borrowing. The Conservatives were under electoral pressure to look toward more radical solutions to the country's economic problems. Mass privatisation of State assets would, in the short-term at least, obviate the need for such high borrowing. The Conservatives formulated an underlying neo-liberal ideology based upon the ideas of Friedman and others before him, the touchstone of which were the concepts of individual responsibility and market solutions. They aimed to free the economy of burdensome taxes and the tangling web of state intervention so that Adam Smith's 'invisible hand' could reign free to guide economic organisation and wealth distribution. The nation

would be organised through self-help, the market, and enterprising private companies encouraged to step into the shoes of the archaic, over bureaucratized, welfare systems.

By the late 1980s the Conservatives had sold off almost all the remaining national industries such as gas, telecommunications and electricity, and their relatively affluent electoral base were able to buy shares in these industries and become more affluent (Hutton, 1996). It was argued that private companies would be characterised by high efficiency, less bureaucracy and better standards of service delivery. Yet, despite increased centralisation, the conservatives inadvertently began to cede power to non-state and quasi-state bodies. Rhodes (1997) argues that political power became embedded in a number of institutions resulting in a bureaucratic 'policy mess' which fragmented State power. Centralisation, Rhodes argues, represented the centralisation of finance but not control.

By the early 1990s, the Conservatives continued their unflinching commitment to the ideologies of individualism, privatisation and competition, and, in 1992, the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) was introduced. Services in State departments would be 'contracted-out' to private bidders, and quasi-markets were introduced into the running of public services including schools and the NHS. In the NHS for instance, competitive tendering was introduced for 'hotel' services such as cleaning and catering, as was the construction and maintenance of hospital buildings (Drakeford, 2000). Private competition, the Conservatives argued, would guard against corruption and procrastination, lead to cost effective service delivery, and remove the financial risks of projects and contracts from the public purse. Citizens, the users of the services, were to be transformed into 'customers' participating in a welfare 'market'.

Through the PFI, private building contractors once again moved into public service works *via* the competitive tender, and directly employed builders were made redundant. Conservative rhetoric vehemently argued that the competitive system would be more cost effective than direct labour systems, despite the original reasons for initiating DLOs i.e. that contractors were corrupt and undertook work to a poor standard.

Altered Ideology?

After 18 years of Conservative rule, Tony Blair and New Labour were elected to government in 1997. They inherited the dismantled and marketised welfare state, and

adopted a 'new' ideology towards governance. Influenced by developments in centre-left politics in Australia and North America, and the writings of Giddens (1994), they rejected 'old' Labour's traditional Keynesian philosophies and adopted what was called a Third Way towards governance. In one sense, New Labour had little choice but to adopt such a tactic as State power had been markedly reduced since their last term of office in the 1970s. Intensive globalisation 'hollowed out' states and 'policy networks' dragged central state power out further and further into the social body (Rhodes, 1997).

New Labour promised modernisation, high standards of service delivery, and promoted active citizenship, or what might be termed 'self-governance' (see Rose, [1989] 1999). Citizens would remain consumers, and market mechanisms, with their associated techno-bureaucracy, accountants, managers and performance tables, would continue to guide the administration of public services. Thatcher's PFI was left intact, and the administration of schools, hospitals, prisons, and public transport was put out for competitive tender. The State retained ownership of many schools, prisons and hospitals, but private companies would build, administer and maintain them under long(ish) term contracts. Some PFI projects, such as 'hotel services' in the NHS, were discontinued by New Labour, but, the construction and maintenance of buildings by private companies was continued, and the PFI was retained for State-commissioned building.

Building Conflict

Since the establishment of general contractors and building professionals (managers, architects, engineers, surveyors and consultants), building work has historically been plagued by conflicts of interests which have serious ramifications for building owners and users. The complexity and emergent nature of building knowledge, and fierce competition between contractors, result in a situation where contractors and subcontractors frequently undercut one another to such an extent that works are commonly undertaken at zero profit. Even when works run at a profit it is usual to cost-in only 1 to 2 percent profit margins on most construction jobs (Bresnan, 1990). Such low margins are exceptionally risky because of the unforeseen problems that inevitably occur during the course of a build. For example, a contractor may not predict how much plaster will fall from a wall when the lining paper is removed. To rectify the problem the contractor would have to call in a plastering subcontractor to

repair the damage with the resultant unforeseen costs incurred. Construction is also a risky and uncertain business in which many builds over-run specified completion dates, and numerous contractors go bankrupt every year. In 2002 for example, almost 1500 registered building companies were declared insolvent in England (*Contract Journal*, 08/01/2003). This represented 2.5 percent of all registered building firms.

Paying subcontractors to do extra works that were not originally estimated, seriously undermines contractors' small profit margins. To counteract this, contractors necessarily have to claw back profits on other parts of the work. One traditional way of doing this has been to skimp on materials because structural deficiencies can be easily hidden under finishing plasters and paints, and, another method is to over-charge on other sections of the work (see Foster, 1969, and below)

It is not only unforeseen problems that contractors must negotiate. Clients commonly lack knowledge about building processes, and often change their minds about what they want during the course of the build (see Higgin and Jessop, 1965). Part of this problem is the vague specifications contained in original tender outlines. Detailed specifications cost money, and potential clients tend to develop these with contractors after the contract has been won, rather than outlining them in full detail beforehand (Bresnan, 1990). Building structures also diverge from their original two-dimensional drawings and plans, particularly because of the sequential nature of building work and the resultant ripple effects. Also, architects are not trained or skilled to cost-in or control for mechanical and electrical services, these are designed by service engineers.

Since the mid-19th century, architects have been employed to deal with building specifications, but they are not involved in all constructions. There was no architect involvement at my research site for example, because the architecture was already constructed. Also, in the past 20 years, Design and Build contracts have emerged, where contractor and client work together to draw up building plans without involving an architect (see chapter 3).

Market Problems

In his report to the government and the construction industry in 1994, Sir John Latham identified the State as the biggest client of the building industry, but, due to its supposed decentralisation under Thatcher, it became fragmented into over 90 separate government procurement bodies. To counteract this, he advocated

employment of experienced consultants and more standardised contracts (echoing the advice of Higgin and Jessop 29 years earlier). He also suggested that competitive tender was a fragile way to build the nation's infrastructure because the resultant under-cutting led to low quality buildings (echoing the advice of the advocates of direct labour, 100 years earlier). Latham proposed a form of team-working where all the parties involved in a build would benefit in the long-term. This would be manufactured by the use of 'partnering agreements' which had been successfully utilised in the Japanese automobile industry (Bennett, 2000).

Partnering agreements were perhaps the anti thesis of marketised State-commissioned building. The implicit long-termism and associated anti-competitiveness of in-house building arrangements that the Conservatives had worked so hard to dissolve, were re-introduced under the Conservatives albeit in a slightly different incarnation as the partnering system. This may seem paradoxical, but as Feigenbaum *et al* (1999) argue, one of the results of free-market government philosophy was mass state regulation. Furthermore, as Rhodes' (1997) argues, the centralisation of British governance was never particularly centralising because policy networks usurped control over public services and became powerful actors in the governance of the nation. Partnering was however championed as a more cost effective, reliable, higher quality method to construct buildings.

Competitive tendering was based upon driving down prices through market competition. However, competition implies adversaries, and, in 1997, Sir John Egan was appointed by the New Labour government to take another look at the building industry. He argued that an adversarial culture was deeply embedded and resulted in a mass of litigation disputes that were both expensive and restrictive. Egan (1998) also found the British building industry to be characterised by over-running completion dates and inflated costs. In short, it was inefficient and unproductive. He followed Latham and advocated the proposals of Bennett and Jayes (1995 and 1998), whose research suggested that Japanese-style management systems should be applied to the British construction industry.

During the 1980's, Japan's economy flourished, leaving its North American and European counterparts behind. Academics, industrialists and managers consequently looked toward Japanese management practices, and masses of these practices were implemented in Western businesses, particularly in the manufacturing

industry in the form of quality circles and total quality management (See White and Trevor, 1983; Hill, 1991; Graham, 1995). Bennett and Jayes argued that Japanese success was the product of long-term relationships between contractors, clients, subcontractors and suppliers. Because relationships were long-term, the separate parties saw and sustained a reciprocal type of 'win-win' situation. They ceased to compete, and came to trust and co-operate in the interests of shared long-term goals.

One construction project will commonly run into another project, or the existing client may have future constructions planned. Bennett and Jayes (1995 and 1998) argued that with long-term relationships, productivity and profitability could be enhanced by up to 30 percent if it were coupled with co-operation and openness (see Bennett, 2000)³. The various building parties would come together to discuss how the job was to be organised within a free forum for discussion and a continual concern for quality, improvement, and the resultant 'lean production'. An open book would exist between the parties whereby clients could view the breakdown of the works and subcontractor costs. Importantly, the teams would be ready to solve the inevitable problems thrown up during complex constructions and not blame each other for mistakes, thereby reducing litigation disputes. A 'blame culture' was seen as unnecessary because both clients and contractors were interdependent and held the mutual objective of completing the construction and profiting from it.

In a partnering agreement the teams would have a shared interest in works and relationships in the long-term. Contractors would be more open, and build better in order to secure follow-on work, and, clients would work with rather than against contractors to ensure that structures were built to the required specifications. On completion of the project(s) the parties would agree to share costs or profits that were above or below the original tender price. If the parties trusted each other they would all be winners in the long term (c.f. Axelrod, 1984).

It was these historical foundations that I stepped into in my fieldwork case study of a NHS building project organised under the auspices of a partnering agreement. The general details of building work organisation and their relationships with the cultures and actions of builders will be illuminated throughout the following thesis, but firstly,

³ Barlow *et al* (1997) describe, from a series of case studies, that partnering did increase profit margins but only by 3-12 percent. They also point out that this may have been due to new technologies and not because of partnering at all.

I turn to the practical and methodological problems encountered during my fieldwork at the 'Keyworker House' build.

Chapter 2

Research in Construction

In this chapter I present the biography of my research project. I outline why I researched the building industry, how I gained access to the research site, and the problems encountered throughout the fieldwork. I then present the underlying theoretical and methodological assumptions that guided my research.

The Beginnings

In 1995, after graduating from university, I found myself making a living from a mixture of state benefits and occasional casual work. After a number of months, I began to think I should apply for a job. I applied for many but had no success. Lusting for a more substantial income, I decided to try to get a building job. I had sporadically done building work since I was a teenager, and it was a familiar world to me, so, I purchased the London *Evening Standard* newspaper every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday to look for one of the building jobs that it advertised. In what seemed to be endless mornings of telephone calls to builders and building agencies, I eventually began work as a labourer.

During my career as bricklayers' labourer and a concrete-repair man, I soon realised painters had what seemed a much better work deal than labourers; they earned more money for less sweat. I had done some painting work when I was younger, so I bought the necessary tools and uniform and went about 'chancing' my arm as a tradesman. To begin with, I worked mostly for the various building agencies that supply ephemeral labour to contractors and subcontractors who cannot find labour *via* other sources, and, I was sacked only once for my lack of skill. I ventured into some other exploits, but painting and decorating became my most reliable source of income; my 'bread and butter'.

After a few years, I became skilled at my job, and it paid for much of my Masters degree. Throughout these years I, like many other British builders, worked on building sites abroad, including 3 months in Israel and a few days in France, and, similar to almost all tradesmen, I worked for small building companies, large multinational contractors, on small projects, and massive projects, in private construction, and for the State. I worked for myself undertaking private- work, and on

one occasion as a subcontractor. I did 'old work' and 'new work', and found myself in work and out of work. Sometimes I earned a good income, and other times only a small one. The longest I stayed with a single company was 9 months, and I worked all over London. The informal nature of the building industry suited my life-style. I could study, go out in the evenings, and still earn just enough money to live on. When I completed my Masters degree, I once again found my academic qualifications in small demand. Unable to get a job out of the building industry, I decided to apply to do a PhD.

While studying criminology I became interested in the close relationship between being male and ending up in prison, so, I arranged to meet Paul Rock at the London School of Economics, to discuss a way of researching this, and he suggested I turn my gaze onto my current work world. The building industry was an area that I had an insider's knowledge of, could get ready access to, where I could earn money to pay for a PhD, and, was little researched. I had thought about this in the past but could see little of interest upon which to base a thesis. I decided however to keep my eyes open, to try to write something about my work, and think about it some more. After breaking through my own taken-for-granted assumptions, I began to find and focus upon workplace conflict, deviation, and the informal economy. Poignantly, my own tactics of normalisation were so mystifying that during the initial phases of observation, I would, whilst riding home on the tube and taking notes about the working day, sometimes report I had seen or heard nothing notable that day. But I also discovered when I arrived home that I had myself stolen a bunch of building materials and hidden them in my bag during the day. I was doing this as a supposed criminological observer, without noticing its salience at all.

I was accepted onto a PhD course and began to read all sorts of literature, some relating to the building trade, some not. However, I had become concerned with how criminology seemed to stigmatise and construct the subject of its analysis. Crime appeared integral to everyday social life, and studying it divorced from that life seemed myopic. I decided I would look at builders' lives in as much of a totality as I could, and to this end, I would return to the field with a broad gaze, adopt the role of an overt researcher, and wait to see 'what came up' via the conventions of inductive methodology and grounded theory. I began to try to gain access to a research site.

Ethnography

Getting In

In my previous work in the building industry I had never been a star employee. I was often late, malingering, and rather resistant to bosses' demands. I had been sacked or walked away from a number of jobs. Furthermore, on these jobs I always kept it to myself that I was a graduate and later a post-graduate, and consequently there was not a suitable building company that I worked for in the past where I could return to conduct my research. Fortunately, Janet Foster put me in contact with an architect who worked at the university, and it was thanks to her that I obtained the telephone number of a 'client's contracts director', 'Mr Singh', at a large multinational building company 'Global Construction Limited'.

Mr Singh was nearing the top of the hierarchical pyramid at Global Construction. After I had spoken to him I was passed from department to department within Global Construction for the next 6 weeks, where each office would tell me to talk to someone in the next office. It felt as though I was stuck in a hybrid version of Escher's impossible staircase and a Kafkaesque bureaucracy, continually going nowhere and constantly being addressed as Daniel. Eventually Mr Singh informed me that he had tried to provide me with a work placement, but 'regrettably it's not that kind of company'. I never asked him what he meant by this, but he did give me the telephone number of a 'projects director' at 'Topbuild Plc', who were at that time contracting their services to Global Construction. I telephoned a projects director at Topbuild who gave me the telephone number of Mr Drear, the contracts manager on some of Topbuild's construction jobs.

Mr Drear was very cordial. Apparently in his mind I was a friend of an important business contact, Mr Singh. It was agreed that I meet Mr Drear at a building site office the following week. After nervously circling the building three times chain-smoking cigarettes, I eventually went in to meet him. We had a very informal meeting in which I explained that I would like to begin my research by working as a labourer so I could move around the building site and get a general impression of what was going on. He explained a little about the project and company structure, half offered me a position at Topbuild to be trained as a site manager, and told me to come to the site the following Monday with safety boots and without a shirt and tie. I would be paid half a labourer's wages, was informed 'not to hold up production', and that my

position would be reviewed in time. With a handshake I left the site office wondering what on earth I was getting myself into. I never saw Mr Drear again.

Getting on

Working as a labourer was a tactic of getting into Topbuild, and a way just to 'be around', get to know people, gain some acceptance and familiarise myself with the nature of the building project. The project was what is known in the building industry as 'old work' i.e. the repair and refurbishment of pre-existing structures.

Topbuild were to carry out the refurbishment and renovation of 3 large buildings of varying sizes in central London. The structures in this case will be termed 'Keyworker House' 1, 2 and 3. Fully functional, they housed 776 National Health Service (NHS) workers, mostly nurses, and a small number of government services including a crèche, a counselling service, a library, and a leisure facility (gym, swimming pool, squash courts, bar and night-club). In addition, Keyworker House 2 housed a collection of hospital kitchens and a chemotherapy unit. The 776 keyworkers each resided in his or her own room or, less commonly, a flat, and shared a number of kitchens, communal areas, bath and shower rooms. During the refurbishment, all the key workers and staff of the government services were to remain in and using the building, and this created many organisational problems for the contractor (see chapter 3).

For the sake of clarity, 'Keyworker House' is used as an umbrella term to cover all three of the buildings that were renovated by Topbuild. Although the buildings were situated in different areas of London, and of different sizes, the process of the build was much the same for all. Furthermore, I shall present the main characters at Keyworker House as if they were continually involved in the build whereas in actuality most were not. New workers arrived, older workers left, some workers left and then returned. It was only a small number of the site management and foremen that worked on the build for the full duration of the field research. Additionally, there were shifts in the site management hierarchy with dismissals, promotions and demotions, but for clarity I have fixed their job titles unless stated otherwise.

The building contract was part of a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) whereby a housing association had obtained the running, rents and maintenance of the buildings from a NHS Trust. 'Opportune Housing' was to refurbish and administrate the

dwellings for the next 30 years, at which time their contract would be reviewed. Opportune Housing employed a building consultancy, 'Assured Consultants', to act as representatives and over-seers of the work. Assured Consultants were the primary party who would on a day-to-day basis deal with the building contractor, Topbuild.

I began my participant observation by working as a labourer for a period of 3 months, 5 days a week. During this time I attracted only small attention as a 'researcher', but there were occasional jokes when people saw me taking a notepad out of my pocket and scribbling things down. I was told by more than one of the builders that, 'this isn't a proper building site this is a holiday camp. They're gonna change the sign at the front to 'Butlin's' next week' (see chapter 6). Otherwise I was just another bloke on a building site; a student who had little money and needed a few extra pounds.

I guess I blended into the daily goings-on because, after a few weeks, most of the builders ceased to ask me why I was working there (c.f. Becker, 1970), and I was treated and ordered around as labourers are. I also felt as though I 'fitted in' to some extent because I felt psychically comfortable with the other labourers, joining in with their banter and joking around. I experienced little 'cultural shock' upon entering the field because I had worked in this type of environment many times before. However, I was ascribed the quite overwhelming master status of 'student', and people interacted with me accordingly. Students were seen as young, over-sexed, middle-class, lazy, bohemian people, with little 'common sense'. Despite my attempts to show that I unfortunately bore little relation to these categories, it was difficult to break with the label during the initial phases of the fieldwork. Nobody really knew what a PhD was; it was seen as the title of something a student does, and, at the time, I really didn't have much conception of what it was either. I was the youngest labourer amongst mostly seasoned old Irish men, and, reflecting the statuses of age and of labourer in the building industry (see chapter 6), I was treated as 'the boy', the very bottom of the pecking order and told what to do by almost everybody. I was essentially powerless to do anything about being the young student at the bottom of the hierarchy. I did not want to conflict with or upset people, and I really wanted to get on and become an unthreatening part of the day-to-day scenery. My powerlessness however, struck me a source of insight because it illustrated to some extent why people will accept ill-treatment in the workplace. It was clear that they have little choice but to accept it.

I came largely to conform to the role bestowed upon me. Being a 'student' in the builders' thinking meant that I was much younger and naïve than perhaps I was. I did find this frustrating because I had served my time as 'a boy' on building sites, and considered myself a good tradesman, albeit in one of the lowest status trades. The majority of the builders never believed that I was a decorator until I actually did some decorating work at the very end of the research period, approximately 9 months later. Such is the power of categorisation.

For the next few months I drifted through the fieldwork rather like a somnambulist, just doing the work in hand, trying to be as friendly as I could, and tucking myself away in corners and toilets to take notes. I also went out on numerous Friday night 'drink-ups' with the site management and labourers, where I got very drunk and occasionally said some very stupid things, after which many sleepless nights ensued. Although I never asked, I received three pay rises over the first three months. I was not employed directly by Topbuild, because in common with other contracting companies, they were a management company that did not immediately employ actual labour. I was employed by the labouring subcontractor, Paddy McMurray, who never asked for my tax details, or Construction Industry Scheme (CIS) card, and paid me in crisp 50 pound notes every week. Legally, everyone employed on a building site in England must hold a CIS card. It contains a photograph of the holder, and his or her National Insurance number. It is a regulatory measure to prevent illegal workers and tax evasion, but is quite ineffective (see chapters 9 and 10). Everyone was in disbelief when they discovered I was not getting paid in full for my labour. No one could ever really understand why I was doing it.

Whilst my role as student attracted some attention in the form of generalised jokes and 'piss-taking', the role of researcher initially aroused very little interest. However, 10 weeks into the fieldwork I began to ask if I could interview people after work. All of a sudden I was the subject of a barrage of accusations that I was from the tax office, the Child Support Agency, a time and motion man, a spy from the client group, or higher management, and/or an agent of rival subcontractors. Most of the comments were said in jocular tone but a certain amount of suspicion must have fuelled them. I was after all, an outsider in a very real sense because I was one of the few workers who had not entered the site through networked relations (see chapters 4 and 5). I therefore, had to earn trust rather than be ascribed it. Despite this, as time went on, some of the builders agreed to be interviewed; some just liked to talk and

others felt they were helping me on my way through life. It was however, often difficult to actually pin people down for the interviews. Many of the men had never been interviewed before, and the term 'interview' appeared to signify a degree of formality that they were quite suspicious of. Consequently I had many cancellations and found myself continually chasing people up.

During the period of labouring I came to realise the extent to which the different trades were segregated from one another. I was only really interacting with other labourers, a few painters, plasterers, and the foremen and site managers directly above me in the organisational hierarchy. Interaction with the carpenters, masons, mechanical and electrical, scaffolders, roofers, management, surveyors and other groups were fleeting: they were people whom I merely said 'alright' to when moving around the site¹. I also had an overwhelming feeling that the site management did not appreciate my being around. I thought this could have been the result of my own paranoia, but as William Burroughs once said, 'a paranoid is someone that knows at least something about what's going on'. This was becoming worrying, and I realised I needed to think about a game plan. Naively, all I had thought about previously was trying to gain 'trust' from the tradesmen and labourers because I did not wish to be seen as a management stooge. In addition, being a labourer right at the bottom of the trade hierarchy, I could see little of how the work was organised as a whole; I had little idea in the larger scheme of things why I was digging holes or pulling roofs down. I eventually asked if it would be possible to spend some time participating in the site office so that I could see what went on in there and how the work as a whole was organised, and, with this request, the project manager's ill-ease towards me softened. I originally said I was not interested in the management of the site, but simply in the 'shop-floor' culture of the tradesmen and labourers. My initial ignorance and lack of recognition of the managers' work had not pleased the hard working project manager. He began his career as a carpenter, and consequently was aware that those working 'on the tools' (i.e. on the shop-floor, but there is no shop and often no floor on building sites) often viewed site management as lazy and unproductive (see chapter 6). He did not want a researcher to draw the same conclusions.

After a week away from the site to rest and recover my thoughts, I began my research in the site office, which altered my status substantially. By being in 'the

¹ 'Alright' and 'alright mate' are common forms of perfunctory greeting on London building sites.

office', the perception of those working on the tools changed, and, I became one of the office. Instantly nobody was telling me what to do, and I often had to search around for tasks in my inactivity and boredom. I remained rather withdrawn from the social world of the office, but I became jokingly known there as 'the office spy'. Yet, as Becker (1970) observed, respondents come to ignore the presence of researchers, and, although my presence was surrounded by some suspicion, the site management soon became caught up in the exigencies of enacting their own social worlds. This was manifest when a senior surveyor, who spent much of his time working in the office, turned to me and said, 'well if you actually are a spy, we're fucked now'.

As it was with the peripheral trade groups out on site, so the many people that came in and out of the office were unaware I was a researcher, most thought I was a trainee site manager, part of the normal scenery. I was however ejected from a site meeting that took place between the site managers and Assured Consultants. The junior surveyor of Assured bellowed at me in a condescending manner that if I was not involved in the decision-making I could not be involved in the meetings. Worried about my continuing position on the project, I bit my tongue, left the room, wrote a letter to the consultants explaining who I was and what I was doing, and never attended another site meeting. I always found it peculiar that I was treated with such suspicion and seen as a possible source of trouble because this only made me more determined to find out what they wanted to hide. There were, not to my surprise, slightly corrupt relationships between the various parties involved in the build, and frequent practices that could be deemed illicit. For my participation in the site office I was again offered wages but I declined, thinking that being paid was putting pressure on me to be doing building work, such is the work ethic built into many of us. Being unpaid relieved my tension considerably, but elicited disbelief amongst the builders, a disbelief transformed into jokes. Despite my telling everyone I received a scholarship for the research, they found it difficult to comprehend why I refused wages when I must have been a poor student who continued to come into work every morning.

As relations with Steve, the project manager, improved, I asked if it would be possible to pay Topbuild for taking the workers out from work an hour early so I could interview them. Steve agreed, and I began to drum up much more interest for interviews through trading an hour off from work in the pub with beers paid for by me. Informal news about the interviews circulated the site. In one of the rumours I was offering 20 pounds for people's time and would reputedly put another 20 on the

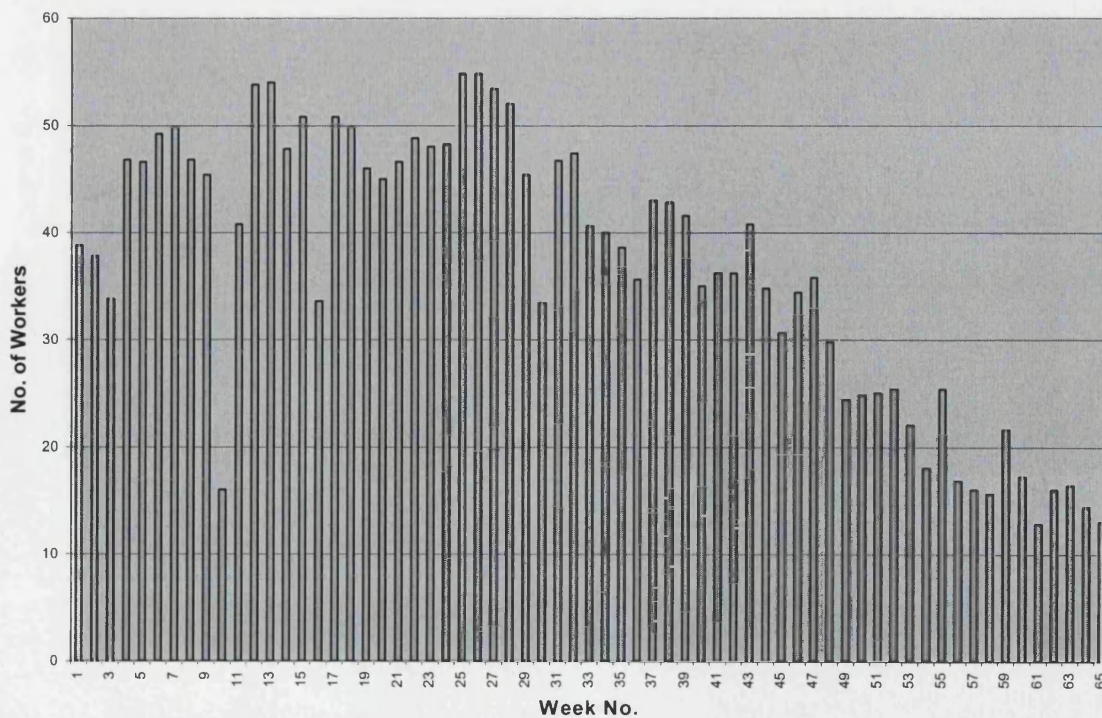
table, saying that the interview would finish when the money was drunk. Despite this, nobody ever allowed me to buy all the drinks in any of the interview sessions, and Topbuild never asked me to pay for the workers' time. Again however, my actions aroused some suspicion. Paddy McMurray, the labour subcontractor, came into the site office one day in rather a panic wondering why I was interviewing 'his blokes'. He had been in touch with Mr Drear, the contracts director, and he said they would want to read anything I wrote about the project. Paddy's reaction was much to the merriment of everybody, and jokes abounded about me being from the Inland Revenue. I had asked Paddy if I could speak with him about his work, but whenever our paths crossed he would move very speedily for a man of his age, rapidly getting out of my way.

It was not only Paddy who was reluctant to speak with me. All the first generation Irish labourers were similarly suspicious. I repeatedly badgered some of them to be interviewed and two eventually agreed, but they were never particularly lucid during the interviews. I got along well with them in work and in the pub, and some enjoyed talking about the 'old days' back in Ireland and their early days in London. Perhaps 'informal' interviews were too formal. Alternatively, their lack of lucidity might have been the result of racial and network differences between us, and a resultant lack of trust. Yet, I never encountered the same problems with the Indian carpenters, nor with any of the Scottish tradesmen. I discuss race and trust throughout the thesis, but Anglo-Irish relations, particularly in the context of the British building industry, have never been particularly rosy, fraught by racism and structural disadvantage.

I spent two months participating in the office. Although I asked to be given a role, I was never offered very much to do, and, on occasion, found it quite difficult to keep awake. This might have been because there was very little work at this point in time as the first phase of the build was drawing to an end. However, I spent my time looking through the many files that instructed and accounted the work. Often I was not interested in the content of the files but was taking notes about the talk and goings on in the office. I asked lots of questions and spent as much time out on the site helping the labourers and 'having the crack' with them and the painters, as I spent in the office. I somehow felt more comfortable with the manual workers than I did with most of the managers, probably due to my past life as a manual worker.

This period was a peculiar time in the life of the build because Christmas was impending, and the first, 'Year 1', phase of the works was almost complete. The impending 'Year 2' was surrounded by confusion and rumour, and the date of commencement kept shifting forward. Most of the tradesmen and labourers were laid-off, and the numbers of people on the site reduced to a bare minimum of approximately 15 workers (see fig. 2.0), predominately managers and foremen. Following Christmas I went back to the office for two weeks, and, decided to return to the site when Year 2 began, when there would be more people and goings-on. For 15 weeks I sporadically went onto the site, interviewing those that were willing to meet after work, and interviewing site management and foremen during the day because they were able to organise their time to do this. During this period, one of the two general foremen said more than once: 'It's funny, you come in and out the site and nobody takes any notice anymore. Might not see you all week and then you come in one morning and it's just like, 'oh Darren's here'. It's just normal for you to be here now'. It appeared that after almost 6 months I eventually became a normal part of the day-to-day scenery.

Fig. 2.0: Numbers of workers on site during Year 1²



² 'Year 1' lasted for 65 weeks.

Following my sporadic part-time participation, I worked in the site office full-time for another two weeks during a busier period, in which time the majority of work shifted to Year 2 and moved over to Keyworker House 2. I took some more time off, occasionally going on to the site to maintain the relationships that were forged, and to conduct more recorded interviews. At this time I approached the painting subcontractor, Ernie Coat, to ask if I could work with 'his blokes' at Keyworker House 2. He told me he had no work for me to do, despite my offer that I was 'very cheap'. As I by now had come to expect, Ernie Coat was quite suspicious of me, and totally disbelieving that I could decorate. Eventually Paul, one of the site managers, spoke to Ernie on my behalf, and told him that I was integral to 'the team', and the work I was doing was 'very important'. He said that Ernie's employing me would be a 'big favour' to Topbuild and would be much appreciated. Ernie instantly employed me and agreed to pay me half of the wages of a poorly paid painter.

I spent the next seven weeks working full-time with the painting group and my social position shifted again. I had moved from sitting around in the office and wandering about the site in my clean clothes, to being a painter dressed in painters' whites and carrying around brushes, steps and materials all day long. The move 'breached' daily reality to an extent because building site officers are not usually demoted to being painters. The builders would laugh or look at me with raised eyebrows and surprised expressions when seeing me in my new uniform which they associated with my demoted position. To repair the breach I would try to make a joke of it (c.f. Garfinkel, 1967).

Due to the trade based divisions on the site I became wrapped up in the social and work world of the painters, seeing very little of the other trades, and rarely coming into contact with the management at all. This was the final phase of the research and I felt much more relaxed. It might be argued that I had anthropologically 'gone native', but, in this position I actually was native. I could do my job well and was quickly accepted by the painters as a tradesman. Having done this job for some years, I fast slipped into their social world and spent a number of memorable evenings out and about with three of my colleagues.

Getting Out

After 7 weeks working with the painters I exited Keyworker House. For the next 8 weeks I went onto the site to organise and conduct a few stray interviews, and spent some more nights out with the painters. In total I spent 51 weeks as a participant observer. This included 12 weeks full-time labouring, 10 weeks full-time in the site office, and, 7 weeks full-time painting and decorating. I also spent a number of Friday nights getting drunk and high with many of the builders. There was a period of 15 weeks, from the end of January until the beginning of May 2003, where I conducted most of the interviews and was at the site part-time in no particular role. I undertook 31 recorded unstructured interviews, totalling 39.5 hours of recorded talk (only one participant did not allow me to record the interview). The shortest interview was 36 minutes, the longest 212 minutes. However, many were done in pubs and often went on past the length of recording, late into the night, after which I would try to note the next morning what had been said through a foggy and stale memory. David Downes commented that I probably did not know whether to 'write up or throw up'. I did both. The mean recorded interview length was 86 minutes.

Many of the builders never agreed to be interviewed but I filled 27 pocket-sized notepads with observational data and conversations that I heard and had with people, and I accumulated a mass of loose notes and ideas. For those who refused to be interviewed, but, liked to talk at work, I had to rely on memory and note-taking to capture their biographical information and attitudes. The divisions and transient nature of many of the trades on the site meant that the research predominately focussed on six main groups who were more or less permanently involved in the build: consultants, officers (management and surveyors), carpenters, painters, mechanical and electrical (plumbers and electricians), and labourers (two of whom were maintenance men).

Methodological Problems

I adopted a theoretical and methodological approach that grew most directly from Robert Park and the Chicago School of sociology in the 1920s. I applied an inductive method whereby the data emerged from detailed observations, or, what Geertz (1975) termed, 'thick description'. The descriptions displayed order and patterning in the fluid social reality of the building site, and the thesis presents and analyses these patterns. In this sense, the thesis is a caricatured copy of social reality, and no

monograph can do justice to the complex, contingent and emergent nature of social life. However, following Simmel, I grapple with the forms and interpretations that individuals themselves place upon social reality, and, from this I draw and construct theories concerning the nature of the social world (see Rock, 1979). This pursuit was in some respects, simply ‘constructs of constructs’ (Schutz, 1962: 6), but constructs can act as a form of communication between social groups, in this case, between the builders, myself and the section of the academic world that reads these words.

An inductive method was applied to a singular case study. This was a research tactic that ushered vast uncertainty but I placed faith in Paul Rock’s advice that ‘something will come up, it always does’. I chose the case study method out of practicality, and because of a pre-existing interest in informal relations. Informal relations are commonly taken-for-granted or hidden from outsiders. Consequently, a useful way to uncover these is through the detail of long-term in-depth observation. Participation within the social world also gave me a personal ‘feel’ for that world, assisting what Weber termed an ‘emphatic understanding’ of subjectivity, although it would take an entire lifetime working on a building site to completely emphatically understand builders.

Ethnographic reproduction of form has been criticised by some ‘radical’ theorists (c.f. Wacquant, 2002³) for being merely liberal and reproducing reality rather tackling social essence. However, quite what an ‘essence’ is, might be impossible to establish. Furthermore, I did not casually adopt a methodological stance formulated almost 100 years ago in Chicago from a combination of social philosophy and journalism. My theoretical position was the result of my own intellectual journeys through the tragedy of the fall of Marxism, and out through the impossibility of post-modernism. In light of my own theoretical travels and the critique of ethnographic reproduction, I did, however, attempt to get ‘into and under’ representations of reality by adopting a ‘multi-sited’ ethnographic strategy (Marcus, 1998, from Duneier, 1999), and I hope to have avoided critiques such as those raised by Wacquant.

Multiple Sites

Duneier (1999) uses the term ‘multi-sited ethnography’ to describe the method whereby fieldworkers endeavour to uncover social factors that are wider and more

³ Wacquant makes a useful but scathing, polemical, sometimes inaccurate, and occasionally ridiculous critique of Anderson (1999), Duneier (1999) and Newman (1999). See their replies in the same volume.

distant than the specific case-study fieldwork site, but which have an impact upon that site. Duneier adopts this strategy partly to avoid what he calls the 'ethnographic fallacy' (Steinberg, 1997) whereby actor's accounts are taken at surface value as indicative of social reality (see also Edwards and Scullion, 1982). Although I reproduce the words and actions of the builders, I too wanted to avoid the ethnographic fallacy in taking their accounts at face value. Yet, since the genesis of the research project I continually wondered as to who I was to assume underlying historical or structural processes aside from the builders' own representations. My only justification for this can be that I was in a position to tell the story when the builders were not. I was also able to step into and stand back from the social world, and, to look out from it into more distant interrelations, simply because I had the time and resources to do this.

Being able to 'stand back' enabled me at least to draw out the mundane occurrences that the subjects took for granted (c.f. Becker and Geer, 1969). To uncover wider structures, motivations and interdependent factors, I took inferential leaps into history and broader social processes and structures. This method can be problematic, as Duneier argues:

The scholar who wishes to avoid the ethnographic fallacy must sometimes ask the reader to make a leap of faith. On the one hand, the ethnographer makes a great effort to document and verify vast numbers of details, and in the process to tell how a social world works in everyday life. On the other hand, when it comes to the connection between these details and constraints and opportunities, his or her claims can seem quite skimpy by contrast. (1999: 343)

The validity of any case study will essentially depend upon the reader's 'leap of faith' in interpreting the cogency of the logical inferences contained within it, and, subjects, researcher and readers all bring conceptual structures to the written case study (Stake, 2000). I did find however, that relating micro-social and secondary macro-statistical representations with historical studies, was a useful tool in forming theoretical links and logical consistencies concerning the problematic relationship between motivations and accounts, individuals and societies. Despite this, the thesis' final validity is up to the reader.

Quantities and Qualities

Quantitative numerical data, while useful for providing general descriptions of large populations, can distort, construct and become social reality. Consequently,

quantitative data cannot be viewed as 'hard' objective science any more than qualitative data. As Hammersley (1992) argues, quantitative and qualitative methods are not mutually exclusive. Case studies provide numerous detail and little generalisability, whereas statistical data provides more generalisability but less detail. Ethnographies, including this one, are engulfed by terms such as 'some', 'many', 'less', 'more', and 'most'. These terms represent quantities, and are statistical descriptions in vague-miniature. Throughout the research I found myself conducting 'mental quasi-statistics' (Becker, 1970) in which patterns and interrelations contained in the data were implicitly observed and counted, during and after fieldwork. Qualitative data are, then, influenced by quantities. This is because both quantitative and qualitative methods are part of the same ethnomethodology of doing science, but they do it in slightly different ways, with slightly different outcomes.

Almost all the argument of the entire subsequent thesis was not assumed before entering the field. Many of my original ideas and deductions were challenged by my fieldwork, during the data analysis, and the writing-up process. In this sense, my research was as inductive as possible. It would have been useful to supplement the data with a statistical survey to reveal broader patterns, but temporal and pecuniary factors prevented this. Furthermore, statistical measures might reveal correlations but cannot demonstrate human action, relations and processes. To infer how action and correlations arise, theories must be formed to grapple with deeper causes and processes, and qualitative induction is one such method of theory construction.

I do not consider the results from my case study to be conventionally 'scientific', but the research on which this thesis is based was empirical (c.f. Berger and Luckman, [1966] 1991), and glued to observational reality. Further, as Znaniecki (1934, cited in Becker and Geer, 1969) argues, most 'hard' science typically studies small numbers. Thus analytic induction in a single case study could be considered science *par excellence*. However, social worlds do not readily lend themselves to straightforward causal explanations. Even pushing causal methodology into the arena of complex multifaceted interrelation cannot solve the methodological problems of reliability and consistency. Much of what impinges upon human action is social, and thereby, subjective and virtual. A fleeting human thought, or a taken-for-granted habit accessible only to the sub-conscious, cannot be drawn out, isolated and subjected to rigorous scientific testing. As a result, no claim can be made to the generalisability of the results and subsequent story contained in this thesis. But it can be said that what I

observed during the fieldwork, in terms of the organisation of State-commissioned building projects, was similar to what I had seen in the past on other building projects. Furthermore, 'people are people', and despite people possessing and expressing their own very individual characters and idiosyncrasies, amalgamations of distinct personalities become entwined in enacting social processes and social forms. These forms and processes operate throughout the social world, and perhaps, not simply in my case study.

In recorded interview sessions I also applied an open and inductive methodology where there were no fixed sets of questions or interview structure, but I simply attempted to sustain people's talk about their lives and concerns. An open research tactic however, does not mould objectivity. When analysing the data, my subjectivity selected salience, and that salience was contingent upon my subjectivity. Even what my daily perception was drawn to was socially constructed. Social life presents multiple truths, relevances and realities, and what the researcher draws from these will always be driven by some kind of theory or idea. No claims can, therefore, be made for my seeing being objective because there can be no methodological escape from the problematic nature of social reality; there can be no real realism. For this reason the epistemology underlying social science can at best be a pragmatic realism. I use this term in opposition to Hammersley's (1992) 'subtle realism', as, no matter how subtle epistemological realism is, it can never be real. Pragmatic realism implies that we can only do our reflexive best to illustrate and think about social reality, and ethnographic research is one method in which to do this. The resultant social theory can be stimulating, and perhaps useful, but never 'real'.

In focussing partly on informal actions, things that are by their very nature uncategorised, I could be accused in a Foucauldian sense of dragging power out into the social body; exposing and constructing the unexposed 'other'. However, I take refuge in the view that that social life is so complex, fluid and ever changing, and, humanity so continually playful and creative, that social life may evade categorisation at every turn. Furthermore, if my thesis is viewed as a story, the theoretical tradition that I continue is as old as humanity itself. Theory is a game of stories, and game-play is a form of human adaptation, and, a means through which structure, fun and play can be manufactured (c.f. Huizinga, [1938] 1970). Yet, like the game play that occurs in schools and workplaces (see chapter 7), theoretical game-play can have the unintended consequence of constructing its subject. Again, there can be little escape

from these problems, such is the impossibility of post-modernism, and is the reason why I adopt the stance of a pragmatic realist. My position as author of the story can be seen as a relay of micro-history, and analogous to every human subject, I was simultaneously vessel and creator of that micro-history. However, at the close of the thesis I attempt to reconcile myself by deconstructing modern nomenclature so as to turn social science back upon itself. I do not believe the whole world to be a series of free-flowing signifiers; empirical realities exist. Job and housing markets, political rule, bodies and buildings, and other technologies, all pattern social life mediated via human subjectivity. And, if objects exist as reality to actors, they are thus reality.

I cannot however, provide a completely satisfying answer to my own doubts. This thesis may benefit me much more so than any of the builders. This haunted my dreams throughout the fieldwork (c.f. Cohen, 1988), and I could only find solace in Paul Rock's words that this was my job and I was essentially in the position of a beggar. Ethically I did the builders no direct harm. I did not take anyone's job or get anyone in trouble, as far as I knew, and many of the builders enjoyed the attention they received. One interviewee told me he felt like a 'famous footballer or something, telling you all about my life'. At best I amplified their voices, and I hope to have represented them honestly and accurately.

In justifying my research strategy I have philosophically and quasi-scientifically argued my standpoint. However, during the fieldwork process, I felt a long distance from the nuances of methodological debates and textbooks. To a large extent I, Like many other ethnographers before me, simply 'muddled through' (see Plummer, 1983). Mid-way through the fieldwork I considered changing my focus to the sociology of a building as opposed to a sociology of builders. There were so many distinct parties, work-groups and users of Keyworker House, that the actual building work was only a part of the social processes involved. However, as outlined above, my presence as researcher aroused rather a lot of suspicion. This was exacerbated by a small media panic concerning the large profits and inefficiency of PFI projects⁴ of which Keyworker House was part. I felt as though I was walking on eggshells, and thought it unwise to attempt to speak to all the parties embroiled in the life of the building. I figured that the building work and the men doing it were complex enough. However,

⁴ 'Brown calls down union wrath after standing by PFI', *The Guardian* 20/09/02.

it would have been myopic to completely disregard the 'life' of the building since it had a salient impact upon the organisation of the build, and therefore, upon the builders' lives which are the subject of this thesis. Firstly therefore, I present the life of Keyworker House and the organisation of its refurbishment. I describe the roles and relationships of the various interdependent parties involved in managing the build, and consider the effectiveness of privatised State-commissioned building.

Chapter 3

Managing to Build

In this chapter I describe the specificities of the Keyworker House build, and the various parties involved in building it. I look at the roles and relationships between quantity surveys, site managers and building consultants, and their relationships to the bureaucratic and managerial measures employed to guide and regulate the build. I go on to question the effectiveness of privatised State-commissioned building.

Dilapidation

Keyworker House was approximately one hundred years old. Through years of poor maintenance, intensive usage, and the onslaught of the weather and gravity, it had fallen into a dilapidated state. Water leaked through the corroded roofs and seeped into the top floor rooms, saturating the plaster and pulling it from the walls and ceilings. Roof gutters and external piping had become loose, blocked and rusting, exacerbating water damage to the brickwork and roofs. Where water seeped into the brickwork, it had rusted the internal steel skeleton of the building, causing it to expand, forcing large cracks down the external masonry walls. The wood in the external windows had also expanded and crumbled, making it impossible to open and shut many of the windows, thereby permitting rain and wind to enter the dwelling through its sides in addition its roofs. The archaic plumbing system ceased to function properly because of poor maintenance and extreme day-to-day use. There were continual floods, sinks and toilets frequently became blocked, and the flow of both hot and cold water was unreliable. The carpets, interior walls and internal woodwork were worn by use and water damage, making the rooms and communal areas look drab, asymmetrical and unappealing.

Insufficient maintenance was the result of economic and political manoeuvrings that occurred during Keyworker House's life-span, and was exacerbated in the early 1990s with the onset of the PFI, when building maintenance was contracted-out to private tender. Private contractors were less knowledgeable with the building's functioning than the previously directly employed maintenance team who lived and worked there. Contracted-in services had a tendency to 'paper

over the cracks' of building problems, rather than rectify the source¹. Keeping the building ticking over until the finish of their contract was what the market demanded.

The cost effectiveness of marketisation was recognised by some of the Topbuild's older tradesmen. Bill, the mechanical and electrical foreman, was one of these:

For maintenance there used to be blokes that looked after it. It's like the problems we've got here, all the pipe-work, all the shit pipes, all the rainwater pipes, everything's bunged up. Years ago in boiler houses, you'd have the boiler-house man and that was his job, he was resident boiler-house man. He'd clean all the taps, clean all the brass, clean the floors. But now to save money they've done away with all the boiler-house men, and they've done away with all the maintenance on the plumbing, on down-pipes, sewer pipes and God knows what else. And what's happened? All it's done is created a massive great bill for whoever takes over. Now in here the boiler house has got to be renewed because it's not been maintained. All the down-pipes, all the electrics, everything. Everything's gone wrong because it's not been maintained properly. So they've stuck us in here and we've got all the faults, and you just can't clear the faults. You've got to renew it all, so it's costing. It's government money being wasted.

The administrative staff at Keyworker House were under pressure from the key workers' union concerning the building's dilapidated state. Yet because Keyworker House was run on a tight budget by the regional Health Trust, the administration did not have the fiscal power necessary to contract builders to repair it. This was costly for the housing administration because the dilapidated roof was letting water into top floor rooms which they could no longer rent out, and they needed to house health service staff to sustain an income from their rents. Keyworker House urgently required attention if it was to continue to house health service workers.

Charitable housing associations were invited to tender for a 30-year contract to repair, maintain and administer the building. They put forward bids, calculating the costs of repair, aesthetic improvement, and general maintenance, in relation to the income that could be accrued from the key workers' rents. In 2001 Opportune Housing won the contract. Opportune was the umbrella organisation and administrative wing of two other housing associations. One was a charitable trust that would put all its profits back into housing key workers and the needy, and the other was a housing management company that was not charitable but privately owned. Anything that the charitable body was involved in would be automatically run and administered by the

¹ New Labour and Network Rail have recently reintroduced 'in-house' maintenance of railway infrastructure because of the negligence associated with contracted-in private maintenance teams that led to the Hatfield and Potters Bar train crashes in 2000 and 2002 respectively (The *Guardian* 24/10/03).

management company, at a profit for its directors and shareholders. The organisational structure of Opportune Housing 'blurred the boundaries' between public, private and voluntary agencies evident in the marketisation of governance (Rhodes, 1997), where public becomes private which becomes profit.

Topbuild were contracted by Opportune Housing to repair the dilapidations, and modernise and refurbish the building's interior as to make it a safer, more aesthetic and comfortable living and working environment. The major works and costs of the works undertaken by Topbuild to Keyworker House 1 are outlined below. These are the actual prices for the work that was carried out in central London in 2002/3, and are taken from the original bill of quantities drawn up by the Topbuild's quantity surveyors and estimators.

A. Dilapidations and Wants of Repair

Scaffold total building, wash down and repair roof, gutters and cornices (£267K)

Remove pigeon detritus, add spikes and netting (£5K)

Identification of pipes containing asbestos (£?)

Repair and replace lightening conductors (£34K)

Replace gutters and repair brick ledges (£21K)

Repair roof railings (£5K)

Repair balconies and railings (£3K)

Brick cleaning and repointing (£554K)

Repair all wooden windows (£91.5K)

Repair and replace metal windows (£18K)

Replace broken glass (£6K)

Overhaul doors (£7K)

Redecorate all externals (£32.5K)

Mastic all external door and windows (£8K)

Overhaul roof leadwork and slates on roof slopes (£21K)

B. Internal Works

Emergency lighting to all public areas (£43K)

Rewire all faulty light fittings (£205K)

Fit smoke detectors (£187K)

Repair cracked plaster in stairwells (£25K)

Decorate all common areas (£180K)
Repair steps (£5K)
Repair wooden floors (£16K)
Repair compartment firewalls (£25K)
Repair ceiling damage to top floor rooms (£10K)
Fit new carpets (£5K)
Upgrade and test electric's (£45K)

The specifications in the bill of quantities were quite sparse and ambiguous. For instance, the work of asbestos removal was not costed, as it was not known how much asbestos existed in the pipes until a mechanical and electrical team had carefully inspected them. Also, works to be carried out to the masonry were unclear because it was not possible to view the full extent of weather damage until the building was scaffolded. The original specification was, then, subject to emerging knowledge as the work progressed, and the costs indicated were only guides to the price of the work and subject to ongoing negotiation. The original works were valued at 3.75 million pounds for Keyworker House 1, but eventually totalled 4.6 million pounds. Some works such as the replacement of the metal ('Crittal') windows were never undertaken, but many extra works were discovered, forcing the final cost up.

Most of the external work resulted from the effects of the impact of natural forces, including lightning, pests, and roof, window and brick repair through weathering. Work to identify and safeguard against asbestos in the pipes was enforced as a regulatory measure to protect workers and users of the building. The majority of internal works were also forced by regulatory necessity. The fitting and upgrading of smoke alarms, fire doors and emergency lighting were specified by environmental health and safety legislation aimed at decreasing risks to users. The remaining internal works were related to wear and tear through use (redecorating, new carpets), and internal weather damage (cracked plaster and ceilings). The extra works that were commissioned during the build were predominantly cosmetic, such as the decoration and fitting of new vanity units and cupboards in the bed-sit rooms, and the construction of new shower rooms to replace the old original bathrooms. These works were non-essential in terms of danger, security and regulation, but were driven by the economic necessity of getting people to live in Keyworker House, and to justify rent rises.

The job specifications for Keyworker House 2 and 3 followed much the same pattern as above. Although the buildings were of different sizes and internal shapes, the dilapidation problems and regulatory measures were generally much the same for each edifice because each had followed a similar 'career'. Consequently, the build processes were also similar.

Building Parties

In a small building project such as the decoration of a single local authority house, there are often many parties involved in the project: the local authority, the tenant(s), the contractor, the subcontractor, the tradesman, the material suppliers, and the impending threat of visiting health and safety officers. Each of these parties has a different interest in the work and how it is done, but doing the work is contingent upon their agreement. This can make for a very problematic and complex situation. For the tradesman making the required product, it might be difficult to do the actual work whilst trying to balance and maintain agreement between the separate parties, but, in larger scale building works, the parties and associated problems can be amplified considerably. Keyworker House was the equivalent of working on 776 local authority houses, and reaching an agreement becomes problematic with increased numbers of parties and interests. Large built structures are built upon the balance of these agreements, negotiations, associated conflict, power play, and the sweat of labourers and tradesmen (c.f. Higgin and Jessop, 1965; Kidder, 1985).

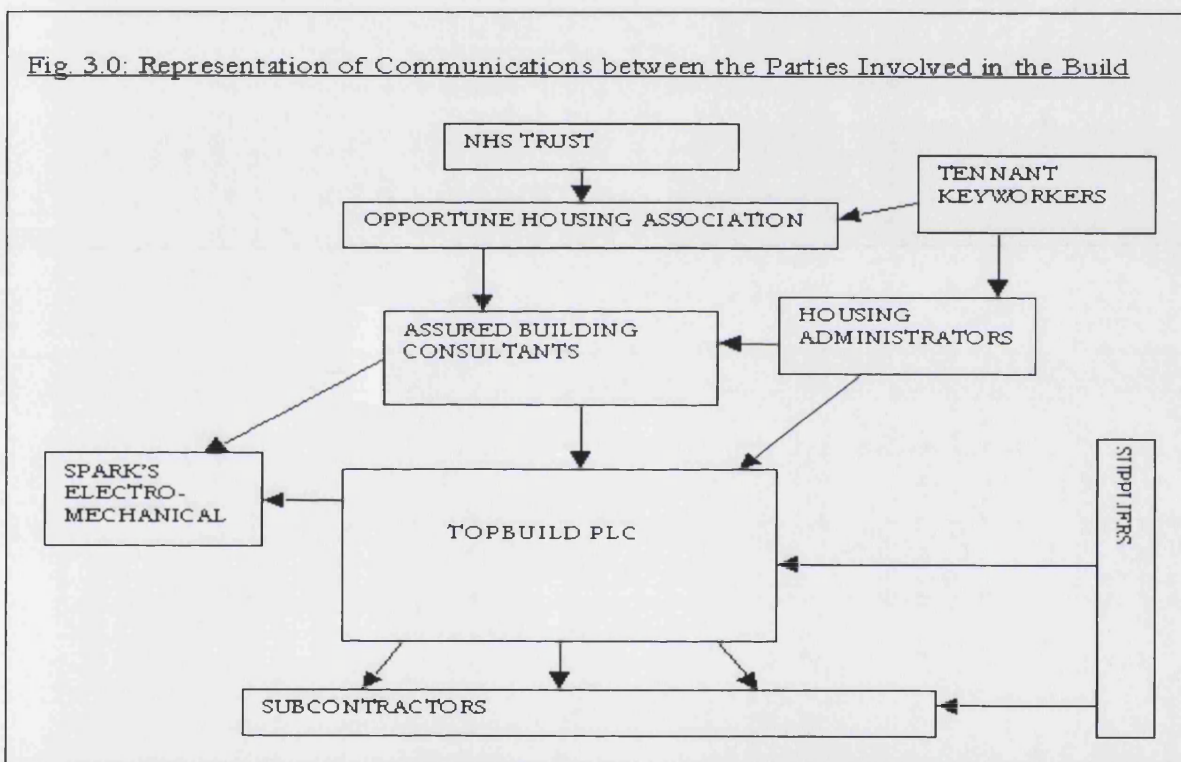
Keyworker House Parties

To administer the refurbishment of Keyworker House, Opportune Housing employed the services of Assured Consultants, which followed best practice laid out in both the Latham and Egan reports. Assured Consultants and Opportune Housing had entered into a partnering agreement with Topbuild on a previous 'new build' job, and the build at Keyworker House was therefore part of a continuing long-term arrangement. A contingency fund was set up to absorb any of the extra costs that might occur through unforeseen problems and expenses. Alternatively, if savings were made, the fund would be shared between Topbuild and Assured.

As Keyworker House had already contracted-out building services before Opportune Housing took on the PFI contract, the administrators of the building were tied in to a contractual relationship with another contractor, 'Trans-hand'. Trans-

hand's contract for general maintenance was terminated with the onset of the new agreement, but cleaning, refuse collection and lift maintenance contracts all remained under their control. This complicated the already complex organisation of the build, and matters became yet further complicated because Assured Consultants employed their own mechanical and electrical subcontractor, 'Spark's Electro-Mechanical'. Topbuild's managers disliked this arrangement because they wished to contract their own mechanical and electrical subcontractors, and the arrangement interfered with the flow of information between Topbuild and Assured Consultants, and, contributed towards what was a problematic relationship between the building parties.

Fig. 3.0: Representation of Communications between the Parties Involved in the Build



Bennett and Jayes (1998) argued that for effective partnering there must be openness, maturity, freedom to express ideas, a desire for continuous improvement, and free flowing information between the contractor and client. At Keyworker House there was little openness or freedom of expression. In fact there were lengthy negotiations, sharp arguments, and frequent breakdowns in communication. Steve, the project manager, contrasted his experience at Keyworker House with the previous new-build, a Design and Build, in which the same parties were involved:

Well that was a design and build job and it was down to us to do what we priced to do, with a little bit of encouragement and approval from Assured. They were just approving systems and products that we were going to use for the building systems,

how we were going to go about doing things and arranging them, and then the final snagging and hand-over really. They were on site there as well, they were above us in a house, but they just didn't have as much input. We had drawings, we had an engineer... So the difference is, that was design and build, and this [Keyworker House] is a partnering contract. We're supposed to have open book policy so everyone gets to see everything what's going on, but, you know, they do have a lot more say over here [at Keyworker House]. I mean there was an original brief and specs [for the build] but it changed so much. So initially yes, they were relying on us to do dilapidation items, but then as things gradually changed, and you're trying to work out fresh prices, that's where it all got a bit messy, and it still is.

For the Design and Build, the client laid down requirements and Topbuild drew up the specifications that were agreed upon. The structure was built to the specifications with only minor modifications during the process, and, because the construction was new, there were few deliberations as to the quality of the finishing work; it should simply be new, closed, symmetrical and shiny. Thus during the design and build, the parties collaborated with only minor conflicts. Illustrative of this was the site 'drink-ups' that took place at the end of some working weeks. Most of the mechanical and electrical, building consultants and Topbuild officers, would go out on a Friday and drink together, but at Keyworker House these relationships slowly broke down and drink-ups became a divided affair. Bill, the mechanical and electrical foreman, described some of the reason for the problems:

Topbuild have all their site managers, site agents, quantity surveyors, and whatever, and we're [mechanical and electrical] not part of them so to speak. It's this situation where it's a bit of, you know, helping the client out, and working together as a team and everything. But Mr Jagers comes to us and says can we give him a price for say putting all new lighting out in the courtyard, which he's not allowed to. But he's the fuckin' client and you don't wanna upset him. So he says, 'what do you recommend'? And I say, oh ten spotlights, a couple of tree-lights, whatever, rough guess, I'm not pricing it but at a rough guess, 5 grand. 'Okay', he says, 'can you do it'? And I say, no, you've got to go to Topbuild. He knows he's gotta go to Topbuild, but now I might have just put me foot in it because we've give him a price to do it for 5 grand and by the time it goes through Topbuild he's got a price more like 10 grand. Then there's 20 percent commission and all of a sudden he goes fuckin' ape shit.

The relationship between Spark's and Assured Consultants was a problematic one for Topbuild, particularly because Topbuild attempted to inflate their prices. The relationship also facilitated organisational problems. Steve, expressed these from Topbuild's point of view:

Fuckin' Spark's, they go behind my back and sort everything out with Assured, then Mr Jagers comes in having a pop at me 'cos the chippies haven't finished the framing in the shower rooms 'cos I'd put them on the fire doors. How the fuck am I supposed to know Spark's were gonna wire-up the showers this week if they don't fuckin' tell me? (Fieldnotes)

Despite what was sometimes a heated atmosphere, the build progressed and Assured Consultants saw Steve as a good project manager who was both flexible and knowledgeable. However, these views did not prevent raised voices and emotive atmospheres between the parties. Yet, a site office can be unlike other office situations because interaction is very informal and masculinised.

The Office

As part of the procurement of the build, Topbuild charged costs for their 'prelims'. These were added on top of the expenses for the actual building work which was predominately carried out by the subcontractor groups (see chapter 4). 'Prelims' included costs of 'hardware', such as desks, computers, faxes, photocopiers, stationery and storage facilities, and, management services to cover the wages of site managers and surveyors. 'Prelims' also included 'house keeping', which was the wages of 6 labourers². The cost of the 'prelims' was approximately £8000 per week for all three Keyworker Houses. It was essentially a cost for administration of the works; payment for knowledge as opposed to production.

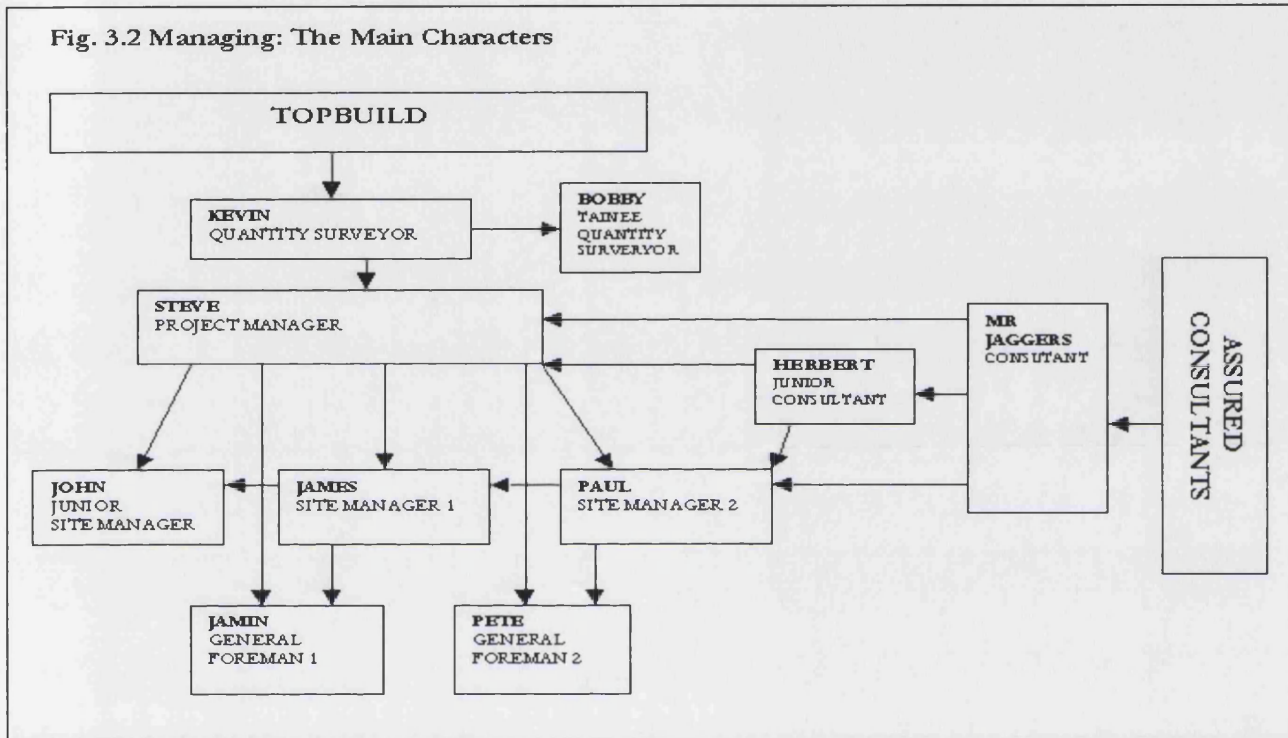
The main site office was situated on the ground floor of Keyworker House 1. I was told many times what a luxury the office was. It was not situated in a muddy field inside a portakabin, which was usually the case, but was warm, relatively spacious and clean. There was a main desk for the project manager, and another for James, one of the site managers. Two desks were tucked away at the rear for Kevin, the quantity surveyor, and Bobby, his assistant trainee, and another was shared between the two general foremen and a visiting maintenance surveyor. The general foremen shared the space because they moved in and out of the office in their role of go-between (see chapter 6), and the quantity surveyors would regularly visit other sites that were under Topbuild's administration.

It was for the most part a very busy room: noisy with faxes, phones, photocopiers and two-way radios constantly buzzing and bleeping. There was also an almost continual round of people coming in and out of the office: subcontractors looking for payment and instructions; foremen asking for orders; labourers in search

² 'House-keeping' labourers were the backbone of the build (see chapters 6 and 7) but they were not in this case, seen as actually building anything, but rather seen as service workers. Or, in other words, Topbuild made a profit from their wages.

of keys and materials; materials salesmen peddling their wares; housing management coming with tenants' problems; couriers delivering packages; and sometimes any or all of these groups just wanting a chat and/or joke. It was at times rather a manic space, so much so that Kevin, the quantity surveyor, would frequently wear earplugs so he could concentrate on his surveying duties.

Fig. 3.2 Managing: The Main Characters



Office interaction was very informal. Rarely did anyone knock on the door before entering, and talk was characterised by voluble joking, swearing and 'piss-taking' (see chapters 7 and 8). Because interaction was so informal, it would be difficult (without prior knowledge) to assume who was situated where in the management hierarchy. For example, Jamin, the general and carpentry foreman, would shout to his direct boss, Steve, to do something, or they would argue over the best way to construct something. The encounters were often terminated with a jocular 'fuck you, you cunt'. Similarly, I once witnessed Kevin athletically jump towards a visiting projects director from Topbuild head office, spin around, face backwards to him, and loudly break wind. The usual adornment of lewd calendars to the site office walls was forbidden by Mr Jaggers, the consultant, in the interests of public relations, and was instead hidden inside the inner doors of the mass of filing cabinets that subsumed the office. In their place, the walls were ornamented by month planners, first aid

certificates, pictures of the office staff's children and motorbikes, and a few humorous photographs that had been taken with the site camera.

Across the corridor, opposite the site office, was the comparatively dry and sober office of Assured Consultants. The close proximity allowed Mr Jagers and his underling, Herbert, to go in and out of the site office frequently. Mr Jagers brought with him straight talk and an air of authority and respect. He was a formidable client's representative, partly because he was trained in the law as a building 'claims consultant' to deal with contractor-client litigation disputes. The office atmosphere always became more sober upon his presence. Conversely, Herbert tended to generate a feeling of animosity amongst the Topbuild managers. He was shouted and sworn at without any semblance of jocular intent, at which he would turn bright red and shout back through his constantly cold-sore encrusted lips. Herbert's general demeanour and condescending attitude towards everybody but Mr Jagers facilitated the development of a general asperity towards him. It was considered stigmatising to be associated with Herbert, and insults centred around suggestions of an alleged friendship with him, or worse still, being addressed by his name. Because Herbert was part of the consultant team, he held a certain amount of power over the Topbuild managers, and, due to his perceived lack of knowledge he was seen as undeserving of his position. The sometimes-tense atmosphere between the site managers and Herbert did little to assist the co-operative ethos of the partnering agreement.

Herbert was considered to have negligible knowledge of building work, and he was inconsistent in dealing with building workers of all levels. He tended to tell people what to do rather than ask them, which conflicted with the builders and managers' values of independence (see chapter 6). Each occasion that highlighted his ignorance was talked and joked about, and therefore accumulated in the managers' collective memory. The site managers' attitudes towards Herbert were remarkably similar to the anti-police subculture of the juvenile groups studied by Matza (1964). In this context, any kind of moral bind to Herbert's authority had been neutralised. As Paul, one of the site managers, told me:

What pisses me off about building is people in high positions who don't know anything. People like Herbert, I fucking hate them to death... He's got a degree, he speaks very well, but fuck me, he does not know the first thing about the construction industry. And that's very scary, because let's not pretend for a minute that's by pure chance that I managed to bump into the most foolish person involved in building at a high level, no chance, they're everywhere. And there comes a point where you can't no longer be angry or resentful about the system, you've just got to accept that's the way it

is, make your money and go with it. Because you're never going to stop it, are you?... It is amazing, he knows absolutely nothing; it's scary really. I find it difficult when you've got to bow your head to people like him, it's very annoying. I'd like to see people at high level more closely vetted, that you could look up to, not laugh at, because he's a laughing stock at Topbuild isn't he? I mean he's not a bad fellow don't get me wrong, but on a professional level... He's ringing up for the most basic conversations sometimes. I dread it because I know that he's going to mention something totally obscure and irrelevant, and we're going to end up having a falling out or another issue over it.

Kevin, the quantity surveyor, concurred:

I hate the likes of Herbert who, to be blunt, can't understand the principles of surveying. He just doesn't get it. Agreeing final accounts with Quality Assured is a pain in the arse.

The strains that occurred between the building parties, and directed towards Herbert in particular, eroded the ethos of partnering. Mr Jagers talked, slightly in the abstract, about why this was so problematic:

Unfortunately the construction industry is very much about relationships. It is about the relationships and the mutual respect between parties. And what tends to happen is because the person doesn't have respect for an individual, that relationship isn't going to work. And the higher up the chain you get, the worse it becomes.

Barlow *et al* (1997) concluded from their analysis of a number of case studies of building partnering, that trust is of the utmost importance for successful partnering but, was in turn, contingent upon individual managers' personalities. The solution to this, they argue, is for clients to change managers who do not co-operate. However, Barlow *et al* neglect the personalities of clients and consultants that cannot be changed. At Keyworker House, Herbert's lack of practical knowledge of building culture and processes obscured the relationships between the parties. He and Mr Jagers held power over the contractor, and Topbuild had little choice but to continue to work with Herbert. However, Herbert was not the only reason for strained relationships.

Roles and Relationships: Managing and Money

The work of Topbuild's site management can be usefully divided into two parts. On the one hand were the site management and organisation of the work, on the other were the quantity surveyors and the costing of the work. Mr Jagers summarised these roles:

When you talk to surveyors, surveyors are very much in tune with money. Site managers are in tune with performance and standards. Directors are a combination of both to be fair to them. So when you're speaking with surveyors, what you're trying to

do is to make sure you get a fair and reasonable representation of costs for the works. With the project managers what you are expecting is performance and quality.

Quantity Surveyors and 'Getting one over'

The work of quantity surveyors' is both technical and legal. Technically they measure the volumes of work to be carried out, and prepare accounts and estimations of costs and profits of materials and labour via these measures, and legally they deal with the contractual arrangements of building jobs. Higgin and Jessop (1965) argue that quantity surveyors were originally employed by clients as a tactical manoeuvre to prevent being duped and mystified by contractors over the extent of works. Contractors often exaggerated building measures by, for example, reporting they used more bricks and bricklayers than were necessary for a particular job. To counteract the tactical move of clients, contractors, fearing that they might be mystified, employed their own quantity surveyors.

The contemporary quantity surveyor works in the site office with a calculator and spread-sheet, continually adding and subtracting works done and about to be done, wading through documented works and instructions, issuing payments to subcontractors, and demanding payments from clients. Kevin described his role:

I spend a lot of the time here just trying to forecast the profit and loss on a job which means forecasting what we're gonna get in the way of variations and extras, getting paid, and, what we're paying out to the subbies [subcontractors] to do it. It's just the balance of that, at the moment it's just balancing it. With the Year 2 works we're gonna get 3 million pound paid, so now I'm just working out exactly how much that is going to cost us. I've got the quotes and done it all, and I know what the margin is I think I'm gonna make. That's how it works, it's just monitoring it every month and every week, I mean we've had nearly £400,000 worth of variations here [at Keyworker House 1]. I'm a glorified accountant really.

Quantity surveyors juggled numbers, they were not particularly concerned with the quality or process of construction because that was the concern of the project and site managers. Quantity surveyors also form much of the higher management in the building industry and can be seen as its commissioned officers; the lieutenants and generals who command and dictate the rules of a build. Almost all Topbuild's higher management, with whom I had fleeting contact, were quantity surveyors. They had left the world of numbers and contracts and, were directing from above the many projects under their jurisdiction.

Quantity surveyors performed an accounting juggling act whereby losses on one part of a job were transferred over to profits made on another part and *vice versa*.

For example, Topbuild underestimated the measure for new asphalt to be laid and moulded to the roofs for which they would have to pay the unforeseen costs. To balance the losses, Kevin priced the fitting of internal fire doors at 50 pounds each when a single carpenter could hang ten doors each day (at a cost of approximately £150), thereby clawing back lost money. In relation to this, a battle of paper ensued between Kevin and the two consultants, Mr Jagers and Herbert (who were also trained as quantity surveyors). They were engaged in pushing costs, losses and estimates backward and forward at one another, negotiating and arguing. Mr Jagers was aware of the game:

They think they can get one over on me but I tell you that they can't. I've been on both sides of the fence [working for contractors and clients], I know what they are trying to do, they can't pull the wool over my eyes. (Fieldnotes)

Quantity surveyors were the 'officer class' of the building industry amongst the tough manual workers and site management. However, because they worked on site, and were the people who sanctioned payment, they all adopted an aggressive bellicose interactive style (see chapter 8). In this sense, quantity surveyors may be characterised as tough middle class. As both Bobby and Kevin illustrated:

It's very aggressive in the building actually. You have to be very firm. Sometimes I like sort of being polite to people, but I like being aggressive as well. I enjoy that part to a certain extent but sometimes it gets a bit frustrating... I've got to have respect here so I've got to be professional, sometimes I want to just hit them but I've got to be professional. (Bobby)

I hate subbies [subcontractors] that whinge for the sake of whinging. I mean we're all trying to make money but there's a point where they're just trying to screw you, and they end up taking the piss and I hate that. It's part of the job but after all this time I just hate it. I like having a good row, but I also hate having a row because I always lose my rag and they always get silly so I tend not to these days. (Kevin)

I interviewed all 4 quantity surveyors at Keyworker House. They said they became surveyors because they liked to be out amongst the hustle and bustle of the social world of the building site where they enjoyed its tough and 'ladish' environment. As Bobby, Topbuild's trainee quantity surveyor, said:

I got on a course in building surveying at university, blindly, I had no construction experience what so ever. I needed experience so I applied to different companies during my second year of university, and I got accepted to work for 'Global Construction' for three months on a big project. I worked there and I thought site life is fantastic... I thought I really enjoy it because the crack on site is brilliant. So I enquired about building surveying and whether building surveyors go onto site like that, and no they don't. So I changed onto quantity surveying.

As mentioned above by Mr Jagers, quantity surveyors' concerns were numbers and legality, rather than quality or organisation, and thus issues of costs and quality tend to diverge detrimentally from one another during a build (see below). There were also problems apart from the division of roles, particularly in relation to the partnering ethos, and this was the work-culture of the quantity surveyors outlined above. Like the culture of builders in general, the quantity surveyors did not like to be pushed around or told what to do (see chapters 6 and 8), and 3 out of 4 of them told me that part of what they enjoyed about the job was 'getting one over' on the opposing parties:

There's a sense of fulfilment involved. I know it's a bit stupid, very childish, but sometimes when you've got one over on like, say on Herbert or whatever, and you know and you have to keep your mouth shut. You lead them to believe that they're the big boys but really you know the background. When you know the value is not as great as what they're actually estimating it, so your not only getting a few quid [pounds] extra on what you're saving, but you're also getting overheads and profits on top of that as well, so it's competing like that. (Bobby)

It's good fun arguing even if you don't know what you're arguing about. Just the fact, just trying to beat them down, probably like Herbert does to a point with us, but he doesn't know what he's doing. But it's good fun agreeing an account when you know you've screwed someone, but as long both parties are happy, then great. (Kevin)

'Screwing someone' or 'getting one over' did not sit comfortably with a partnering ethos. Bennett (2000), arguing about the effectiveness of partnering, adopts the conceptual model of Axelrod's (1984) 'prisoner's dilemma', illustrating that even if a single party competes and everyone else co-operates, the net gains of co-operation break down. In these situations, only the competing party gains and then only in the short-term. For all parties to benefit, co-operation is crucial, otherwise the whole system breaks down. 'Getting one over' was embedded in the culture of the surveyors, thereby disintegrating the effectiveness of partnering. The quantity surveyors also actively concealed information from the client parties rather than working in a climate of openness where information could flow freely. Bobby for example, would be on the lookout for the impending entry of Mr Jagers or Herbert into the office. Upon their entry he would quickly close the account spreadsheets on his computer. In addition, when the project manager allowed me to look through the pricing schedules, I was strictly instructed to keep the documents under close guard, out of sight of the consultants.

Barlow *et al* argue that for partnering to be effective 'each party has to have a genuine belief in the integrity of the other side' (1997: 13), and, be 'required to

acknowledge their mistakes and readily take responsibility' (1997: 14). The actions of both Topbuild and the consultants did little to promote belief in one another's integrity or demonstrate a willingness to acknowledge their mistakes.

In addition to being the 'money-men', quantity surveyors also functioned as the eyes of those further up the management hierarchy; as a link in the 'adhocracy'. Information concerning the build was accounted for by a mass of form filling carried out by the site managers, but, Kevin regularly met with Mr Drear, Topbuild's contract's director, to discuss the economic performance of the works under his jurisdiction. Kevin's gaze, then, supplemented the paper accounting methods that monitored goings-on on the site (see below). This was important because paper accounting methods could always be fabricated. Woodward and Woodward (2001) reveal Kevin's importance in this respect, in their own case study of the underhand practices of a project manager. The manager fixed the accounting and shielded his incompetence from higher management for many months, resulting in project failure and profit loss. At Keyworker House, the salience of Kevin's observational role was also reflected in the many comments of the builders that, 'Kevin is never off duty, even in the pub he don't stop work'.

Site Managers and 'Arse-Covering'

Site managers predominately rise through the ranks of tradesmen, most commonly carpenters. Carpenters are particularly suited to construction management because they traditionally work on all phases of a build from inception to completion. This is known as first and second fixing and finishing work. Steve, the project manager, was formerly a carpenter, and his position at Topbuild could be viewed as one similar to that of a regimental sergeant major, and his site managers as warrant officers. Tradesmen climb to these ranks but rarely rise above them into the 'commissioned' middle-class world of surveyors.

Site managers were the non-commissioned officers at the forefront of the build and their concern was work organisation. For example, health and safety had to be accounted for, and Topbuild employed a visiting health and safety officer, Mr Smith. Out on site, all the tradesmen and labourers would know of his impending arrival because the foremen would come onto the site, hand out hard hats, and make sure that everyone was wearing safety boots. Mr Smith rarely inspected the actual building site

itself, preferring to visit the site office to make sure the project manager had performed the necessary health and safety accounting duties. Steve once joked that he would put a cork on the end of Mr Smith's fork for his own safety at the Topbuild management Christmas meal (see also fig. 8.1)

Health and safety duties included inducting workers to the formal site regulations and putting up notices of risks in the workers' canteens, such as where the first aid was kept, or to be beware of rodents and repetitive strain injury. They also necessitated regular scaffold and plant inspections, and Mr Smith generally oversaw the project manager's brief in relation to the mass of new health and safety regulations that regularly flooded in. Health and safety requirements had to be documented so that if a serious accident occurred (which fortunately did not happen during the time of my participation) Topbuild would be covered against prosecution. This kind of accounting was termed 'arse-covering' by the project and site managers, and bureaucratic 'arse-covering' subsumed their working days. This was reflected by the multitude of paper and filing cabinets that enveloped the site office.

Not all arse-covering concerned health and safety regulations. Much of the managers' files and paper concerned 'requests for information' (RFI's) to specify the finer detail of how the client wanted parts of the work to be carried out. For instance, they specified the type, colour and number of coats of paint that were to be applied to interior walls. Often the consultants were unsure about the exact way they wanted the walls painted, and would debate and argue this with the contractor, who further debated the matter with the subcontractors because building work can always be done using different methods. An example was an informal meeting that ignited in the doorway of the site office:

The mechanical and electrical consultant and foreman were debating with Mr Jagers which would be the optimum type of light to fit into the shower rooms. Bill, the mechanical and electrical foreman, wanted one type because these did not draw too much power from the fragile main electricity supply, but Mr Jagers was concerned about the quality of the light emitted from them. Steve, the project manager, was saying that the brighter lights were too expensive, but Norman, the mechanical and electrical consultant, said that bulbs for the weaker light would need to be replaced more frequently. Steve went off to get a sample of one of the light types, to see how the bulbs were to be replaced. He then called the maintenance man, Mike Fixit, to show him how to replace the bulbs. Mike said that these would be very time consuming to replace, and argued for another type to be used. The debate continued in this vein for more than two hours. (Field-notes)

The changing of a light bulb is proverbially simple. Much of the build was more complex than this, and thus agreement increasingly difficult. The informal meeting

illustrated that the different parties did come together to discuss and negotiate problems, as is suggested by partnering principles. This has probably always occurred in building; a site manager could never have wide enough knowledge of all the separate trades' skills because they are too vast, disparate and complex for a single person to comprehend (see chapter 4).

Project and site managers are forced to consult with subcontractors and foremen through their own lack of knowledge arising from the complex division of labour between the building trades. The subsequent solutions to building complexities were the outcome of varied interests and power play. However, it was Mr Jagers who held ultimate power because he was the client's representative and it was the client who paid. Nevertheless, even after negotiation and solution, tradesmen had the organisational space in which to go out and do the work the way that they wanted (see below and chapter 6).

The files also concerned 'conformation of instructions' (COI's). COI's confirmed how the consultant wanted something done so that the project manager would be covered against future claims that he had not orchestrated the work as instructed. It was a common occurrence for Mr Jagers or Herbert to barge into the site office to say that a particular piece of work had not been carried out as agreed. The project manager would then try to counteract such claims by pulling the files out and searching for the RFI's and COI's.

The exact specifications of the works were quite foggy and altered by the client during the process. Consequently, instructions for the works were continually altered. In a partnership, alteration of instructions would simply need to be agreed upon and carried out, but because of the lack of trust between the parties, all new instructions required agreement in writing. If this did not occur, arguments over payments proliferated and, when negotiations over new and altered instructions transpired, the warring parties would hunt down written instructions to substantiate their case. Paul, one of the site managers, spoke about his 'arse-covering' duties:

It seems to be over-complicated, and it needs to be over-complicated because of the incompetences of the people that are involved in it. All day I find myself putting paper into files. It gives me the opportunity of each time when something hasn't happened or somebody bollocks [reprimands] me, I just get the thing out the file and say well the reason I didn't do it is that fucking wanker didn't do it. And that's what I do all the time, you've got to do that. Not to be negative about it, but covering your own arse, it saves that embarrassment... I try to make it as specific as I possibly can, and you know, if it goes pear-shaped and they're looking for somebody's head to put on the block, you just gotta try to make sure it's not yours. So it's arse-covering to a certain extent

John, the junior site manager at Keyworker House 3, echoed this:

There's so much paper it's like a rain forest in here... It's all to do with money at the end of the day. If something goes wrong, if someone comes back and says 'what's happening with this', open the file up, there it is, this is what happened, this is where it happened, this is how it happened. It's all arse covering really.

Bureaucracy and Efficiency

Gouldner (1954) argued that bureaucracy is not applied to organisations merely to improve efficiency as Weber maintained, but to regulate conflicts of interest. Gouldner found that where it was difficult to get people to do things in the interests of the organisation, bureaucratic methods were implemented if all parties could see their benefits, or alternatively, if one party had little power to resist the imposition. RFIs and COIs followed this pattern: both client and contractor saw the benefits of formal bureaucratic process because it protected both parties through a tight specification of tasks. However, Gouldner also showed that bureaucracy had a tendency to extract only the smallest amount of effort from its incumbents and no more: 'the rules were serviceable because they created something that could be *given up* as well as *given use*' (1954: 174. Italics original). This was the case with COIs and RFIs, whereby the contractor undertook the works only to the minimum specification outlined in the instructions and no more; a kind of bureaucratic work to rule. 'Enabling bureaucracy' therefore, did not increase efficiency as Weber, or later advocates Adler and Borys (1996), maintain³. In fact it severely hindered the principles of lean production, blameless culture and pursuit of quality.

The alteration of instructions was not always due to lack of knowledge or foresight, but was thrown up by outside parties - third parties - frequently as a result of government legislation. It was what Mr. Jagers described as 'fire-fighting':

On a scheme like this in a number of ways it's fire-fighting because we have to respond to situations. So to give you an example, if we take the showers. The existing baths that were here were in an appalling state, and in fact, in my view they were environmentally unsafe. So that if an Environmental Health officer came along and if he looked at the bathrooms, his reaction would be they are not to be used and you are to replace them all. So that's one side of the issue, and the other side of the issue is that when you canvass tenants to their views, on what they want. Because ultimately that's here, we're providing a service to the tenants, they're the end users, they're paying for it. And they

³ Adler and Borys (1996), in critique of Gouldner, term these types of formalisation 'enabling bureaucracy'. They view these methods positively because they enable innovation whilst at the same time monitoring it. However it was seen in practice at Keyworker House that the parties used formal methods to do work only to the minimum requirement. In this specific case therefore, enabling bureaucracy cannot be viewed as having the positive outcomes that Adler and Borys maintain.

don't want baths, they want showers. So we say right, what we'll do is we'll put showers in. Then Environmental Health come back and say, 'well hang about a moment, we got standards you got to work to, and it doesn't allow you to put showers in'. So we say hang on a moment, everyone wants showers, and they say 'I'll tell you what', after a long period of discussion and negotiation, 'we'll do a deal with you. You can have 50 percent baths and 50 percent showers'. Now, we have to respond to that, that's fire-fighting because then we go back to Topbuild and say look, we thought you were gonna do 100 percent showers but you're not, you're gonna do 50 percent showers. And it's very difficult to legislate, yes, knowing what they are doing. Now, that's how we have to respond. It's third party intervention that affects that relationship. And it's maybe the case that Topbuild think every time we change something that we're doing it for the sake of it, but it's not, in the majority of cases it's responding to events.

To confound regulatory problems and endemic arse-covering, there were also many residents of Keyworker House who continued to use and live in the building throughout the works. In this sense, the product of an old build is specifically problematic because it is being produced and consumed simultaneously.

The key workers and other users had to live and work on a building site for 65 weeks. Their privacy was invaded by electricians and plumbers entering their rooms, and carpenters and by painters walking around the scaffold outside the windows of their bedrooms, bathrooms and toilets. In effect, they were surrounded by builders and building work both inside and out. The difficulties were further amplified because the key workers worked shifts, and consequently would be trying to sleep during the day when the builders were working. And, building work is often very noisy. Out on the scaffold the hum of masons' generators, labourers' pneumatics, and carpenters' drills, saws and hammers, echoed through the building and, in this noise, the builders had to shout to find and communicate with one another. In addition, the vast majority of key workers were also women. There were numerous complaints about the language and actions of the builders that management had to deal with.

Most of the conflicts manifest in the site office rarely filtered down to those who were actually making the product, the tradesmen and labourers. Notices were placed on the scaffold specifying: 'No shouting, No smoking, No mobile phones, No swearing'. This was as much as the tradesmen and labourers saw of the intricate negotiations between the parties, and nobody took much notice of the rules and orders anyway (see chapters 6 and 7). To a builder, the scaffold is his workplace, and it was exceptionally difficult to view it as attached to someone's home. It was even more difficult not to swear if one trapped his fingers in a poorly weighted old sash window, got a splinter in his hand, or banged his knee on a scaffold bolt. Many such actions

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were distasteful to some key workers, and only a very small percentage needed to complain to make it seem like all were against the builders. This could and did occasionally generate negative attitudes and conflict between the builders and some key workers.

The builders' lack of adherence to the managers' rules reflected in part the lack of control that managers had over tradesmen (the situation of labourers was slightly different, see chapter 6). The site-manager's job in relation to the workers was not really one of control therefore, but of orchestration. Project and site managers organised bodies in space and time; they did not organise the movements of those bodies. Managers organised the flow of the work in time because of construction's sequential and interdependent nature, but they did not control the build or the builders (see chapters 6 and 7).

Friends or Strangers?

In a quality circle, such as in a Japanese car plant, all workers are provided with the opportunity to discuss problems in the production sequence, and enabled to rectify any faults before they begin to occur in future production. At Keyworker House, the spatial, cultural, and interest divisions between the separate trades and parties were so vast that one trade never really knew what another was doing or where they were situated in space. The mere existence of a management hierarchy actually confounded problems of co-ordination. If there was no hierarchy, the trades would be forced to communicate with one another to ascertain where each other's work was leading in the sequence. However, in working for a general contractor, it was seen as the contractor's responsibility to co-ordinate the build, and, consequently, the site managers were relied upon to do this. Management hierarchies can therefore prevent co-ordination, no matter what kind of organisational logic they are operating under. The trades remained independent, divided and sometimes with conflicting aims.

There were mixed responses from the site management and consultants as to whether or not the partnering agreement had been successful. Illustrative of the problems, Mr Jagers said, 'I think if this job had been run on a traditional basis we'd probably end up in court. That's how bad it is [in the building industry]'. It was telling all the parties termed the agreement a partnering 'contract', but the essence of a partnering agreement is that there is no contract. Its whole ethos was lost to some

extent. To the parties it meant an open(ish) book, a long run of work, and a contingency fund. It did not mean being partners on a quest for lean production.

It makes sense to integrate separate parties and trades into the organisation of a build and there is ample evidence to verify its effectiveness (See Bennett, 2000). Foster (1969) utilised trade integration with some success in his small building firm in the late 1950s. He termed his method 'circular management', which was the forerunner of Japanese style quality circles, total quality management, and partnering systems. Foster however, directly employed his foremen and tradesmen, and consequently, did not face the same trade divisions as those at Keyworker House.

At Keyworker House it was the long-term nature of the agreement that had been effective. The work moved from one building to the next and became increasingly predictable to undertake. The contractor and subcontractors had a better knowledge of what the follow-on works would involve when they finished each phase of the work. This was also the case for the tradesmen, whose knowledge evolved as each part of their work was completed. For instance, as a painter, my work to the sash windows became faster and faster with each phase of the decoration process; once a course of windows was completed I could see how to get around the problems that emerged when I worked on the next course (see chapter 7). It tends to make sense therefore to contract workers and parties who are long-term and, long-termism can also prevent price under-cutting and the related poor quality work. Long-termism was implicit in the setting up of DLOs of the past, where there could be no conflict of interests because the contractor and client were the same party.

State-Work Paradox

A paradox has arisen in the organisation of State-commissioned building work. To make works cheaper, more efficient, less risky, and less corrupt than existing direct labour systems, the Thatcher government introduced competitive tendering and contracting-out. A decade after its introduction, the Conservatives and their task forces concluded the new arrangement had led to an adversarial and litigious culture with poor quality work and time over-runs. Research suggested that the way around the problems was to decrease competition and introduce longer-term relationships. Competitive free markets were essentially transformed back to non-competitive cartel-type organisations (see chapter 9), and a new variant of direct labour evolved in

the form of partnering agreements. This was not analogous to direct labour because the workers (excluding the site management and surveyors) would all be technically self-employed, and therefore, receive almost no working rights at all. Furthermore, an expensive and essentially non-productive layer of bureaucrats and middlemen (consultants, higher contractor management and subcontractors) was introduced into construction organisation. And, the manual workers, although remaining self-employed, became long-term.

Many of the manual workers at Keyworker House had worked for the same subcontractors for a very long duration, for up to 25 years, and the subcontractors worked with Topbuild for similar lengths of time. This type of organisation was comparable to Eccles' (1981b) 'quasifirm' which he claimed was almost universal in the building industry (see chapter 9). Furthermore, because building workers were relatively independent of management control, they possessed an autonomous workplace power that enabled them to disregard managerial directions. It was this that partly supplied the negative image of direct employment as unproductive in the first place, but it was the same worker power that re-emerged on site at Keyworker House, and explained why the build was described by the workers as a 'holiday camp' (see chapter 6). It appeared that Government policies had turned almost full circle.

Despite the lack of trust and co-operation between Assured Consultants and Topbuild, the partnering agreement had borne benefits to some of the parties. Opportune Housing, Assured Consultants and Topbuild were all profiting from the arrangement. The second phase of the build was not put out to tender because the works formed a continuation of the partnering agreement. Steve told me that Topbuild would have never procured the second phase in a competitive tender because they now knew many of the hidden costs involved in the build. Their accumulated knowledge and experience meant that the second phase would be done more quickly, effectively, and for a larger profit for Topbuild. Kevin priced the next 'Year 2' works with a 15-20 percent profit margin, significantly higher than the usual 1-2 percent on most large building projects (Bresnan, 1990). Assured Consultants also benefited because they would continue to consult throughout the Year 2 works. However, the arrangement bore negative benefits for the key workers because the PFI and the partnering agreement was accompanied by layers and layers of management and middlemen who extracted a percentage of their rent money, which was of course, public taxation.

Similarly, the tradesmen and labourers lost out because they forfeited almost all of their employment rights through the subcontract system.

In the next chapter I focus on subcontractors and their relationships with their manual worker employees. These relationships had a significant impact on the build, on the builders' lives, and were central to the ethnically bound trade divisions present at the Keyworker House build.

Chapter 4

Subcontracting and Trade Enclaves

Chapter 3 described the relationships and organisation of the interdependent but disparate parties involved in the build. This chapter extends that analysis by focusing on the emergence and composition of the subcontract system. The tradesmen and labourers who physically constructed the build were not employed directly by Topbuild, but *via* their subcontract trade representatives, which had a salient impact on employment patterns present at Keyworker House.

The 'Subby'

Topbuild was a knowledge broker. Akin to other general contractors they did not directly build anything nor own any means of production. They provided the management resources, co-ordination and regulatory knowledge to construct buildings. They owned computers, methods of administration and managers, they did not own men or machinery. Topbuild were a 'hollowed out' contracting company (Harvey, 2003) where machinery, human skill and labour were contracted-in by trade specific subcontractors.

Emergence and Function

General contractors compete and undercut one another to win contracts. This results in shrinking profit margins, which are an inherently risky enterprise because of the uncertainties involved in building work (see chapter 1). To reduce risks, contractors hand out smaller trade-specific parts of the works to subcontractors. Subcontractors, who originally evolved from the ranks of entrepreneurial master craftsmen, bid for their sections of the works, thereby taking on part of the risk of the total costs of the construction. To reduce their own risks, subcontractors commonly undertake work for more than one building company, and charge approximately 50 percent extra on top of their total wage costs¹. Eccles (1981a) argues that widespread subcontracting in the building industry is a response to inherent uncertainty, and, the more complex the build, the more contractors rely on subcontractors.

¹ Calculated by comparing subcontractor invoices for daily wage rates to the actual wages paid to the builders. I did not have the necessary skills to calculate subcontractors' profits on lump sum works.

Trade specialisation and divisions of building labour disperse construction knowledge into many separate trade groups. As a result, general contractors require trade-based subcontractors to conduct the specialist and disparate parts of the build for them. Shane, the project manager, reflected on this:

You have to deal with I don't know how many different trades, and you either know a little bit about all the trades or a lot about a few of them. So you rely on them [tradesmen and subcontractors] to do their jobs properly, which is the uncertain, the unknown, which I don't like. Not that I could ever know every single trade inside out so that I knew when I was getting the wool pulled over, or it wasn't being done correctly... If you could get a good knowledge in every trade then I would be quite happy, but you can't, you have to rely on people. That's the one thing I don't like about my job. Some people expect you, being the site manager, to know what the fuck you're talking about, but you can't personally know everything. But I suppose having the carpentry background helps, that's a general knowledge, a lot of everything [in building] stems from it.

Subcontractors also form links between contractor and worker. They band together tradesmen or labour for the contractor and find work for tradesman. They require a thorough understanding of their trade so they are able to estimate the costs of works, and competitively tender for them, and, in this sense, they are also knowledge brokers. The business acumen subcontractors must possess differs from the skill of the archaic guild-masters whose positions and standings were predicated on building ability rather than entrepreneurship (see chapter 1).

Proliferation and Specialisation

Although subcontractors grew from the building guilds, there are today many more trade specialisations than existed in the past. New technologies and building services necessitated the development of new trades, for example, the electrician or the steel erector. Also, increasing complexity and specialisation fractured building tasks. For instance, the development of new roofing technologies and materials drove part of the plumbers' work of keeping water out of a built structure to the roofer, and plumbers came to specialise in fitting and fixing piping. Regulatory measures also facilitated the development of new trades, such as asbestos removal experts, water purification contractors, or fire alarm specialists. In addition, building often requires the use of large or expensive machinery, such as earthmovers and diggers, motor-powered cranes or scaffolding. Contractors require this equipment infrequently and thus subcontractors specialise in supplying it.

At Keyworker House there were 29 different subcontractors employed on various parts of the build, more than double the number of medieval building guilds. Topbuild employed specialist subcontractors for every aspect of the works: drilling, brick cleaning, pest prevention, roofing, tree cutting, vinyl-floor and carpet laying, mastic application, fire alarm installation, water purification, drainage, and lift maintenance. They also subcontracted the more traditional specialisations: tiling, plumbing, electrics, carpentry, joinery, masonry, ground-work, labouring, painting, plastering, scaffolding, iron mongery, welding, and glazing. A different subcontractor represented each separate specialisation. In some cases there were long chains of subcontractors between the working tradesman and the organising contractor. For example, the 'sand-blaster-brick-cleaner-man' ('Blaster bloke') was subcontracted by his boss/work mate, who in turn subcontracted to a steam-cleaning company, that subcontracted to the main masonry subcontractor, that subcontracted to Topbuild, that contracted to the housing association, that were contracted to the government department. Only 2 men did the brick cleaning, but 5 layers of middlemen 'managed' their work. It can be no wonder that builders often try their hand at entrepreneurial subcontracting in order to cut-out the long lines of middlemen that stand between them and their wages.

Becoming a subcontractor, employing others and supplying labour, was contingent upon having or creating sufficient networks to find labour, possessing the capital to pay that labour, having the business acumen and skills to estimate and plan works, and upon finding the necessary knowledge concerning potential contracts to tender for. Subcontracting is a risky business. The unpredictability of building work hinders the formation of accurate estimations of the costs of works, and when building contractors go bankrupt, it is unlikely that their subcontractors will be paid. The biography of Coat's Decoration highlighted the risky and entrepreneurial nature of subcontracting, as Ernie Coat explained:

When I started decorating I worked on the tools for about 7 years. I thought to myself, well, you know, because I've been a person, always had a business of my own [previous to being a building subcontractor, Ernie owned a motor mechanics garage]. So I decided this is not the right thing to be doing. I should be picking up the work myself. So I started doing small jobs, basically advertising in the local paper and going from there. Then I got into contractual work, as I now still do. Now I do no private work at all, I only do large contract work because people wanting their houses done want them done to a high standard but they're not prepared to pay the money. So I thought to myself, this is not the way to go, we'll go elsewhere, different way from the rest. I went into this and I'm still here.

DT: How did you make the step into working with big contractors?

Basically because I done a job for a contracts manager, unknowingly he was a contracts manager at that time, and, he just offered me would I price a job up for the company he was working with, and in actual fact it was Topbuild. I priced the job up for them and I won it. So it was a matter of being in the right place at the right time... It was a lump-sum price so it didn't cause me a problem about pricing it. But once I got into it I found that I needed to sort of get the surveying side of it so that the contractor's surveyors wouldn't be able to pull the wool over my eyes. So then I went into that. I didn't get any qualifications for it, I just went to night school and picked it up, really it's self-explanatory in any case, measuring the work. Once you know the remit, what to measure, and the way to measure, it's basic common sense... I've been working with Topbuild I suppose 30 years. I've done a lot of work for them, some good, some bad. You always get a job that you're going to lose money on, because you either make a mistake on the lump-sum price or things have just gone wrong. That's just what I term as a swings and roundabouts situation. Somewhere along the line you're going to make a mistake on pricing the job. You've just got to grin and bear it, and think to yourself well, I won't do that again. You learn by your mistakes basically, and I think all companies are the same. I should imagine even Topbuild will make a mistake in pricing, in fact I know they do because I've been on some of the jobs where they have made mistakes on prices. But yes, I do a lot of work for Topbuild, plus other companies obviously, I do a lot of work for [3 other construction companies], but I don't work for other companies who are no longer in business, they've just wound up.

DT: Have you ever had any problems like that in the sense that they go bust and don't pay you?

Oh yes. I've had 4 companies go broke on me, McBuild being the worst. He done me for £75,000. But again you've either got to bury your head in the sand or just pick yourself up and get on with it. Because obviously it wiped out a lot of my money, basically that's a lot of money. But again it's a lesson I learned, and I will not allow a company to go too far in debt to me. I'll only let a certain time pass and then I'll start shouting. If nothing comes through, then I stop the work. But I pride myself with the fact that I've never ever not paid any of my blokes [employees]. The site I was on when McBuild went broke, the blokes all got paid. There's no reason why they should lose, they were working for me and I paid them, I was the one who suffered... Several people [subcontractors] I know have gone broke through companies going bust on them, and it's left them in such a situation where they can't pay [their employees] because they haven't got the money. One close friend of mine, he lost everything he had through a company going broke on him... It was so much pity. And this is why some of the laws are wrong in this country. McBuild who went broke on me, it didn't harm him Mr McBuild himself. He still lives in a massive great big house in Maida Vale, he's still driving about in a big flash car, and he's got £75,000 of my money! They should be responsible for their debts, but they're not, because they're a limited company they're not responsible... No, I didn't even get a penny in the pound.

DT: Does that worry you in your day-to-day life that it's possible you could go under?

Well no, I never put myself, hopefully, touching wood, saying it, I don't put myself in the position where if a company went broke on me I wouldn't be able to fund that break. I got caught very badly with McBuild and I would never allow any payments to go up that high again. I won't do that now. I mean with Topbuild, I will not allow payments all to be at the same time. And if they won't accept that, then I don't do the

job. Payments will be when I want the payments to be, not when they want them to be...

Flexibility and Specialisation

Piore and Sabel (1984) argued that a new form of industrialisation was emerging in intense capitalist societies in the early 1980s, associated with the decline of mass-markets and the rise of individualised consumption. In response to changing markets, small adaptable companies were emerging, organised to be flexible enough to cope with the demands of heterogeneous product markets. Piore and Sabel viewed this as a positive process that would break down monopolies and enrich work tasks. Workers would be re-skilled, undertaking varied tasks in small 'high-tech' cottage industries such as Silicon Valley or 'Third Italy', in North America and Europe respectively.

Debates circulated in the sociology of work as to whether an era of 'post-Fordism' had arrived, and if it had, whether or not it would enrich the labour process. Portes *et al* (1989) argued that flexible market demands were met by a global expansion in small-batch subcontracting. The subcontract system provided flexibility to main contractors because individual workers, mostly under the control of piecework, could alter small parts of the task under little instruction or reorganisation from employers. The labour force had become flexible because workers in the subcontract system possessed few working rites and were easily disposable (See also Hyman and Streek, 1989).

Since their inception in the late 18th century (Cooney, 1955) building contractors were 'flexible specialists'. All built structures have similar but different physical configurations. They are a variation on a theme (LeCorbusier, [1923] 1987), much like the plethora of products made for mass consumption (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1972; Pollert, 1991; Ritzer, 1996). Building contractors tend to concentrate on specific types of building works, like infrastructure or housing. In this sense, they specialise, but they must also maintain flexibility because of the variable, or 'one-off', character of their product (Bresnan, 1990). As a result, general contractors utilised the services of subcontractors. Subcontracting provides contractors with large numbers of labour at short notice and, because subcontracted building employees are almost completely casualised and possess very few employment rights, labour can be dismissed instantly when the work is completed.

The extreme competition and market volatility characteristic of the building industry facilitates reliance upon subcontracting. If a building contractor is unable to procure new projects they can instantly 'down-size' or 'up-size' because they possess little machinery, industrial space or directly employed workers to pay for. Subcontracting provides large numbers of labour at short notice, and because there are few employment rights granted to subcontracted employees, labour can be dismissed instantly when the work is completed. However, whilst subcontracting may be a type of work organisation adapted to deal with variable product markets, it is not the only organisational type suitable. The guilds, and the countless other artisans in the medieval period, produced 'one-off' products for hundreds of years. In this sense, subcontracting and 'post-Fordism' are pre-Fordist; a reaction of employers to volatile markets and labour movement power. As Hyman and Streek (1988) maintain, subcontracting and peripheralism is the norm in the service sector, another casual, non-unionised industry where workers possess little collective power, similar in this sense, to the building industry.

Subcontracting and Ethnic Diversity

The building industry has a long history of migrant labour. This is illustrated by the Old French origins of the contemporary English names for many building tools and techniques. Terms including: bucket, mallet, trowel, mitre, scaffold, pulley, fitch, emery and chisel, emanated from Norman tradesmen who lived and worked in many of Britain's major cities from the 12th century onwards. They originally worked on the prestigious buildings of the conquering aristocracy but their influence spread into British guilds and building trades in general. 350 years later, Coleman (1965) describes how the crews of navvies who built the Paris railways in the 1840's, between them spoke 13 different European languages, and they were reported to have developed a *lingua franca* that was spoken on railway works throughout Europe. When they built the British railways, the navvies would necessarily 'pitch-in' together, but they were also fiercely internally divided by region and religion, where Irish Catholics were subjected to quite severe ill-treatment (Coleman, 1965).

At Keyworker House, the different trade groups were also divided by religion and race. An extraordinarily diverse group of men worked on the build. Their ages ranged from 16 to 69; their religious affiliations included various denominations of Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. I met men from Albania, the Seychelles, the

Caribbean; various parts of India, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Russia, Hungary, Bosnia, Kosovo, Spain, Southern and Northern Ireland, Scotland and various areas of England. London has a long migrant history (see Holmes, 1988; Hobbs, 1988; Bowling, 1999), and consequently so do its builders. The building industry, in London is multicultural, and has long been a first stopping point for migrant groups. It is the physical body that is the essential ingredient to build something, not culture, personality or language (see chapter 5). From my own anecdotal experience working on building sites in London I find it extraordinary that official statistics show ethnic groups representing only 2.3 percent of total construction workforce in England and Wales (CITB, 2000)². At Keyworker House, white English tradesmen were a minority, albeit a large one.

Geography, Division and Ethnicity

Sequentialism and trade specialisation necessitates building work divisions because the different trades do not and cannot work side by side (see chapter 1). At Keyworker House, physical and organisational work divisions were reinforced by and interlaced with cultural and racial divisions.

Interaction on building sites is commonly quite perfunctory and superficial, following the conventions of masculine-saturated talk, humorous comment or football team jibe (see chapters 7 and 8). The separate trades rarely stopped work to discuss religious, political or emotional matters because such discussions could be risky, facilitating conflict and piss-taking between the plural cultures and races (see chapters 8 and 9). Friendships were drawn from *within* the trades and not between them: the carpenters were friends with the carpenters, the painters with the painters, the labourers with the labourers etc. Although the 5 main groups worked on the site for the majority of the build's duration, and men of different trades were familiar with one another from transient and fleeting contact over the years, they were socially and physically divided. Their work took place in separate spaces, as did their rest breaks and out of work socialising. Many had worked for the same subcontractors for many years, consequently members of the separate trades were familiar with one another

² I was unable to find ethnic minority statistics for London's building industry but in consideration that the 2001 Census showed that 29.9 percent of all Londoners were non-English, it can be assumed they form a higher percentage of London's builders than national statistics indicate.

but did not associate to a very large extent, although there was a certain amount of integration between the site management and the labourers (see chapter 6).

Fig. 4.0: Map to Illustrate Geographic Distribution of Trade Neighbourhoods³



Subcontract Trade Groups

Fig. 2:1 illustrates how each of the trades, with the exception of mechanical and electrical, represented culturally and geographically divided and enclaved groups. At first sight this appeared unusual but similar patterns have been found in other workplaces (particularly in North America, see Franklin, 1936; Zaretsky, 1984). The socio-geographical patterns were the result of what Jamin, the carpentry and general foreman, described as ‘everyone getting their mate’s jobs’, and reflected sociologists’ descriptions of the patterning of informal social networks (c.f. Granovetter, 1974). I will discuss social networks more fully below, but first I provide a concise description of the composition of each of the main subcontract groups.

³ The numbers of points on the map are deliberately ambiguous. This is because I was unsure how many men each subcontractor employed. I overheard talk about various employees whom the builders had seen in their local pubs, streets and homes concerning those that had worked for Topbuild’s subcontractors and those that were retired or sick.

McMurray's Labour

The labour subcontractor, Paddy McMurray, was in his late 60s and had, with masses of other Irishmen and women, migrated from the rural south of his country during the severe downturn in the Irish economy in the 1950s. The majority of McMurray's employees followed a similar path; migrating from impoverished rural Ireland to industrial England in a time of the large rebuilding projects in English cities following World War Two. The 1961 Census revealed almost 1 million Irish living in Great Britain (Homes, 1988). Some had left Ireland through lack of employment resulting from the mechanisation of farming, others through over-population and rent rises on their family smallholdings, others because of complicated patterns of inheritance, and others to escape religious conservatism. They followed a migratory trend that had begun in the early 19th century when large numbers⁴ of Irish labourers settled in industrialising English and Scottish cities to labour manually on the canals, railways, factories, docks, and the building projects of the industrial revolution (Davis, 2000). The 1951 Census indicates that one third of all Irish migrants in England and Wales had settled in London.

Jokes abounded at Topbuild that Paddy McMurray did not employ men under 65 years of age. The jokes only partly reflected reality because he also employed a second wave of late 20th century migrants who had left Ireland during the 1980 recession. Over 50 percent of Irish migrant men find themselves working in the building industry (Haplin, 2000). The bodily labour involved in working in agriculture in Ireland was easily transferable to semi-skilled building work in urban areas in Britain. The Irish are famed in British discourse for their physical strength. However, they were both historically and contemporarily subject to derogatory racism concerning their mental skills, and many experienced very tough working lives.

In addition to the Irish migrants employed by McMurray's there were a number of second generation Irish. All except one had links to Paddy McMurray through their fathers whom had worked as ground-workers. Aidan was one such example. His father grew up in the same village as Paddy McMurray and had later worked for him as a 'tea boy' until he was 71 years old. This reflected MacAmhlaigh's (1961) labouring experiences, who suggests that during the 1950s

⁴ In the 1841 Census there were almost 300,000 Irish recorded as living in England and Wales, 1.8 percent of the total population (Holmes, 1988). Yet because of the open boarders between Ireland and England there were probably many more Irish in England but not registered in census data.

Irish builders were internally divided by local region: men from County Cork worked with men from County Cork, men from County Kerry worked with men from County Kerry, etc⁵. At Keyworker House these divisions had broken down, apparently because of dwindling numbers of Irish migrant labour (see below).

Only one of the labourers was not subcontracted by McMurray's. Mickey T subcontracted himself and 3 men to other Topbuild jobs. He was the 'tea boy' at Keyworker House, which meant he made and fetched the tea, and washed and tidied up. When he completed his 'domestic duties' for the day, he worked with the other labourers drilling holes, concreting, filling skips, carrying plant and materials, and sweeping up. Mickey T retired during my field-work aged 67:

What would you want to interview me for? What you see me doing here today I've done all my life [he is standing with a shovel in his hand]. If you speak to one of us you'll know the life of all of us (laughs) ... I left Ireland in 1952 at the age of 15, and since then I've done pretty much every kind of job in the building apart from brick-work... Back home my parents had a few acres, smallholding like. We had 5 cows and 2 pigs. In the summer we'd harvest the sea: sea grass, shellfish, mackerels and salmon. We'd sell the salmon and salt-up the mackerel and herring and two pigs for the winter. I had 14 brothers and sisters see, and only two rooms in the house, one for the parents and the other for the kids who slept 7 to a bed, top to tail. And it was half a mile to the nearest well. So when I got to 15 I felt I should get out (laughs)... There were a million Irish in England at that time, all sending £2 a week back home, that was a rake [a lot] of money for Ireland. People slag-off England but it's one of the only countries in the world that look after you when you're sick... I've been cold and I've been wet, but I've never been hungry since I've been in England. (Field notes)

All the older labourers were skilled ground-workers. They had served their time working on roads, tunnels, sewers and foundation works. For them, working for Topbuild was semi-retirement, earning a small but regular wage, shielded from the weather and only sporadically highly physical (see chapter 6). Mickey T could still work harder and faster than I could, despite my being quite fit and 36 years his junior. The labourers were, with the exception of Mickey T, all South London Irish, living in and around Southwark, one of many Irish enclaves in London⁶, and were all Catholic and believers in its doctrine.

⁵ Anecdotally I have evidence that Irish regional divisions in London still exist on large and lucrative tunnelling jobs, in particular on the building of the channel tunnel. Thanks to James Ward for this information.

⁶ Irish enclaves in London are becoming increasingly indistinct. Second generation Irish tend to assimilate into English culture and many older Irish have returned to Ireland (Malcolm, 1996). Danny, the labour foreman, bemoaned the fall of the Irish community in a recorded interview. The traditional Irish pub, the centre of the community in London was, he said, fast becoming a thing of the past

*Turner's Carpentry*⁷

All of the carpenters were members of the diaspora from Kutch, a rural area of Gujarat in Northern India (excluding Jamin who was born in mid-Gujarat and an old school-friend of one of Turner's subcontractors). They were all Hindus, albeit to varying degrees of dedication and belief. Their forefathers left Kutch at the end of the 19th century to build the railway from Mombassa to Nairobi for the British East African Company where 5 Asian labourers (Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims) were killed for every mile of track they laid (Patel, 1979). When that railway was completed, many remained in East Africa to administer the empire for the British, and many Kutchis (and Ramgharia Sikhs, see Bhachu, 1985) formed their own building companies to construct and maintain the British Empire's infrastructure. Just as the Irish had built much of modern Britain's physical infrastructure, the Kutchis had built much of the British Empire in Africa.

Most Asians left Kenya and Uganda during the xenophobic phases of African nationalism in the late 1960s. Fearing the worst, they had come to Britain as subjects of the British crown, but those who remained in Uganda had been terrorised by Idi Amin's despotic rule, and in 1972 were ordered to leave the country within only 90 days. One of the carpenters, Naz, summarised part of the Kutchis' recent history:

I came here 1969. I was about 11 and a half. My parents came in 2 years earlier. My mum's father, he was in Africa, Mombassa, British used to rule. So he become a British citizen, and that automatically brings my mum British. So she got married, my father was in Africa, they moved back to India, Gujarat, and in '66 Harold Wilson bring out the law, British ladies can bring their husband [to Britain]... One of my grandfather's friend was educated. He lent my father money. He says 'it'll cost you 10,000 or 15,000 rupees to get to London'. He said 'I'll give you the money and when you get there then you pay me back'... So his son sent two tickets, or money equivalent, to India and my parents paid him in 3 months time or 4 months time whenever they've got the money. So that's how they came over...

We are, us, we are Kutchi Patels. We are known as the Kutchi Patels. We are known as farmers or builders, we speak farmer and builder language in Gujarat. We never had any other trades; we never had any industries in Kutch, no big industry where you can employ like 10 000 people, nothing like that, so either you are a builder or a farmer. It is known as the desert of Kutch.

The carpenters were toughened twice migrants from urban areas of East Africa, or of a second generation who grew up and went to school in Harlesden, West London. Harlesden was the geographic centre for the all of the carpenters, (except one who

⁷ I have used an Anglicised company name for the Asian carpenters because the actual company name was Anglicised.

lived in a less affluent East London Asian enclave), but some of the older men had moved out to a more affluent suburban neighbouring area (c.f. Park *et al*, 1925).

There were three 'bosses' of Turner's Carpentry, each of them also agnate Kutchi Carpenters. They had been in their subcontract position for 5 years, and because of this, were still fighting to ingrain their business relationships with Topbuild. To maintain and build these relationships they charged a low rate for their carpenters' labour, and were inclined to act with generosity towards Topbuild's management (see chapter 9).

Coat's Decoration

Ernie Coat's employees were a mixed collection of first and second generation Northern and Southern Irish, some Scottish, but mostly English tradesmen. All of them were white-skinned, which in my experience is rare amongst this occupational group in London. Many had worked for Coat's for a number of years (up to 35) 'on and off', and, similar to the labourers and carpenters, they knew each other in and out of work for many years. The vast majority lived in Edmonton in North London, their network member groups revolving around 5 public houses in Enfield Town, which acted as informal recruitment centres (see chapter 5). A clique of three younger painters lived in King's Cross, also in North London. They were linked to Coat's by one of their fathers who had moved out to Enfield. Similar to the carpenters who moved from Harlesden to a more affluent surrounding area, some of the Enfield painters originally grew up in King's Cross, but had left for the slightly more affluent and culturally homogenous Enfield.

Topbuild Managers

Topbuild's managers were not a subcontract group but they did form a distinct cultural group, which is why I include them here. The managers were all white Protestant English who lived in the rural towns of Kent in Southern England. 3 of the 5 managers rode in from Kent every morning on their motor bikes, as did 1 of the 2 quantity surveyors (one of whom also lived in Kent). Unlike to the subcontract groups, the managers were all quite young (aged between 23 to 40), which reflected Topbuild's project director's purposeful tactic of recruiting and training young site managers before they were seasoned by informal culture through long periods of time working 'on the tools' (see chapter 5).

The managers were all careerist builders in that they were willing and eager to ascend the hierarchy of command (to an extent – see chapter 6). Three of them entered formal apprenticeships upon leaving school and two of them had university qualifications. I will term them ‘new working class’ because they were enveloped in a career structure, had embraced meritocratic ideals and consumerism, and performed the related body and personality work, quite unlike the tradesmen and labourers (see chapters 5 and 8).

Spark's M and E

Spark's was a ‘family firm’ that employed both plumbers and electricians. In this sense, I refer to mechanical and electrical as a singular group rather than separately as plumbers and electricians. In contemporary service technology, plumbers and electricians must essentially do both of these trades because machines that regulate the flow of materials through pipes tend also to operate electronically. Plumbers and electricians also group and work together, which enables them to learn one another's skills. Spark's were not the subcontractor of Topbuild's choice because they had come ‘ready packaged’ with Assured Consultants, and this created problems for Topbuild's managers (see chapter 3 and 9).

Spark's were the only subcontract group that displayed geographically-dispersed and culturally-plural employment patterns. They employed men from the Caribbean, Scotland, second generation Irish, white English, and on occasion, Eastern Europe. This variation was a result of regulatory legislation and the related shortage of mechanical and electrical skills at the time of my research. As Bill, the mechanical and electrical foreman, explained:

The building [industry] is desperate for plumbers. You can't get plumbers for love nor money now. I mean we had plumbers, good plumbers, and I know some very, very good plumbers but we can't employ them because they're not Corgi [Council of Registered Gas Installers] registered. So the thing is, anything you install now, if you haven't got that certificate or that Corgi registration, it doesn't matter what plumber puts it in, if he hasn't got it then the contractor's in trouble. So we can't employ them, so we can't get a decent plumber. A lot of the kids have all gone into the computer side of it, and the ‘sparks’ [electricians] have all pulled out because there's easy money in data cabling, data wiring, fire alarms... This one guy Stan, he's about 55, an electrician for 40 years. He's got more experience in his little finger than most of the sparks today and yet he can't get a job because they want qualifications and he hasn't got none. He just learnt, he came through the trade, and you know he just can't get a job. Unless you've got that piece of paper you can't work in this trade.⁸

⁸ Bill was talking in general terms. Not all of Spark's employees possessed formal skill certificates, see the biography of Trick, chapter 5.

From the quick descriptions above (which do little justice to the complexity of the groups but will be expanded on throughout the thesis) it is evident that ‘birds of a feather flock together’, but only where there are plentiful skills in the network groups. Working for Topbuild was considered ‘cushy’. The rate of work was slow and it provided regular employment on relatively small building sites that were not the large, cold, impersonal and dangerous places that larger building sites tend to be. The majority of Topbuild’s work was for the State, and consequently it was not affected (to such a degree) by fluctuations in economic markets. Much of the work was also ‘old work’, and therefore, it mostly took place inside, shielded from the weather, and on projects that did not run to over £15 million (Topbuild’s father company, ‘Bigbuild’ did all works valued over £15 million).

Routes into employment at Topbuild were therefore blocked to others by the existing workforce being reluctant to leave. By contrast, the shortage of mechanical and electrical tradesmen forced Spark’s to advertise in the press and use the assistance of building agencies to find skilled labour. Some of their labour shortage problems were also the result of the poor transferability of these skills across different countries. For example, an electrician from Russia may take some time learning to use British equipment and adapt to regulatory specifications. To be employed by a large contractor he would have also to pass formal examinations (or possess the necessary contacts), which would be almost impossible for a non-English speaker. Bill reflected on this:

You get a fucking Jamaican turn up and I say to him you gotta do it this way and then he says, ‘no, we don’t do it like that, we do it like this’, I says, no, you gotta do it this way, it’s different over here, ‘Oh all right’. So the next one’s South African and he don’t know either, you know, because there’s so many different laws and different ways and regulations.

To a smaller extent, labour shortage was also operating in the labouring group. Paddy McMurray’s network groups were retiring, moving back to Ireland, or dying. He had some difficulty obtaining labour by informal means and had on occasion to employ anyone he could find, and, at Keyworker House, this was a Russian and a Spaniard. However, McMurray’s non-Irish labour were the first to be dismissed when work slowed and men were squeezed off site. In respect of this, all of McMurray’s regular workers remained South London Irish. Ethnic labour shortage processes were also at work for the Plastering subcontractor, Luke Screed. Luke was native to the

Seychelles, as were most of his workers, or they were the second generation. But due to the small numbers of the Seychelles diaspora in Britain⁹ he had to rely upon what was mostly Eastern European labour. Again, these were first to be laid off when work became scarce.

Social Networks and Ethnic Enclaves

Basic relationships in the [building] industry are for the most part informal and unstandardized... Perhaps more than workers in any other industry, the building workers function as independent units, each worker pursuing employment and making arrangements to apply his skills according to personal contacts, personal preference, and a personal schedule (Myers, 1946: 1)

Myers' ideas concerning builder preference and independence in North America were based upon an earlier text by C. L. Franklin (1936) who described how particular building trade foremen would employ men of their own race and culture to work with them: Jewish foremen employed Jewish tradesmen, Irish foremen employed Irish tradesmen etc. Myers argued this was the result of the corporal nature of trade foremen's work; they spent the majority of their workday side by side with those they recruited, and they preferred to work alongside people of their own ethnic affiliation. Whilst it does appear that 'people like people like themselves' (Newcomb, 1961; Rubin, 1973), Myers failed to recognise that informal recruitment methods and ethnic network divides would block access to information about jobs to those that were not members of foremen's ethnic networks.¹⁰

Constructing Recruitment

Granovetter (1974) has suggested that employment opportunity, and thus a substantial aspect of social structure, was to a large extent the result of an individual's contact networks. Social networks can be 'earned' and manipulated to a degree (Boissevain, 1974), but are also largely ascribed and contingent. Individuals are born into a network group predominantly centred around a family and, during the course of their life-trajectories individuals become increasingly

⁹ The numbers were so small that the Seychellians do not appear in minority ethnic statistics as a distinct group.

¹⁰ Racial divisions in the unionised sector of the North American building industry are today almost monopolised by particular ingrained ethnic groups. This is quite unlike the situation in Britain because there has never been the strong union controls over the industry that existed in North America, yet Union power in the North American building industry rapidly declined since 1955, according to Thieblot (2001). This had mixed effects for more recent migrants. Sassen-Koob, (1989) describes how Mexican migrants obtained a foothold in New York's building industry in the non-union 'old build' sector, but they were not granted the formal working rights that unionised builders expect. Arguably however, any job is better than no job at all.

bound up in these groups (Becker, 1963). In other words, our future contacts and social trajectories are contingent upon our past contacts. Educational qualifications and money capital may negate the necessity of ascribed contacts (to a degree). However, the majority of the builders bypassed formal education, and recent migrants found that their education was worthless in England's host economy. For the builders, their bodily skills and social contacts were their sole social capital.

Granovetter's research on middle-class workers showed that 56 percent obtained their current job through personal contacts. In my own research, out of the permanent groups on site, only a very small percentage obtained their jobs through formal mechanisms (the majority of these were mechanical and electrical workers). 90 percent of the total workforce had obtained their jobs through social networks, mostly family and to a lesser extent, neighbourhood friends (see also Hill, 1976; Grieko, 1987, and chapter 5). This factor, noted by Jamin above, clearly explains the patterns presented in fig 2.1. Furthermore, as Granovetter argues, it is not that all jobs are obtained through network information, but good jobs, and, as I have already argued, Topbuild's jobs were considered good jobs.

Recruitment and Trust

In an article focussing on mains-gas pipeline construction workers, Graves (1970) discovered that 100 percent of pipeline workers were recruited through informal social networks. Many of the 'bunches' of gang workers were family groups: fathers and sons, brothers and brother in-laws. He argued:

Exchange arrangements, in the form of work related favours, seem to be the principal kind of mechanism that organises the seasonal movement of the pipeline labour force... Crews are formed, and workers find work through personal contacts rather than through formal means. (1970: 73)

Graves viewed the nepotistic nature of pipeline employment as a result of the extreme ephemerality of pipeline construction work. Pipelines must necessarily be built across large geographic areas and their builders must move across space with them. Furthermore, parts of pipeline construction only take short periods of time to build. Pipeline builders, then, work only for short durations, usually for between one and two weeks, and then have to find more work. Pipeline contractors by extension, require semi-skilled and skilled labour in short periods of time. They also need to be able to 'trust' that labour because of the problems of monitoring the work across such

vast distances, and informal networks ensure skilled and trusted pipeline gangs can be found quickly (see also Graves, 1958).

The ephemeral nature of pipeline construction is similar to that of building industry organisational patterns in general, albeit to a more extreme level. In ephemeral work organisation, social networks become especially effective because large numbers of workers must be disbanded and formed in short and irregular periods of time. In addition, the problems of monitoring a mobile workforce across large distances, require that labour must be 'trusted' to carry out the work at an efficient speed and to a required standard (see chapter 6).

Whilst informal networks recruit labour at almost zero cost, they also find a particular type of labour. Grieko (1987) argues that employers prefer to utilise networked labour because it reduces recruitment costs, screens and informally trains potential labour, and provides a certain amount of control over new recruits through the favour-giving and receiving mechanism. As Ernie Coat mentioned:

Basically it's people who know people. If I'm looking for painters I might say to the lads, I'm looking to take more lads on, if there's anybody you know? And of course in the building trade you'll find a lot of people know a lot of people. So, somebody might have said to them the week before, 'look I've been laid off, I've got no work'. So they ring them, they ring me, and that's how it comes that so many people know each other, word of mouth.

DT. And do you prefer that, in that your painters are coming with a kind of recommendation?

Well yes. I had an incident last week where I took 2 lads on. Although they were recommended by somebody else, a site agent [manager], but they were bloody useless. But normally if one of the lads said, 'my mate's a painter', they normally are. It does work out better through that way than advertising, as with advertising you don't know what your gonna get. We had to advertise when we was down at Lampet Street a couple of years ago because the job all of a sudden got pushed forward and they wanted everything done, so I had to get more blokes. And we advertised in the *Standard* [London-based Newspaper]. We took on 12, 4 of them were no good at all but 8 of them were good and they stayed for the duration of the job. You're always going to get the odd one when you advertise that's going to be no bloody good. That's part of the building trade.

Through tapping into family and neighbourhood networks, Ernie was afforded a modicum of certainty as to the skill and character of his employees. Thus social networks not only relayed information, but the quality of that information are perceived as reliable and was thus trusted. Trust mechanisms functioned beneficially for potential workers, existing work groups and subcontractors. New recruits could rely on the 'intensive information' they received through their network which may

indicate that Ernie Coat always pays wages on time, in cash, gives regular 'subs', tends to have long durations of work, and does not always ask for a CIS card (see chapter 10). Work groups inherit a colleague who is 'like them', with whom they can get along and who is already integrated into a known network. In this sense, the existing work group will usually know something about the new worker, or at least they will know others that know something about him. And, subcontractors receive workers whose skill levels can be predicted, or who will be informally instructed by the work group. Again, Ernie Coat said:

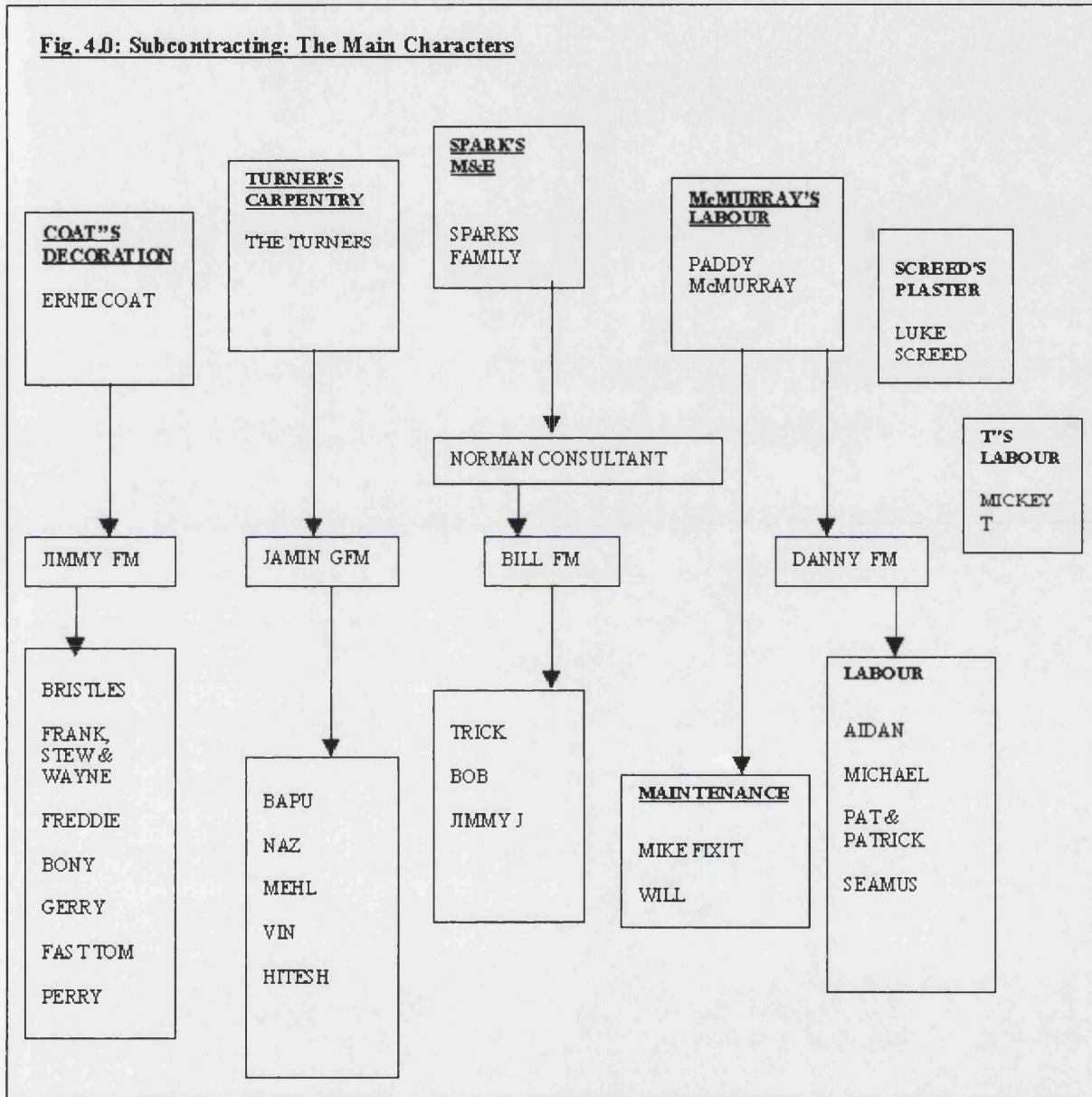
We do give some of them a chance. If you can see they might be all right if they get into the right rhythm then, you know, we will tolerate it for a week or so. But if they're no good at all then it's normally a day, if they haven't picked themselves up, then that's it, gone. It's the only way to do it.

Ernie's words were sterner than in practice. Those that were 'all right' were tolerated for much longer periods than one week, especially if they were linked into the workgroup. This was because the workgroup would informally train 'friends of friends' and/or if they became popular characters (see Grieko, 1987, and chapters 5 and 6).

Informal networks provided information concerning work and workers, and projected an element of social control onto networked employees. In this sense, networks provided cheap recruitment and training of labour. Furthermore, in finding employment for friends of friends, the network reinforced itself because members became bound to one another through the elasticity of the favour mechanisms that ordered their networks (see chapter 9). This, in part, explained the geographic and racial patterns evident at Keyworker House.

I will expand upon issues of reciprocity, trust, social networks and racial dynamics in chapter 9. Firstly, in the next chapter, I describe the detailed processes that led the builders to becoming builders, the informal processes that framed their trajectories, how they retrospectively constructed their life narratives, and, the effects these elements had upon their cultures and work-life trajectories.

Fig. 4.0: Subcontracting: The Main Characters



Chapter 5

Becoming a Builder

The previous chapter described how the informal nature of employment and recruitment practices in the building subcontract system were related to the ethnic, geographic and social patterns evident at Keyworker House. In this chapter I examine the broader long-term processes that guided the builders into their careers, their personal biographies and social backgrounds, and how they retrospectively constructed and narrated those biographies.

Types of Builder

I present four 'types' of trajectories in becoming a builder. The types were not applied by the builders themselves, but were superimposed by me in my analysis of their life stories. At work the builders categorised themselves and one another primarily by trade, and secondarily by ethnicity and geographic neighbourhood. Collective forms of working-class masculinity tended to subsume the builders' individuality in some contexts, making it almost impossible to distinguish between the builders with respect to their varied routes into becoming builders (see chapters 7 and 8). I have applied types simply to carve some order and meaning out of the builders' very individual lives and experiences. The types are not therefore exhaustive, but were amongst the most common paths followed into the building industry. They are included because the culture of a building site does not arise entirely at the site of workplace interaction itself. It is framed and influenced by the social and cultural backdrops that the men carried with them to the workplace.

The Death of Class?

Commentators on the macro-social structure of developed nations, such as Bell (1974), and Lash and Urry (1987), argue that productive infrastructures in intense capitalism have shifted to a post-industrial form. Post-industrial economies were based upon knowledge, service and consumption, resulting in a growing and affluent consumer middle-class, and a shrinking productive working-class. Whilst this does appear to be the case, the 'old' industrial class system continues to have an impact on people's lives in the form of social background, upbringing and the social networks

individuals experience and create in the early, formative years of their lives. As Cannadine (1999) argues, class is a state of mind; a discursive category that the British use to define themselves and one another within the context of a hierarchical social system. Class is real because people think it is real. However, class is more than a reified mental category because it continues to impinge upon people's life-chances. Willis (1977) for example, convincingly argued that the British education system underpins class continuation through functioning as a kind of sorting-mechanism that maintains the old class divides. Willis' study is quite dated, but evidence for the continuing validity of his thesis can be seen in Fig. 5.0, which although a rather crude measure of class and social mobility, speaks volumes (see also, Crompton, 1998).

Fig. 5.0: Percentage of 21-30 year olds by social class origin who have higher educational qualifications as their highest level of attainment, 2000

SOCIAL CLASS	PERCENTAGE WITH HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS
I PROFESSIONAL	87.2
II INTERMEDIATE	57.1
III SKILLED NON-MANUAL	23.6
III SKILLED MANUAL	8.4
IV PARTLY SKILLED	10.7
V UNSKILLED	6.1

(Quarterly Labour Force Survey. From Gilchrist *et al*, 2003)

Class structures continue to influence people's lives in intense modernity. Society's physical infrastructure must be built, cleaned, maintained and repaired, and somebody must do it manually and somatically. In this sense, not only did the builders stem from manual working-class backgrounds, they still did manual work; they were specifically working-class and thought themselves to be so.

Not all the builders were educated or had grown up in British class society. Many came from agrarian economies where the furtherance of patriarchal work traditions or labour in the rural economy was paramount to their early work careers. However, all of them had experienced life at the lower end of class and income

structures. Even the traditionally caste-bound carpenters adopted Anglicised class categories to interpret their social position. Naz highlighted this, and the reasons why:

[In the past] we used to go on the caste culture, now we don't do that, well, it's changed a lot... I'm a working-class, yeah. I mean we have a caste for barbers, we have a caste for shoemakers, we have a caste for every cunt. But it's changed... [my son-in-law] he's from the barbers, he's got 4 brothers and none of them are fucking barbers anyway... I mean his father wasn't a barber either.

Even the white-collar site management saw themselves as working-class. As Paul, one of the site managers, told me:

I'm working-class yes. Quantity surveyors consider themselves middle-class don't they? Because I think it's a professional qualification QS, but it's bullshit isn't it? All it means that the chief honchos sit in big leather chairs like Wing Commanders... No I don't see myself as being middle-class, not in the least. Definitely working-class, wouldn't even cross my mind until you asked the question. I've got a degree but would you say that a lot of people who've got a degree would consider themselves to be middle-class... [Site management] is a desk job to a certain extent but I wouldn't say it puts you alongside dentists or doctors, but it's, it sounds quite impressive doesn't it, 'building site manager', you know, it sounds something more than it actually is.

Diverse Roots

Collectively the builders followed no concrete or formalised route into the building industry. A small minority chose to enter 'the building' from leaving school and had worked in it for most of their lives. Many however, simply found themselves in 'the trade' having tried a diverse range of other occupations. The overriding majority drifted in to the building trade under the impact of social changes and economic necessity, and *via* the patterning of their social networks.

Formal Apprentices

Norman, the mechanical and electrical consultant, was the son of a printer. He grew up in East Anglia in relative affluence, and at the close of his primary schooling he passed his 11+ examinations:

I went to a grammar school and absolutely hated it. All my friends went to the local secondary modern, and so they were getting home at 4 o'clock and I was getting home at half past 5, doing loads of homework all night, I really did detest it. When I went to school you left at 15 normally, but at grammar school we had to stay until we was 16 and take O' levels. I couldn't stand it but they wouldn't let me leave because although I was certainly no brilliant scholar, I wasn't any real trouble to them. I wanted a job that kept me outside as well, I didn't want to be stuck in a factory or anything like that. So I went and got myself an apprenticeship at British Gas, or as it was known then, the Gas Board, which was a nationalised industry. The school told me that if I got a trade apprenticeship I could go to college for 6 months to start with. So they let me leave.

In those days the apprenticeship was 5 years. We were fast tracked as well, so I actually got my City & Guilds [formal trade qualification] first and second-class by the

time I was 18. Then while I was an apprentice I went on to do gas utilisation and get my Institute of Gas Engineers qualification and all that. I then worked most extensively on gas-fired boilers, the new generation, on the maintenance and electrics of them. Then North Sea gas came, which changed it again. Being young and being quite good on electrics I was whipped off to go round a special project going all over the Eastern region, sorting out a lot of the major faults and everything. It was the dawning of a new era because gas boilers were coming in and electrics were starting to go onto gas. So the industry was changing rapidly and they wanted to train people that could adapt and know it from the start. And we was in the unusual situation of about being 22 or 23, knowing a lot more about the new parts of the industry than the older boys. Central heating and that they knew virtually nothing about, a bit like today with all you lot knowing computers inside out while we struggle like mad with them.

I must have left there when I was about 26 I suppose. Then I went to work for myself, and I did that for about another 10 years. I built up quite a large company but I didn't like the pressure of it so I got out of that. I had 14 fitters eventually and about 3 part-time office staff. But I got to a situation where British Gas always owed me a 100 grand, and I'm talking of a long while ago, it was a lot of money... I had quite a nice life, nice house, a brand new BMW and everything, but I thought well this is not what I want from life. You lie in bed at night being owed thousands of pounds and wondering how you're gonna pay people.

DT: And so you went back and worked for somebody else after that?

Yeah, well I had a lot of friends in the industry, so I went and worked for some friends as a contracts manager and I run some big jobs for them. I decided I didn't really like working for people after being my own boss for so long, so I went freelance, and I did that up until the time I came to work for Spark's. I just work as a contracts manager and consultant for them now.

Technological change in building services placed Norman in a strong work position early on in his career, and he eventually started his own business. However, the pressure of being a businessman, and the perennial problem of getting paid by contractors, led him back into being an employee, although a high ranking and well paid one. Ascent through the building career structure was common for formally trained builders like Norman. They began training in the industry straight from school and tended to rise through the lower 'non-commissioned officer' ranks. Norman also highlighted that the contacts, or 'friends', that he made in the industry eased his transition back to being an employee. This eventually took him to working for Spark's at Keyworker House.

Steve, the project manager, was also formally trained, and he exhibited and explained a similar career trajectory:

I left school, I actually, I wasn't the brightest, I was sort of just above normal if you like, or above average, with regards to education. I went to a local secondary school and I arsed about for the first few years like you do, but then I realised that maybe I should be putting a bit more effort in. So I got moved up a class and things become easier. I just did the standard qualifications at the time, O levels and CSEs. I did a shit load of exams and my schedule was topsy-turvy but I stayed and my mum paid for

extra lessons in maths and English and that, and I tried to get as much as I could. For what reason I don't know.

I just went for everything and I ended up with six O levels and I backed them all up with CSEs. So I ended up with loads and loads of certificates. Then I left school, and I'd been working in a cycle shop with my mate, putting bikes together, selling bikes to customers, and I was sort of earning about £70, £80, sometimes £100 a week, depending how many bikes we sold. I was waiting for my exam results to come through and I didn't really know what I was going to do. I thought that [the bike shop] was good enough, I was earning a bit of cash so it was all right. But you know what they do at school where they try and forecast what job you should do when you leave, they put in your typical likes and don't likes, and your skills, and then they come up with what they think you might do. I did that and eventually got a letter through from Surrey College of Technology saying, 'we got an open evening seminar, would you like to bring your son along, we've selected him because of the particular qualifications he received'. The qualifications were quite handy as it were, CDT [Craft, Design and Technology], pottery, and those handy sort of things like that. And I just sort of went with the flow then. So we went to a seminar, which was I think orientated round carpentry and joinery. Next thing you know I was signed up. One of the teachers there was in with Topbuild, knew the director. And then what they did, they used to sponsor you. So there's this YTS [Youth Training Scheme], it's £27.50 a week and you get your travel on top of that. Well I thought, fuck it, everyone saying you should get an apprenticeship and be on the tools, you're handy and all that, you'll never be out of work, so I thought that's fair enough. I've always been inquisitive and fucked around with stuff, being the man about the house with mum being divorced, always handy, so, fuck it, go for that.

I did a release to site, 6-month college, 6-month doing a day release and evenings, and after 4 years training I got me Institute of Carpenters and Institute of Carpenters Advanced [qualifications] and then I was out on site full time. It didn't take long then I suppose, for people when I first went to the interview at the construction offices for the construction director to say, 'do you really want to do this, you know, you're over qualified' and all that. So they obviously saw there was potential and they just used that. And I proved myself of being willing to be guided, because I don't actually strive for anything, I just get guided. I've never said, I want to be a site manager or I want to be a general foreman, it's just gradually come on board. If they were to say, you *will* be a manager I'd probably shit myself. As it comes on board you kind of take things on and deal with it. I've pretty much specialised in second fixing and finishing, but along the way telling them I want to do a bit more on the ground. I never saw the job starting so I said I want bit more seeing jobs through, right the way through. First job I ever went to was actually groundwork, shuttering concrete. I got there and thought, well, I've been at college hanging doors and door frames and there's this fucking Paddy [Irishman] standing up to his knees in concrete saying, 'pass me a rip of ply'. What? What the fuck's that? That was a bit of a culture shock. But I done a lot of shuttering which sharpened me up a bit, then I was back on second fixing and finishing.

So that's basically how I've ended up where I am now. I've worked with all the site managers Topbuild ever had... I've seen the way they do things, sort of adapted with the different skills that I had, and hopefully grabbed a little bit from each of them. As I say, I just sort of come through on the guidance of those people, and just got on with it basically.

For young working-class men, 'getting a trade' is commonly viewed as one of the very best career options: 'you should get an apprenticeship and be on the tools... you'll never be out of work' is a statement heard time and time again. Even in economic recession when building work slows and jobs become hard to come by, a

good tradesman could be confident that he would at least scrape a living undertaking small private works within his own network groups (see chapter 10). Steve also hinted at the 'culture shock' of having to adapt his formal training to the reality of working on site. Formal apprentices engage in informal learning of building site culture, and it is here that past cultures are, to an extent, ironed out and adapted to informal workgroup culture (see chapter 7). Building site masculinity also contributes to this process by casting overarching shadow over building site interaction (see chapter 8).

Norman and Steve both took formal apprenticeship routes into the building industry, a process that they accurately saw as waning today¹. Bill, the mechanical and electrical foreman, another formal apprentice, told a similar story:

I had no intentions of coming into the building trade. I left school and we had a careers officer and I just went up the office and he said 'what do you wanna be'? I said, I want to go in the Post Office, telecommunications or on the telephones. So they sent me to a place in Wimbledon where I sat the exam and then two weeks later I got a letter through saying, 'you've passed the exam but unfortunately you're only 15', because you were allowed to leave school at 15 then, they said, 'unfortunately you'll have to wait a year before we can enlist you'. So I went back to the old careers officer, told him and he said, 'well anything else'? I said, what about electricians? I didn't even know what an electrician was really, it was just that you heard about electricians so I said electrician. So they sent me down to a firm and they enrolled me. You had to sign indentures then and they sent you off to a college. I then spent 5 years on day-release at Brixton College. I mean it was a different way of life then because all the big firms had apprentices, not like now, I mean we ain't go none on this firm [Topbuild]. When they took me on they must have taken on about 15 trade apprentices, so you all grew up together. That was 1971, when I left school.

Formal indentured apprentices were in a minority at Keyworker House but they formed a majority of the 'non-commissioned' managerial positions. They also had little real aspiration to become a builder, but were directed into the trade by their school careers officers, and/or simply through a desire to leave school early. Most of the builders however, had undertaken rather more archaic informal/formal apprenticeships whilst they were still at school.

Part-time-job Apprentices

Like their formal apprentice colleagues, the part-time-job apprentices showed little desire to be builders. Bristles, a painter, was illustrative of this:

¹ The numbers of apprentices registered with the CITB in 1985 was 8,700. In 1994 the figure was 2,500 (Harvey 2003), and it can be assumed that the numbers began to drop off long before 1985. The present New Labour government is currently creating a number of new apprenticeship schemes and conducting an advertising offensive to redress the highly publicised building trade skill shortages.

My old man was a carpenter, and his father before him, and his father before him. But I tend to do things different to whatever my family do, always have done, always will do. So I was at school, 15, and I was already doing odd jobs then for a Jewish man. He was teaching me bits and pieces. He gave me a paintbrush and told me how to hold it, how to hold a paint kettle, certain ways to paint a door, to paint a window, everything. He was a friend of the family and it was like a Saturday job type of thing, everybody had a Saturday job then. There weren't that much money around so you done that and got a couple bob [shillings]. That's normally how you got into trades then, because the kids that had Saturday jobs washing cars for the mechanics became mechanics; the one's that helped out on the fruit and veg became fruit and veg men. That's how most people got their trades, just by doing their little Saturday jobs.

Bristles left his Saturday job to go to work as an advertising clerk in Fleet Street. But after 5 years he was 'stabbed in the back' by one of his managers, and forced to fall back on his local networks and what he was familiar with, so he could make a living:

It's quite a hard thing to get stabbed in the back. You're getting offered a good position, you have a day off and come back and you've been made redundant. You can't fight against that. Now the office work, that finished, that was a part of my life, but I always tend to look at the good sides. I earned loads of money, I had a great time, and saw things I'll never, ever see on the buildings. But having said that, now we came onto this section of labouring. Now that was hard but at least you had a laugh...

So, my brother, who went on to be a bricklayer, he got me a job labouring on his site. Them days there was no machines at all. When they used to shout, 'oi, there's 5000 bricks coming', there was 5000 bricks that had to be off-loaded by hand². They were put on by hand and taken off by hand. One man used to stand up there and just throw four bricks every time. It was gruelling. I thought oh well, I'd better get out of this, even as a young lad, oh it was hard work. Anyway so, we finished unloading bricks and I thought, this is too hard for me and went back to the Jewish man who had by then become very old all of a sudden to me. He was always quite a nice man to me. When I first worked for him when I was 14 and 15 he used to pay me something in the region of 10 – 15 shillings for the day. It weren't bad money, he'd also give me some steak or a piece of beef or something for my mum to cook, always, that was my wages on a Saturday. Dread to think what the mechanics got, 15 Shillings and a gallon of oil? That'll put hairs on your chest; that'll put hairs on the inside of your arse to be honest!

So I'd already started decorating when I was 14. Now I had to get back into it. Mr Cohen was a true decorator. He went to work, suit, collar and tie. He used to get his overalls out, but not the overalls that we wear now, they used to be like carpenter's overalls. They had a little pocket in the front, most people wear them for woodwork lessons, like the ones Fast Tom [a semi-retired decorator who worked for Coat's] wears now, he used to wear those. They'd be brilliant white and I don't know how but at the end of the day they used to go back even whiter! Nothing was on them, no paint, no dust, no nothing. Well, he said to me, 'you stay with me and you can have all my customers when I'm gone'. I knew most of them but bearing in mind he'd had a load of new customers in the 6 years that I'd left him. So he said I can have these customers, and then he died. Just old age really, he just died. I never, ever found out how much money he had, he was one of these men that you knew had money. But true to his word, the list and everything like that was given to me, all his customers.

I did manage to keep hold of some of the old customers that I knew from 6 years ago, I managed to get my foothold in there. But the work they were asking me to do

² Bricks and other heavy materials are still commonly transported manually. I can testify to this having worked as a labourer. It is a slight exaggeration to say that there was no machinery in the 1960's. Cranes for example, were used at least since the medieval period (see chapter 1).

was above and beyond normal decorating, it was like painting gold roses around the ceilings and stuff like that. I hadn't done it before properly. I had been shown by this man but it was something, I suppose, I was mostly self-taught... Yeah so 99 percent of his customers were Jewish, it was all word of mouth, everything was done by word of mouth or in a pub... But by then I suppose, three quarters of them [customers] I had never, ever met, and not being of the best Jewish nature. I'd knock on their door and say, oh I used to work with Mr Cohen, but a lot of them had never saw me before. I mean, you're not in someone's house everyday of the week. When you paint the inside of a house it should last for 5 years. When you paint the outside of a house it should last for 3 years. So it was a turnover type thing, you couldn't just survive on a few people. I suppose under your belt you need about 60 people, and though you don't see them everyday they do tend to like, if a wedding or Christmas is coming, they might spruce the front room up. That's a great time 2 weeks before Christmas. So, I managed to get my foothold in there. I earned a fair few shillings but not enough really and I eventually moved out of London to Milton Keynes where the overflow from London was going. Out there they were building thousands of houses. Plenty of money to be earned, plenty of money.

Whilst still at school Bristle's part-time work served as an informal/formal apprenticeship. However, his break from Mr Cohen for 6 years, and his not being Jewish, had essentially lost what could have been a lucrative business. He then followed his work out to one of the new industrial overflow towns that were being built and engineered by the State to accommodate London's slum dwellers and provide inexpensive labour for factory work.

Like Bristles, not all of the part-time-job apprentices finished their informal training. Aidan, a labourer, was one of these:

At school I was sort of, sort of, in a way encouraged to leave (laughs), because my work wasn't up to standard, in the wild days, sort of hopping school and taking chances you know what I mean? So they asked me to leave but I had to tell me parents something else. What it was, I was working part-time at a garage. I was filling up cars with petrol, was the days when you used to have petrol pump attendants and that. And then they used to use me as a grease monkey, greasing up cars, putting oils in cars, minor work. Standard cars, not like the technology cars you've got today. Simple things like changing spark plugs, fan belts, putting starter motors on. Just the easy sort of thing. I used to work from 7 o'clock in the morning till 5 in the evening. I was getting a weekly wage of £12.50 take-home, but I was getting a bit cheesed off because all my mates started doing other different jobs, getting a lot more money than me, in the twenties and thirty pounds a week. So I got round me dad [who was a first generation Irish labourer] in the end and he says to come on labouring with him. What I done was, I went with him and my first week's wages was £50 on 5 days. From 12 pounds to 50 pounds! So you can imagine then, bloody hell, how much money have I got now! It was like 5 weeks money, good money. I had a girl friend at the time, the one I was to marry later on in life, and I just treated her for the next few weeks...

I remember going there and I was, not a tea boy, because we had a canteen there, I used to sweep up, clean all the mess rooms, clean the toilets out, all the sort of shit jobs you know what I mean? Then I would go in on the site, sort of later on, me and a cousin of mine, we was working together. We would go in on the site, sweeping up, general clearing up, moving this from there to there.

Aidan left the building industry after working as a labourer for 7 years. He took a job as a van driver in his brother-in-law's packaging firm, in which he later became a shareholder. With the expanding business he became the warehouse manager, but the firm encountered financial problems:

We all took loans out for these new premises and to this day I'm still paying for it (laughs). So that's when I started working for my brother doing groundwork. But when me brother had no work for me I asked Paddy McMurray if I could work for him. My dad was the tea boy for Paddy in his later years [until he was 71], semi-retirement like, and Paddy and me brother are good friends. This was last year, and Paddy took me on until me brother got some more work. That's why I'm struggling a bit you know, that's why I'll work 7 days [a week] if I get it because it's really tight.

Aidan left his part-time-job apprenticeship, lured by the bigger wage packet that labouring with his father could offer. This was a common story: the men entered the building industry when they were young, drawn by the attraction of a large wage packet. The building industry is one of the few occupations where one can earn more money at the beginning of their career than he can at the end of it: younger, healthier men can work at a faster rate and thus earn more money than older, less fit men. However, money was not the only factor making the building trade attractive to them, most mentioned that they also enjoyed 'the crack'³ that was integral to the culture of the building site (see chapters 6 and 7). This was expressed by Bristles in, 'it was hard but at least we had a laugh'. Bristle's words also illustrated that he was drawn along by the attraction of money when he moved to Milton Keynes because there was 'plenty of money to be earned out there, plenty of money'.

Adaptation to Social Change

Not everyone was attracted to the building trade by large wage packets. For many, like Aidan falling back into building after his family business went bankrupt, 'the buildings' were the only wage packet they could get. Pushed into the building trade by social change and guided by shifts in the economy, many had few choices but to take a job as a builder when the opportunity arose. Trick was one such individual. I have chosen to include his story here because Trick was a plumber and electrician who learnt his trade informally. It might be assumed that to do such a complex and

³ The term 'crack' (or, 'craic') originates from Ireland and its frequent usage by the builders highlights the influence the Irish have had over London's building site culture.

dangerous job⁴, one must first undertake a formal apprenticeship, but Trick was given 'a chance' to learn much of his trade informally as he 'went on':

I got into the building game because I was unemployed for 3 years at the end of the eighties. I mean I used to work for myself for 15 years. I was refurbishing and reconditioning washing machines and vacuum cleaners, that kind of stuff. We used to buy the old ones that people part-exchanged. We'd do them up and sell them back as trade. So at the end of the eighties that all went tits up with Maggie Thatcher, thank you very much. I was unemployed for a good couple of years because I'd cracked 40 and I was wrong side of 35 let alone anything else. Every time I went down the Job Centre, you'd look on the boards and there'd be nothing, or they'd want paperwork or certificates.

Now, when I left school, the quick version is, I left school at 14 and a half with nothing [no qualifications] but I got straight into a job, I actually left in the Easter and I should have left in the summer. If you had a job to go to you could leave. So I went straight into a car factory. I was there for about a year and that was all. The factory you see, you were working for 5 years and there would be strikes for 5 years, so I thought I'd get out of that. I actually went from that to doing temporary electrics. I did that for a while but I didn't have any transport at the time so I went to another firm making electrical re-winders in Cricklewood. It was amazing then [in the 1960s] because you could look in the local paper and get whatever job you wanted, whereas now you wouldn't get your foot in the door unless you had a piece of paper [qualification] from a college or something. I wished I'd stayed there now, it was an interesting job.

So that went on for a couple of years and then the Japanese started sending over their bloody cheap versions of motors, armatures and windings. So that's how I got into the sort of domestic side. I met a guy at Cricklewood who was doing his own refurbishing on the old washing machines, so I went in with him and built up quite a nice little business. It was a great little life, great little life you know...

So all that time it was like going from one job to another without any qualifications, which was great. But then after I worked for myself for 15 years there was nothing. Because of the late 80s, early 90s, when all that went down the pan, it was like bloody hell, where do I go now? What do I do? To be honest I was gutted because I thought washing machines and vacuum cleaners, that domestic side of it, would see me out. I thought I can do this for another 20 years, but of course I didn't. I should have seen the writing on the wall because years ago you'd have taken a kettle to be repaired, you'd have taken an iron, a hairdryer, toaster, all those little small appliances you would have taken to be repaired. But of course over the years the little things, the kettles, the irons and the toasters, all drop away because the price is getting cheaper. The next thing up the ladder was the vacuum cleaner and the washing machine. It's like now a washing machine even I wouldn't bother to get it fixed unless it's something like a pump or the rubber gasket. I mean they don't even part exchange them now do they? You just throw it away...

So I was looking on the board in the old Job Centre and it was like you gotta get a certificate or some sort of qualification. So I decided after 6 months on the dole I think it is, you can go training. I went down to South London, the Training Factory of all places it's called! And I decided to go for air conditioning. I thought by doing that you're doing some plumbing work and you're doing electrical stuff and control work and all that nonsense. That was like a permanent thing for 6 months, for City and Guilds. That was all right, come out of that, got all me certificates and whatever, but of course it's nothing like a proper 5-year or 3-year apprenticeship. I mean it's really a government thing. They're giving you a chance and getting you in the door, have a go at that, do that, there's your certificate, out you go, get to it. It gives you the bit of paper

⁴ In recorded interviews I asked all the mechanical and electrical tradesmen if they had ever been injured at work. Every one of them proceeded to show me substantial scars on their bodies inflicted by electric shocks.

to show. I mean to me it doesn't make you an air conditioning engineer or anything. As far as I was concerned it showed a boss that I was willing to learn, have a go and knuckle down.

I'm 53 now, so I would have been about 46 at the time. I mean I was gutted. At that time they were saying at the Job Centre, 'don't apply if you're over 35' and all that you know. I thought bloody hell, 35, that was 10 years ago! Then you start hearing things like, like the family over in Ireland for example, the guys that were 35, 40, they were saying, 'they're putting us on permanent unemployment because they got so many youngsters coming through, they haven't got time to sort us out'. I mean I was really fucking trying because I'd worked all my life. I must have written 3, 4 hundred [job application] letters. Half of 'em you didn't even get a reply. Never got anywhere. So where did I get my job? I got my job out of the pub. I do all this paperwork, all this City and Guilds, and my brother-in-law, he's chatting to a guy in the pub who works for Rank Xerox and the guy's saying, 'I'm losing the air conditioning man, he's bugging off to France or something'. My brother-in-law just happened to say, 'well Trick's just done his City and Guilds, he's got no basic work knowledge, he just done the bloody course'. The guy said, 'that's all right, bring him in'.

I literally phoned him on Friday night and I went to Uxbridge 8 o'clock on Monday morning. The man didn't give an interview or nothing, I just started from there. After a couple of weeks I turned round to the guy and I said to him I'm gonna have to jack it in, I'm out of my depth here. I've just done a poxy course and you obviously want someone who can come in here and get on with it so you can leave them alone but you're having to show me a lot of things, but he was very good, 'no that's all right'. So from there it just sort of went on. That's where I met Bill and eventually come on to this firm. When they lost that contract, my governor said to me, 'well I know you're doing air conditioning, do you fancy coming out onto the sites, but you'd be doing the plumbing side of it only'? I said, yeah I'd give it a go, I'll see whether I don't like it or you don't think I'm up to it, but either way we'll give it a go for 6 months and see how we go on. And that was it really, I just kind of learned as I went on. So I sort of come into the building game in the back door, not expecting it, the last place I expected to be to be honest. But I quite enjoy it actually, I quite enjoy the work.

Trick, like countless other British working-class men (and women⁵) was affected by social and economic changes, and became outmoded by economic restructuring and the influx of inexpensive consumer goods into the country. He had little control over global economic changes but fortunately he found his way into a 'chance' in the building industry through his brother-in-law and the pub.

The Pub

The pub was mentioned many times as a place where building work opportunities could be found, and it was also included in the life stories of both Bristles and Trick.

⁵ Working-class women have always been a peripheral and flexible workforce, the first to be laid-off in times of economic restructuring. However, working-class women might have experienced a smoother transition to knowledge economies than working-class men. Many would have remained in bottom-end service jobs that they have always done, and those pushed out of factory work absorbed by the increasing numbers of service jobs. Also, more recently, many working-class women moved into proletarianised white-collar work, something which working-class men might find emasculating and therefore a poor option (see chapter 8).

The pub forms a central part of British life, and as Reimer (1979) argues with respect to North American builders, it is institutionalised in building site culture.

A clue to why the pub holds such a central place in Anglo working-class cultures can be found in the past. Tressell (1914) highlights the lives of builders at the turn of the 19th century. Many lived in cold, sparsely heated houses where large extended families, over-worked women and illness were almost constant and normal parts of daily life. It can be no wonder that working men desired to frequent warm, bright, public houses and engage in the little leisure that they could, or could not, afford.

In the 1830s 'gin palaces' were specifically marketed towards the poor as an escape from the desolation of the slum, and by the 1850s, there were 5000 gin palaces in London alone⁶. As Dickens wrote:

Gin-drinking is a great vice in England, but wretchedness and dirt are greater; and until you improve the homes of the poor, or persuade a half-famished wretch not to seek relief in the temporary oblivion of his own misery, with the pittance which, divided among his family, would furnish a morsel of bread, gin-shops will increase in number and splendour. If Temperance societies would suggest an antidote against hunger, filth, and foul air, or could establish dispensaries for the gratuitous distribution of bottles of Lethe-water, gin-palaces would be remembered among the things that were. (1836: 106)

Further back in time, during the medieval period, Woodwood (1995) writes that some of the perquisites that builders expected in their wages usually took the form of beer. Brewing sterilised drinking water against life threatening bacteria such as typhus, and as a result, beer became a staple part of the diet of the medieval British. In the 1950s the pub had a similar function to that of Tressell's house painters and the gin palace.

As Mickey T explained:

When I come over in 1952 I'd earn £7.50 a week, would pay £2 for me digs, send £2 home and still have enough money to go out and get pissed [drunk] (laughs). Everybody always says about the Irish being big drinkers but it weren't like that back home. I never been much of a drinker like, but in those days we didn't have much of a choice. We was forced to drink because we had to live in digs that were dark and cold, sharing with strangers, all sorts of fucking people (laughs)... In some pubs in the winter they'd put on a fire and soup for the workers... Cos we was all in there, that's where the gangerman would come to find his blokes. (Field-notes)

Building work since its inception, took place away from the home in the public work-world. Builders always travelled to places of work, and, like the experiences of Mickey T, they sometimes trekked large distances. Having to live in temporary

⁶ The Gin and Vodka Association (www.ginvodka.org)

makeshift and shared accommodation, builders in particular would have always spent much of their time in public houses⁷. Postgate (1923) writes that the early building trade friendly societies would meet in pubs, and that these later functioned as an early form of labour exchange. Builders had to meet in pubs because they did not share a common workplace in which to gather.

The pub has become inscribed into British working life through its relationship with poor pay, polluted drinking water, inadequate housing and a cold climate. It has become a natural recruitment centre for those that need labour, and, by extension, becomes a place where one must go to offer labour. It is this circular process that institutionalised the pub and its close relation, beer, into British working life, and, particularly into the builder's life.

Social Change and Chain Migration

Whilst drinking and the pub were a central feature to many of the men's lives, this was not so for everyone, in particular the carpenters. The carpenters were embedded in a cultural network emanating from a hot climate and which frowned upon the use of alcohol. However, all the older carpenters told me they had been drawn into the Western vices of drinking, smoking, gambling and eating meat at some point in their lives but, most had, after a few years, moved back into more traditional family-centred lives.

The first generation Kutchis told a story of their life choices being highly structured. Political factors had pushed them into the British building industry, and rather than the typically Irish story of going from rags to rags, the Kutchis had gone from rags to riches and back to rags. As Bapu explained:

My grandmother and grandfather left Gujarat about 100 years ago. At that time it was very hard to work in India, that's why we go to Africa - Uganda, and split up the family. Then work, work, work, send for family to come over. All my family, my father, brother, sister all grow up in Uganda, everybody was over there...

My father was a builder in Africa. He did very well, own company, own business, everything all right, and suddenly the big Idi Amin Dada was the problem. All the English and Indian was the guilt of the problem but they all coming to this country, all settle here now⁸. I came in 1972/73, I was young, 24, 25. My father teach me on everything of the trades in Africa: make the chair, make all the joinery work, furniture.

⁷ See Coleman's (1965) description of the 'truck'; temporary villages that the railway navvies lived in.

⁸ Not all the Ugandan Indians came to Britain. Patel (1979) writes that at the time of expulsion of the Ugandan Asians, the British government would not accept them into its country and many went to North America, Italy and Canada. Eventually the British government let a certain amount of those they had originally displaced, enter Britain (see also Bowling, 1999).

You see my father was builder, my grandfather was joinery and builder. We are 2 trades in the family. My father has 5 brothers, all work as builder. My own brother as well, he is a builder...The work here is easy for me, its simple, the door is ready, everything is ready. In India and Africa we have to make everything by hand from timber that was coming by the rough. We have to put it in our lathe machine and do all the mouldings, do everything by our self.

‘Work, work, work, send for family to come over’. Chain migration processes both supply and restrict choices though the shape of network patterns. Migrant groups were not free to migrate anywhere they chose because historical, social, political and economic factors directed their movements. The Kutchis migrated across the globe, but in a pattern tied to British colonialism. In this sense, their movements were not global but international, framed by specific colonial nodal points.

The choices of migrant men who came to Britain after school leaving age were usually very restricted, and the building industry was perceived as their sole option. As one of the labourers, Michael, told me:

When I first got in the building trade? It’s so long ago I don’t know (laughs). Must be, 20 year ago I started on it. When I left school I was in a caravan factory, back home, mobile homes and all that. Next thing I joined the army, I went there for 3 years. Then I worked in the forestry for a while, at home, done that for a couple of years. That was the hardest job I ever done I tell ya. Then, worked in the building over here, and that’s where it started, doing a bit of groundwork, labouring, that’s it... I’ve not a lot of choice have I, hmm? But I quite like it sometimes, no pressure. Labouring you do what you’re told and that’s it, end of story.

DT: Why did you come over here in the first place?

Because all the family moved over here, so, they’re all over here, the whole lot of them except the father, he used to work for a farmer years ago, farm labourer, he done that for about 50 years. I been coming over here on and off for the last 20 years.

Michael moved to England simply because all his family were here. He always seemed a reluctant émigré, yearning for the quiet village life in which he had grown up. Many of the other labourers, like Mickey T, had migrated for economic reasons (see chapter 4), beginning the chain of migration that someone like Michael was diffidently pulled along on the end of. I heard similar stories concerning ‘not a lot of choice’ from many of the labourers. Work options in England for those from rural backgrounds in Ireland would have been limited. To work as a labourer, or modern day navvy, took a simple transfer of bodily strength from a rural to an industrial environment.

It should be noted that those who agreed to be interviewed, tended in the main, to be the more permanent workers at Keyworker House. Consequently, many of the

more ephemeral characters were not interviewed (although I did talk to many of them at work), and thus my data might be skewed to a degree. These types of individual, like Dave the alcoholic plasterer or Dan the drug-dealing decorator, may have had different past and present lives than the core groups. However, this was not to say that the core groups had less deviant pasts than anyone else (see chapters 8 and 10). Some experienced very 'rough and tough' neighbourhoods under quite adverse family environments. These I term the 'bad boys'.

Bad Boys

A substantial number of the builders grew up the sons of artisans, or for the Irish, the sons of farmers and farm labourers. For some, like Bapu, being a builder was almost in their blood; they did formal or informal apprenticeships, were the descendants of long lines of tradesmen, and become tradesmen themselves. For the bad boys, things were different. They carried chequered pasts and had 'chanced' their way into the building industry by firstly working as labourers and gradually learning the skills to become a tradesman of some sort. Aidan's comment above that, 'at school I was sort of, in a way, encouraged to leave... in the wild days', was something many of the men shared. Stew, a painter, was one of these:

I grew up in a fuckin' mad house. It was like before I was even 10 I fed meself and clothed meself. I done most of everything for meself. I mean it wasn't bad or anything but to say, 'did you have a childhood', I didn't, no. All this comfort, security, prospects, I didn't have none of it. I just rarely get it now. My dad was in a rehabilitation centre when I was a kid, we lived in squats and he used to beat me mum up. That was due to the fact that he was fuckin' wired you know, he was totally stoked. I look at that and think, fuck me, sitting around and jacking up [injecting drugs], fuckin' up most of your life. I watched many of my friends getting hooked, my mate's mum and dad both died of AIDS through using needles, it's a fucked up world...

The first thing I ever done was smoke a joint [cannabis cigarette] when I was 12. When I got to 13 I had mushrooms and then I started munching loads of microdots, blotters, loads of acid [LSD]. That's fuckin' done me great that. When I stopped taking them I was trippin' for about a year and a half. In the end I thought, right I've gotta get off of this, but then one of my friends introduced me to ecstasy. Whack! I landed up on them. It was a totally different kettle of fish all together, I mean the shuttle didn't land until about 4 years after. I was a complete space cadet. I mean, the only reason why I done what I done was, which is a lame excuse, I'm not making excuses, but all the crap I was having to deal with at home with a violent father, my mum being terrorised by him all the time. The only way I could get away from it was: 'come on holiday Stew, come with us, all the crap makes no difference, it's all there, all in the head, you can't get away from it'. So I took bloody drugs. Obviously, I was flying, I was buzzing out me nut, loved every minute. But soon as you come off that, amplifies the situation, it's ten-fold worse than it was to start with, so take more... Then there was one day when I was about 19, near on 20, and I was looking in the mirror and I thought, I'm fuckin'

gone mad. So then I thought, snap out of it, and I did. That's when I stepped in to doing what I started to do.

DT: How did you manage to pay for all your acid and E's and that when you were a kid?

Like I say I would go out and lash car windows, nick the stereos. That was the main thing I used to do at the time. As I was growing up I started to get sick and tired of me dad spending all his money on drugs. We were lucky to eat let alone have clothes on me back, so at the time, I was like 9 or 10, I was out there smashing cars. I was going behind market stalls and grabbing fruit, and clothes and that. I was proper thief but I had to fend for myself. I'll never go short of a few bob that's for sure, I had a lot of savvy for a thief, I was like a little business man. But I started to think I might get nicked so leave it alone, go and get yourself a job. Mind you saying that, when I was 14 I had more money than I do now. I wouldn't walk round with less than 400 quid in me pocket. Now I'm lucky to earn that much in a fuckin' week. But I feel better for it, peace of mind, its not all about money. Materialism, you can shove that up your arse, I'm not into it...

It got to the point where a lot of things I'd do and get away with but I was quite, I always, I get a guilty conscience. I'd smash a window, nick something, then I'd go home and analyse it and I'd think what if it was a lady with a kid and she doesn't have much money. I'd feel really guilty about it. There was a couple of occasions where I went back, took what I'd stolen and put it back. No joke. In the end I just felt so guilty at what I was doing but I had to fend for myself, I needed clothes, I needed to eat, so I done it you know. But as I got older I started juggling [selling drugs]. I'd buy a bag of 70 E's, I'd eat 30 and sell the other 40. Within 4 days I'd just munch the lot. But in the end I just thought this is violently impractical, I'm getting nowhere. But like I say, for every amount of drugs that I've taken I'd be a rich man. Me and millions of others...

I miss those times of taking the piss and going out and earning good money for things that you shouldn't be doing. I know now it's violently not a good idea. Me being banged up in the cells is not gonna do me or me family any favours. So I have to strain me greens everyday, earn tuppence and try and live as good as I can...

So, basically, when I was a kid, well I say a kid but when I was about 19, I was a tearaway and I just needed to do something to occupy my mind, so I did a City and Guilds in painting and decorating. Got my Guilds in that, then I left it for about a year, and after a while a couple of friends got me on a labouring job. So I done a bit of labouring, working for a plasterer. Doing that I was watching a few of the tradesmen, watching how they were doing things. After a while I went off working in a tyre place. Don't take much to do that, fit a tyre. I stuck it out for a while, nearly 2 years. It was just the fact that I was only earning £130 a week. I just thought I can't deal with that. So I started labouring for this bloke and then one day I was talking to the governor and I just turned round and said, look, I went to college and I'm a painter and decorator, and he said, 'I gotta bit of work like, I'll give you a start'. So he pulled me off the labouring and got me in to this little place called Marsden Villas. From there it just picked up. I've not looked back since, but I've always worked on and off like. Sometimes you just think fuck it, I don't give a shit, but the next thing you know you're back in trouble⁹. Like I say with this job, I don't want to mess up any more than I have too. I mean with Ernie Coat, I've worked for him on 3 occasions, this is the longest I've ever been with him. The first couple of times I worked for him it was only a trial basis so there was none of that being on the cards or tax, he just wanted to see how I would get on with the job.

⁶ See Duneier (1999) for an analysis of the 'fuck it' mentality, its relation to releasing people from moral binds, and the consequences of this.

Stew was one of a clique of three younger painters (late 20s-early 30s) who all grew up in a small area of Kings Cross in central London; an area that has been and still is residualised and stigmatised by its image as a deviant service centre. Bristles also grew-up in this part of London, and he told me how as a child he worked as a runner for some of the local prostitutes, fetching alcohol and cigarettes for them. The Cally Road clique: Stew, Frank and Wayne, still lived in the area, unable to move away even if they wanted to because of the low wages most painters earn (see chapter 10).

Frank described how he entered the building trade:

I first got into the trade though my Uncle. When I was at school I used to work with him weekends for some extra pocket money. When I left school he set me on as a labourer. Crap money and I had to do more work than anybody else because, relatives, family, you know what I mean? Then from there I went to dispatch to do van driving, then I went back to labouring on the building sites. Then, what was it, then my brother was working for a painter. He wanted a painter just for the one night so he asked me to come in and I was there 4 years. One nights work, 4 years! This was, must be going back about 10 years ago now. Then, well he sold up the firm, and after that I did more building site work, talked to Freddie and [his son] Wayne.

DT: How'd you know Freddie?

Through Wayne. We grew up together me and Wayne, his mum and dad used to look after us when my mum was out working, used to baby sit for us, and they brought us up basically. My fuckin' dad was always pissed-up [drunk] you know. Yeah so, Freddie always looks out for me. He always has, he always says if there's any work coming up and I'm not working he'll give me a bell [phone him up]. And then like, spoke to Freddie one day and he said, 'there's a job going with Ernie Coat's at Hammersmith'. So I've been with them ever since. I bought Stew over, got him the job, basically it's, you know what I mean, it's just like getting in contact with people innit.

Frank's friendship with Freddie had got both Frank and Stew their jobs with Ernie Coat. Again and again, people's family and friendship networks enabled them to find work. For people like Frank and Stew, whose fathers spent much of their lives intoxicated and out of work, individuals such as Freddie who 'always look out for me', provided a vital informal link into work. Freddie was analogous to the 'old heads' whom performed similar functions in North American low-income black neighbourhoods (see Wilson, 1987). Informal routes into work were particularly important for Frank because he perceived he could not afford to pay income tax on his wages (see chapter 10) and only an informal and trusted link with Ernie Coat enabled him to work in this way. Informal recruitment methods also permitted the Cally Road clique to work within their own friendship group. They lived and worked in an exceptionally insecure world and their clique provided a protective layer of security.

However, it also created problems because they were almost continually falling-out for various reasons (see chapter 10).

Stew's story highlighted that he left his entrepreneurial work in the informal economy because of his feelings of guilt and shame concerning his unorthodox occupation (c.f. Braithwaite, 1989). He also became head of his own family, for whom he felt a great responsibility. The strong associations between the family and mainstream conformity were something that many of the builders experienced (see chapter 8). In relation to this, I describe the biography of another bad boy, Jamin, the carpentry and general foreman. Jamin's story illustrates how job networks and families were powerful sources of social control:

I was doing A levels: maths, computer science and physics, yeah-serious boy! I was well on my way, but women and wine, and that was the end of college. My dad was very strict, right up until I was about 23, 24. And it was my own fault in a way, I can't really blame him. I was going to college and I took the freedom for granted you know? I used to bunk off college and go drinking and fucking and all that shit. My dad just got pissed off and he said, 'right that's it, if you don't want to go to college tell them you're not coming in and come to work with me'. About 8 months I worked with my dad in the factory when he hauled me out of college. He tried to train me up [as a goldsmith] but he just wanted me to keep out of trouble basically. I was getting into all kinds of fuckin' trouble. I would have ended up in jail man.

DT: What kind of stuff were you doing?

Stupid stuff. Fucking puffing [smoking cannabis] and I had mates who did robberies and that, went in jail. I must have visited every jail in fucking London: Rochester, Feltham, Henley on Thames, fucking Isle of Sheppey. Sheppy's the most depressing place. Yeah, I was lucky to escape from going to prison man. It's a phase you go through isn't it? You just want to be out with the lads don't you? And your dad's telling you, 'don't go out, don't go out', and you're thinking, why can't I go out and have fun? Looking back on it he was fucking 100 percent right. Yeah, but it's one of them things, as I say everybody goes through a funny patch and a phase. Luckily I escaped from it without too much damage. And as you get older you settle down more and more don't you? Get into the work mode. I was always good at work, I never ever had days off, right up to today, right from day one. Never late for work, regular as clockwork, still am actually, which is something I'm proud of man...

So I was with the wrong crowd, that didn't help, I fucked it up. I left study and I didn't really want to go back. It's funny though, I wouldn't mind going back now, do a few courses here and there, but time and money you know what I mean? So I left college, worked with my dad, then did nothing for about 6 months, started getting little jobs here and little jobs there, furniture store and all that sort of rubbish. My mate was in the building game and he was boasting like, 'I've been at work and I've dug a hole a metre deep and that long'. I said, 'so fucking what'? He said, 'I bet you couldn't do it'. So I thought, 'all right let's go mate'. And I went there, and that was it, here I am today...

I started off labouring, proper labouring; digging holes, cement mixing and concreting, proper building you know. At that time [in the early 1980s] building was booming, you could just literally walk on and get a job. My mate was working in this place, a little firm it was and they were doing council [local authority] houses up. So he

took me along. We were earning about £18 a day, and I was a good grafter man by anybody's standards. And I just carried on from there, labouring, labouring, watching, labouring. I don't really like moving round so much but I went where the money was and did that for about 2 years I think it was, slowly got my tools together, and then sort of became a chippy.

DT: In the sense that you were labouring, how did you learn chipping?

Well when I was labouring, there was a lot of chippies on site, as there is here. I was watching them, giving them a hand, working with them, talking to them, mucking in a little bit, seeing how they do it. Eventually I got the confidence, got me tools together, phoned up the agency and said, I'm a chippy. No one ever really found out that I'm not a chippy as such, I did quite well, did quite well. Never ever got thrown off a job, never. And that's how I got into the building thing really...

I did quite a long time with the agencies, must have done about 2 years with them, floating round here and there. And then I got onto a firm, Hillpark Builders. They were like a subby, they weren't an agency, a proper firm you know, got in with them. And I did about a year and half with them and then moved on to another company. The recession came in 1990/91, no work about. So I did a bit of cabbng for a while, about 3 months, 6 months, and then slowly got back into chipping when the work picked up. Never looked back since, no, never had time out man, never had time out since then. Cabbng, that was quite fucking enjoyable. It's too dangerous now. When I did it, I'm going back to when there was a recession, it was fucking dangerous then. And I also did it before that, just to sort of like earn extra money in the evenings, which was like 1986/87. And a fucking good time I had doing that man; the women, freedom, going to parties and that, it was good.

Informal routes to becoming a tradesman were a common story, as can be seen from the stories of Frank, Stew, Trick, Jamin and myself (chapter 2), and, building agencies are a useful route to learning a skill because agency jobs are often quite unsupervised, and 'agency blokes' are commonly expected to be low skilled, or lazy (see chapter 6). Agencies are, then, useful areas in which to test and improve one's skills.

In common with Frank and Stew, Jamin had moved into the building industry from being a bad boy. I wonder what would have happened to these, and the many other men like them that had similar teenage experiences, if they had not found themselves in the building industry? If all building workers were required to train as trade apprentices at colleges that (crazily) often demand formal educational qualifications, there would be very few tradesmen indeed. The numbers of formal or part-time-job apprentices would be too small to fill the void. As indicated in Fig. 5.0 many working-class men tend not to learn the formal educational curriculum at school, what they learn how to 'piss around' and be a 'lad', or in Willis' (1977) terms, they 'learn to labour'.

Restructuring the economy left Britain without the mass of industrial work opportunities into which the 'lads' culture melds so well. Building sites, car mechanics and cab driving are perhaps the few remaining legitimate career options left open to 'lads' in contemporary Britain. The 'no questions asked' policy, workplace freedom, ephemeral career structure and heavily macho environment of the building site, provides a relatively comfortable and familiar way to make a living for many such men. The bad boy background of a substantial number of builders also formed a structural backdrop that impinged on building site culture in general (see chapter 8). 'Ear'oles' that come to work on building sites must also learn to labour, as Steve indicated above.

Formal and informal apprentices, those pushed by social change, and the bad boys, were all relatively culturally indistinguishable from one another on the building site itself. Their ensuing life trajectories were contingent upon their pasts; most notably upon the direction of careers officers and social networks. In the following chapters I examine the what and how of builders' culture, and argue that the masculine edge by which it was framed made the building trade a home for the bad boy and for those from traditional working-class backgrounds. And of course, bad boys cannot be quite so bad if they are at work for most of their everyday life. Intelligent, energetic young men need an income and something to do. Consequently, the informal and unregulated nature of the building industry is part of how it recruits and trains building workers, and, essentially keeps them, for the most part, out of trouble.

Selves, Bodies and Class Cultures

Work and Personality

The informal and corporal nature of building employment practices also facilitates a drift into the industry by another type of person: the poor communicator. C Wright Mills (1951) wrote that knowledge and service work required and necessitated employees to perform a specific kind of personality work, and, since the majority of work in intensely developed nations is service based, the majority of workers must prostitute their personalities and be a corporate individual (see McDowell, 1995; Tyler and Abbott, 1998; McKinley, 2002). However, one's personality is almost irrelevant to do building work. In this sense, individuals who are unable or unwilling to communicate or to present themselves in a corporate service manner, can at least

work 'on the tools' in the building industry. This may explain why and how many of the men were regular drug users, and how others literally never said more than a few words to me or anyone else throughout the fieldwork period.

Frequent drug use was facilitated by the nature of building work and may provide another ingredient as to why alcohol use is institutionalised in the building industry. Put simply, one can do manual work with a hangover and/or under the influence of narcotics (see also chapter 7). Aidan illustrated this in comparing his labouring work to his previous job as a warehouse manager:

With the packaging firm it's shirt and tie and all this business, all that hassle. Got to make sure your shirt's ironed for the next day, gotta wear a different tie, what over-jacket you gotta wear and all things like that you know. Least you can come here and just chuck anything on, ain't gotta shave every day, come in smelling of beer and all that. Just come in do your job and that's it.

These factors cast light on why early sociological studies of working-class men and boys associated drug use with 'short run hedonism' (Cohen, 1955; Miller, 1958). Put simply, the working-classes may be hedonistic simply because they are able to be so. Language and personality are unimportant in terms of getting a job done, although one must get along with his work mates or face the consequences (see Chapters 6 and 7), and simultaneous work and drug use are possible. The non-service aspect of building work was further reflected in the terminology used by management and subcontractors who frequently referred to building workers as 'bodies'.

Effected Bodies

A Foucauldian style of reference to the worker as a 'body' also reflected the builders' own concerns. Their body was their capital because corporal ability was ultimately translatable into money (see chapter 8). Furthermore, as evidenced from the testimonies above, all the builders apart from Norman, the mechanical and electrical consultant, saw their lives as *contingent upon external effects*. Norman attended a grammar school, and this was perhaps why his narrative reflected a certain amount of personal choice. The narratives constructed by the quantity surveyors in chapter 3 also projected stories of life and career *choices*, and, the quantity surveyors were the only building group who considered themselves middle-class. Perhaps thinking of one's self as middle-class also entails thinking about one's life as guided by personal choices. However, it appears illusory to view one's life as the outcome of pure freedom of choice because life trajectories are embedded in and contingent upon

historical foundations and the actions of *everybody* else. Those who possess formal qualifications may have some choice to at least follow the career that their qualifications delineate, or to choose work that requires no formal qualifications if they possess suitable social networks. The working-classes however, do not have such a wide range of choices and they know it.

The builders' ability to negotiate formal social structure was limited by a lack of formal qualifications, money, high-capital networks, and other's reactions to their ethnicities and cultures. They were reliant on parochial informal social networks to get jobs (and housing, services and goods, see chapters 9 and 10), and these networks were fraught by the disadvantages of their class and ethnicity. Early sociological research classified structural-effect narratives as 'fatalism' (c.f. Miller, 1958). However, fatalism was a realistic interpretation of lives at the bottom end of the class structure. The effects of poor schooling (Aidan), negligible parenting (Stew), career officers (Bill), technological change (Trick), and political uprising (Bapu), are largely out of one's personal control.

Class-Consciousness

The builders' political outlooks were varied, inconsistent and context-bound. Bill, for instance, saw himself as a socialist, but did not agree with the existence of unions. Mike Fixit was incredibly right wing for the most part, but supported gay marriage and adoption (much to the disdain of everyone else). Mickey T was a practising and pious Catholic, but entertained the idea that Jesus was black, and his attitudes were in general as liberal as my own. I could continue these examples but what I want to illustrate is that I found no sense of any kind of coherent or collective class-culture amongst the geographically dispersed and ethnically plural builders. Homogenous class-culture was fractured by gender and race divides, competition over jobs, and even distinction between the trades. For example, when I left the site office to participate as a painter, Steve said to me, 'what do you want to work with them for? Painters are the scum of the earth'.

What the builders' shared was the perception of their lives as being largely out of their control. They were lives of adaptation and reaction to distant social, economic and political events, and they clearly saw that. This section of the working-class therefore, possessed a 'penetrative' culture of sorts; a realism that life choices were

structured and contingent. This did not mean they passively accepted these conditions. In their own ways they fought against imposing parochial powers and utilised cultural methods to shield against insecurities and to make life more comfortable for themselves. Collectively constructing reciprocal social networks was one method, another was their 'on the tools' informal culture. In the following two chapters I describe the methods of control and organisation of the builders working 'on the tools', their culture and their careers, and the relationships between social control and the builders' informal culture.

Chapter 6

Indulgent Control

'I'm digging the hole because of my workmen'
'Your army? I thought you were the general!'
'Sometimes the army does the leading'
'That's a poor sort of general...'
(William Golding, 1964: 39)

In this chapter I examine 'internal' work control. By internal, I mean the procedures utilised within workplaces to encourage worker acquiescence with the formal instrumental demands of the work process. 'External' work control by contrast, are seen as factors facilitating workplace conformity but which lie outside the workplace, for example, monetary provision for the family unit or a cultural work ethic. External work controls regulate workers but do not stem from within the workplace itself (see chapters 7 and 8).

Control and Deviation

Writers including Marx (1889), Weber (1930), Marcuse (1941), Braverman (1974), and more recently, Ritzer (1996), argue that work in capitalist societies takes on a dynamic that increasingly controls and structures work tasks. Commonly, the metaphor of the panoptic assembly line is used to illustrate these dynamics. However, a number of workplace studies reveal that workers do not passively submit to formal control processes (see Goodrich, 1920; Mayo, 1933; Roy, 1952; Gouldner, 1954; Dalton, 1959; Taylor and Walton, 1971; Beynon, 1973; Burawoy, 1979; Cavendish, 1982; Collinson, 1992; Graham, 1995). Work groups resist formal control and control itself is often seen to manufacture that resistance. Yet, as Hodson (2001) discovers, unilateral management control is not related to increased workplace conflict, rather that conflict is concomitant with disorganised workplaces because of the arbitrary nature of their control (see also, Edwards and Scullion, 1982).

Building sites are often, almost by definition, disorganised workplaces that are associated with worker dissatisfaction and conflict. However, this was not found to be the case at Keyworker House. Topbuild and their subcontractors employed many workers on a long-term basis, which suggested that the builders could not be totally dissatisfied with their workplace. Working 'on the tools' at Keyworker House was better described as an *ill-organised*, rather than a *disorganised*, workplace. Yet, I

observed many informal work activities at Keyworker House, that is, events that took place during the workday but which were not associated with doing any actual work. These non-productive activities could be interpreted as acts of worker resistance/deviance but, because most of the builders derived satisfaction from their work (see below), the nature of their resistance was seen to be predominately related to structures of 'time' and 'energy', rather than the result of formal managerial control or workplace disorganisation.

In this chapter I describe how the builders were controlled by management and formal work processes, and the degree to which they conformed to, or resisted, those controls. I begin with the various forms of control present at Keyworker House.

Management Control

Ouchi (1980) conceptualises work as a transaction between workers and bosses. He suggests that three types of relations regulate work transactions: market, bureaucratic, and clan relations. Markets regulate employment through payment for performance of work tasks; bureaucracies regulate conformity through legitimate monitoring and prescription of work tasks; and clans regulate work tasks through normative processes. Ouchi maintains that clan relations exist where work tasks are ambiguous and cannot be closely monitored or scientifically managed. In a clan relation, 'transaction costs' are reduced where formal methods of control would be difficult or expensive to implement, and workers possess their own ethic whereby they control themselves and one another through taken for granted normative formulas.

From a Marxian perspective, Etzioni (1961) also conceptualises three forms of managerial power which correspond closely to Ouchi's categories: normative (clan), coercive (bureaucratic) and remunerative (market). From a variety of perspectives, then, work control can be viewed through the screen of these three main types. However, Ouchi's ideas are based upon the theory of transactional exchange and he neglects work as a source of intrinsic satisfaction or play, and, he neglects too the possibility that part of the power of clan control extends from these non-transactional aspects of working. The oppositional bifurcation of work/play concepts is a false dichotomy in many contexts (see Huizinga, [1938] 1970; and chapter 7).

At Keyworker House, clan relations, or what might be termed 'craft mentality', were the most salient form of work control but all 3 types of relation existed simultaneously. The various trade groups differed in the type of work

relations/controls present, but all types existed side by side within a single work team (c.f. Edwards and Scullion, 1982).

Control of Management

Topbuild's site management were quite independent of higher contractor management control and monitoring, but bureaucratic accounting methods and formal time schedules propelled their workday. They were also overseen by Mr Jagers, the consultant, who, in association with Opportune Housing, held tangible and direct power over the site managers. This was manifest in the 'removal' of one of the managers, James, upon the request of Mr Jagers. James was disliked because of his lack of enthusiasm and attention to detail. Steve, the project manager, commented on this arrangement:

Obviously if there's a problem they'll [the consultants] tell them at head office. So all the time it's going all right, they fucking stay away, it's as simple as that. And if it ain't blinking working like it wasn't with a certain person [James], they'll ship them out, and that's the way this client is. Sometimes clients are like that, if they don't want someone there they'll fucking tell you. And the attitude of our company is, which is quite right, we'd rather lose that member of staff than we would the business. So Topbuild either lose them or just put them somewhere else.

In the time preceding James' removal it appeared that it was only he who had no idea he would be expelled from the job. The management knew what was going to happen, and as I was observing the office at this time, although not being told outright, I too could sense from the whispered tones and derogatory speak that James was soon to be dismissed. Mr Jagers was not happy with his work, and with little or no argument from Topbuild's higher management, or James' colleagues, James was moved to another job¹. Mr Jagers held ultimate and final power over the administration of the build:

James didn't tend to spend so much time over-seeing the works. And he trusted, using that operative word, the subcontractor to do the works. And on occasion the subcontractors let him down and that may not have happened if he was more conscientious. ... He didn't do the chasing as he needed to, his credibility went down because the work did not make the programme, so obviously everyone's opinion of him, and he may be a first class individual, went down, and that's human nature... Now it may be that James is better than [another site manager] on another job, but I don't want to take that risk because I can trust [the other site manager] whereas I don't trust James' performance. (Mr Jagers)

¹ The move was short lived. Topbuild did not sack James, but instead forced his resignation by ill treatment at his new site. James soon left Topbuild for another building company.

Mr Jagers' power was a very direct form of work control; it was the power of dismissal. This filtered down the hierarchy to the builders on the tools because they were self-employed and could be dismissed instantly with no notice.

Burawoy (1985) argued that work control in developed capitalism is characterised by hegemonic consent. However, he neglects to discuss how the 'whip' of the market still, and perhaps increasingly, anchors consent in developed capitalism². Whilst workers may be controlled by clan-style work ethics, consent to capitalism and/or bureaucratic career discipline, it is the market that ultimately supports these mechanisms through the violence of dismissal; an instance of what Newton termed, 'good old fashioned coercive possibilities' (1996: 143).

Management Control of Workers

My eldest Brother works at the car plant [in Cowley]. You watch them go into that factory, they go in there like they're like robots. All go in on the hooter, all come out on the hooter. All clock in at the same time, all clock out at the same time. I couldn't handle that. No fresh air, same place everyday, all those rules, that's not for me.
(Mike Fixit, maintenance man)

The site management did not overtly control the actions of the builders on the tools. There could be little formal engineering of control, and thus it was problematic to observe the builders throughout their workday. In this sense, the builders had to be trusted to a large extent to do the work on their own initiative. Management organised the placement of bodies in time and space, but once they had been so placed, the nature of building work necessitated that the trades were free to move around their product applying local, heuristic knowledge onto that product (see chapter 1). Consequently, the builders were quite autonomous, controlling their own work tasks. Essentially, site management did not control the majority of the trade groups at all, but they were indirectly monitored and controlled by the management *via* their foremen and trade specific subcontractors.

Trade specific parts of the work were handed out to subcontractors on a fixed sum 'price'. In this case, the subcontractor was controlled by market mechanisms, and

² Burawoy maintains that the whip of the market is characteristic of developed capitalism. In contemporary advanced capitalism he argues that welfare systems and state regulation protect workers from the whip of markets which assists capitalist hegemony by appearing just. However, as I have shown, builders were little protected by state regulations, and welfare benefits are so low as to force claimants into relative poverty. Furthermore, work is associated with masculinity, normality and morality. Claiming welfare benefits is therefore economically, morally and symbolically violent (see chapter 8). In this sense, I define violence as any act intended to cause substantial discomfort to another.

therefore, he possessed an interest in getting his tradesmen to work. The subcontractor organised the work and workers *via* his trade foremen, and the foremen were integrated into their subcontractor's goals through reciprocal notions of loyalty and wage payments (see chapter 9).

It was only the labourers and carpenters who were employed on a direct 'day work' basis. That is, Topbuild paid a fixed daily sum to the subcontractor for each man contracted to work at Keyworker House. Consequently, in this case, the site management held an interest in directly controlling the actions of the labourers and carpenters. Yet because of task ambiguity, the labourers and carpenters could not be managed directly. I will term the type of organisational control applied to the carpenters and labourers the 'indulgency pattern' (Gouldner, 1954): for the clan to work they would need to be 'indulged' in their rituals.

The Indulgency Pattern

In *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy*, Gouldner (1954) compared the management of 'subsurface' miners with 'surface' factory workers at a gypsum plant in North America. The factory workers were controlled by formal bureaucratic methods and clear lines of authority that tightly dictated their movements and work tasks, which were intended to iron out the impact of the informal shop-floor work cultures present in the factory. By contrast, the miners were indulged in their informal work culture. Indulgence took the form of managers and foremen turning a 'blind eye' to absenteeism, pilfering, and general group control over the working day. Gouldner argued this was the result of the miners working side-by-side, which, coupled with unpredictable danger, necessitated a strong informal and collective culture.

Miners risked their lives everyday, and consequently their informal whims had to be indulged by management. The miners' tightly collective mode of working framed a culture that embraced risk and physical hardship, and, their work-group clan mentality, rather than formal managerial power, prompted them to work in such adverse conditions (see also Wicks, 2002). The culture and methods of control of the builders were remarkably similar to those of the miners described by Gouldner. Lines of authority were often confused and always negotiable, and like the miners, the builders expressed grievances, 'immediately, in a face-to-face way, using unadorned, direct language... in forceful and eloquent detail' (Gouldner, 1954: 111-112).

Whilst building work can also be very dangerous, and builders must sometimes be encouraged to carry out risky and unpleasant tasks, I did not view this as the major reason for management indulgence, although the other parallels between these types of workers are strong. In common with the miners, builders often worked side by side, lived in close physical proximity to one another (although not in tight occupational communities in the rigid sense of the term), and they worked outside a career structure. A career hierarchy was closed to most of the tradesmen and labourers and, the career offers a powerful mechanism to promote worker conformity (see Grey, 1995; McKinlay, 2002). The dearth of such career opportunities substantially reduced the coercive effects of formal work control.

Again, in common with the mines, building sites are immobile and maze-like areas which make observation problematic and disable modern bureaucratic power. As a result, the builders tended to have substantial power over formal authority rather than *vice versa*. Management and workers had thus settled upon a 'truce' over the battle for work control and the effort bargain, and the indulgency pattern was an outcome of that truce.

'Butlin's'

The chippies for instance, they just baffle me because to me they're just so slow. It's the first time I've ever worked on a building site where that sort of 4.30 mentality, go home at 4.30, I never had that before [on my old company doing 'new work']. I miss the sort of buzz of being on a site where there's a lot going on, you feel like there's a lot of energy, things are going on and the building's going up. Here it just seems so lethargic half the time. (James, site manager)

The indulgency pattern resulted in the builders describing the job as a 'holiday camp' or 'Butlin's'. The pace of work was quite slow. It was rare to see men running, rushing or sweating like builders on large 'new work' jobs where almost everyone is tightly controlled by the market, or 'price-work', mechanism. The multi-contingent, uncertain, and emergent nature of 'old work' makes it problematic to proscriptively cost, and consequently difficult to set specific prices for individual tradesmen's work. Furthermore, rushing and running on building sites are not recommended because of the many hazards that litter the workplace, but 'time is money' in 'price-work', and accidents and fatalities are an outcome. As Bristles, a painter, pointed out:

There's two ways for this: health and safety will really bother you if you're not on a price. If you're working on a price you won't even notice it. At the end of the day all you are looking at is the big bucks, that's all you want. You'll only be sensible when

you're on day work. When you're on price work you think you can like twizzle like a ballerina and extend the length of your arms or something.

The site management were forced by regulatory bureaucracy to pay serious attention to health and safety issues. This, coupled with the majority of workers being paid on a daily rate, may be part of the reason why I never witnessed a serious accident at Keyworker House. Day work for most meant 'taking their time'. In the early stages of fieldwork I conceptualised taking time and slow pace as a 'natural rhythm'. However, I later changed my view through the nuances of field data (see chapter 7).

An extreme example of slow pace of work provided in the following fieldnotes:

In the afternoon [while participating with the labourers] I was sent from Keyworker House 1 to clean up some flats that had recently been refurbished at Keyworker House 3. James, a site manager, escorted Aidan, Seamus and I to Keyworker House 3. We arrived there after a slow walk through central London across a distance of approximately one kilometre. James purchased some soft drinks and snacks for us all and instructed us to get the flats clean and tidy, and work around Bristles and an electrician, who were finishing the final stages of the refurbishment. I guessed that James was attempting to buy a little slice of loyalty because he would not be staying to monitor our work that afternoon and no foreman was present. James left, saying he would return in two hours.

We were soon joined by the two maintenance men, Mike Fixit and Will. We began to chat and clean the carpets, kitchen and bathroom surfaces in a leisurely manner. I entered one of the rooms to vacuum the floor and found the electrician asleep on a sofa, the *Sun* newspaper balanced upon his head to shield the light from his eyes. Aidan tapped me on the shoulder and jocularly whispered to me to try to be quiet as not to wake the electrician. I said 'sorry mate, didn't mean to disturb you', and left the room. We all began to joke about this, finding it quite hilarious. Comments such as, 'Darren wants to see how building jobs are managed hey', 'this is a proper Topbuild job this one', 'he's doing a tidy job on those electrics in there', became the focus of our talk. The labourers began to tell extraordinary stories about other Topbuild jobs where they had skived, or witnessed others skiving work.

We all went into the 'electrician's room' to sit down, smoke cigarettes, continue 'the crack', and devour the remaining drinks and snacks that James left for us. We whispered, still messing around. The electrician woke up, saying, 'Can't a man get a decent sleep around here'? And jokes were exchanged. Will began to read volubly from advertisements in the *Daily Sport* for free sex from middle-aged women and swinging couples. Pat continued to vacuum, occasionally peering around the door and winking. Mike Fixit proceeded to 'wind up' Will, saying he should find himself a 'real woman' and see what sex was really like. It took two to have sex he said, it wasn't something you did alone in your bedroom.

Bristles informed us he was going to the shop to buy some cigarettes. We never saw him again that day, and we all began to speculate whether James would really return to the job. We thought he probably would not but could not be sure. Will argued that James always played squash on Wednesdays, so he wouldn't be back at all. We began to talk about 'getting off' early, and Seamus said, 'fuck it, I'm going down the pub'. Will and Mike Fixit said they would take a very slow walk back to Keyworker House 1, and I said I would join them. We walked leisurely through central London,

looking in the shops and at the passing women. Will told me about his sexual conquests and prowess, whilst verbally harassing women on the street. (Adapted from fieldnotes)

This was an extreme example of slow work-pace and time banditry which took place in the afternoon when the trades generally did little work, but similar things occurred all over Keyworker House. The housing management reported one of the electricians, Jimmy J, to the site management, for being found asleep at work on more than one occasion. Jimmy J was not sacked but warned by Bill, the mechanical and electrical foremen, to sleep somewhere more secret if he was going to sleep at work at all. Butlin's it was not, but there were solid reasons for the builders using such a metaphor.

Attitudes and Managers

Steve, the project manager, talking about the labourers, illustrated how the indulgency pattern operated:

You can soon read people and how they're going to perform for you if they're on day work and, you know, and obviously, labourers. I know they do a bit of hanging around, a bit of swinging the lead every now and then, but I try and keep men I trust around me. And then when I want that little bit of extra, in fact I know I'm going to get it, and they ain't going to grumble or complain. Because it's an awkward one again, you know, labour in general. I've been on jobs that aren't mine, just been there to help out and [labourers] they're wandering around, standing leaning on the shovel and having the crack. You know, and I know you know, Pat and Patrick over there, James had to have the pits dug out and I know there was an element of that game. It's frustrating because Kevin [quantity surveyor] sees it and gets the hump. But I say, what am I fucking supposed to do, hold their hands? You've got to try and give people a bit of trust. And they don't do it twice to me generally, they just won't work for me again, you know, it's as simple as that. Not in a confrontational way, but I just don't want them near me if they're not going to tow the line. I put a good effort in, why the fuck shouldn't everyone else? I'm not on price work but I put my bollocks into the job so I expect, not that everyone puts 200 percent in, but at least 95 percent... I think they do it generally, but that I think is resulted in me, I don't mind having a laugh and a crack and having a wind up and a joke, but when it's work it's work. And they're not dealing with a Hitler, but even so said, someone that's quite light hearted, I don't mind talking about the family and kids, but we do want some work done...

You have to strike relationships up here. People say, 'oh you got to distance yourself, wear a tie' and fucking all that, 'you're the boss and they're not'. But people resent that and they don't, they fucking won't work for you. And they think 'he's a cunt he is, he can't talk, he's always fucking saying put your [hard] hat on, no standing around', you know. I don't know quite what the word is, but it's mixing it really. I think that works. A lot of people say it doesn't, but in my history it works. You treat people with respect, they treat you with respect, that's mutual. And then you do get the job done, and if you don't, you just have a jolly up [drink up] with them, and they know if they've upset you, and they think 'oh fuck I shouldn't have done that, I've upset him, I didn't want that, he's all right'.

Steve knew the labourers did not work ‘flat-out’ all day long, and he was reluctant to become authoritarian towards them. But, by indulging their informal clan mentality he maintained a workforce that was loyal and reciprocal, or ‘mutual’, when he really needed them to be³. He saw it would be unprofitable to apply unilateral pressure because they would not continue to work for him. Furthermore, putting pressure on them was difficult because it was problematic to observe them; Steve could not ‘hold their hand all day’. Even if he could observe and place pressure on them, because of open access to most building jobs, they would be able to leave the site and go to another job if labour was in demand. It was co-operation that the management demanded, not control.

Aidan explained part of how the mutual indulgency system worked from his perspective as a labourer:

This is how I like it, people we’re working with you see, like the management team talk to us on first name terms. Because you can go on other sites and what they do is look down through their noses at you, you know what I mean? Cos there's a lot of snobbery in the building game you know. They sort of think, ‘labourer you’re a shit’ and all this business. But not with Steve and James and Pete, they muck in with us, have a joke and a laugh you know. There’s a lot of people in the building that sort of, they think they are above you, which there’s no need for it... What you gotta acknowledge, I find sort of, if someone’s passing you in the corridor, ‘morning, alright’, acknowledge someone you know... Its like young Bobby [trainee quantity surveyor], I got to know him over at the Hackney job. First day I met him he says ‘you see all that rubbish over there, I’m not trying to tell you what to do but is there any possibility of moving it out the way?’ I says, ‘yeah no problem’, and then gradually I got to know him, then we became sort of buddies you know. That’s what I like to be like, that’s like a relationship. Then you get in to banter and all this business. You know how to take Steve now, sort of being friendly, learn the ropes you know.

Aidan disliked what he perceived as snobbery, and to being told, as opposed to being asked, what to do. If management did not conform to these expectations, conflict could arise, and, on building sites, conflict cannot be contained by bureaucratic or despotic methods. Furthermore, as Sennett and Cobb (1972) point out, social class may entail symbolic injuries; no one wants to be seen as ‘a shit’ by virtue of their manual job. As Mike Fixit explained:

Steve and James, they’re not bad people to work for are they? It’s not like ‘I’m a site manager and you’re a labourer’ is it? It’s like you’re all friends. You take the piss out of them, they take the piss out of you... They get more [work] done on these jobs for

³ In my experience it would be rare to find such ‘indulgent’ management in the building industry. However, on building sites where management and their foremen attempted to control their workers without respect for them (usually control by aggression and threat), the builders would collude to do substantially less work than the workers at Topbuild. In addition, I only observed one act of industrial sabotage at Topbuild, whereas sabotage was common on other building sites where there was little respect and reciprocation.

the simple reason it's the way they treat everyone. There's none of this them and us. If you've got somebody that's, I mean if you ask anybody that's worked in the building game say 20 – 30 years ago, you used to get the gangerman [foreman] would sneak round corners and watch what you were doing, make sure you're not stopping and talking. They'd be patrolling the building site trying to catch you out. And in those days if you were caught talking and having a cigarette, that's it, you were gone. Whereas on these sites if they see you standing and talking, 9 times out of 10 they'll come and join in the conversation. I think they're, I mean, all the Topbuild jobs I've been on, they've been no different, you think nothing [work] is being done but they must be doing something right because they keep getting more work. I think they get more out of the men because they show the men real respect and if you got their respect they'll give you it in return... It's like Steve and James, they say *can you* do this for them. They *ask* you to do something almost as a favour, but you get some people and they are ordering you to do it, do this, do that. That don't wash with me.

If the boss is being an arsehole I'll start looking for another job, simple as that... sod him. I'm here to do a day's work and if I can't get to do my day's work without him standing behind me watching me or chasing me up every five minutes... I give them what I'm paid for. I'm not working harder for my money, I'm not working less for my money. They pay me X amount of money for the day and I give them that amount of work. That's the way I look at it anyway. I don't rush around because I'm not paid to rush around... Everybody could do with more money, but no, I'm quite happy with what I get. I give them just enough to cover the money they pay me. If they want me to do more then they have to pay me more, simple as that.

Mike espoused a 'fair day's work for a fair day's wages'. He possessed his own quasi-calculable work ethic that echoed Ouchi's conceptualisation of work as a transaction. He also commented that the management would ask the men to do things rather than tell them, 'sort of as a favour', and, because he was treated with respect he was willing to do an amount of work which he considered to be in line with his wages. In this sense, market control, whilst being coercive through the violence of dismissal, was also constructive through its being framed by a 'fair day's work for a fair day's pay'. However, Mike also said he enjoyed his work, and therefore, his work was not solely a pecuniary transaction but one possessing intrinsic value (see chapter 7).

The labourers accepted the right of the managers to manage if they were indulged in their informal culture and awarded what they saw as 'respect'. As Burawoy (1979) points out, it is not hierarchy *per se* that frames worker conflict but, the way in which it is administered (see also Edwards and Scullion, 1982; Hodson, 1992). In this respect, management hierarchy is hegemonic in intensively modern societies - its existence unquestioned. If managers managed in a way in which enabled workers to feel respected for their labour, status injuries did not surface and conflict remained dormant. However, if management did not adhere to the rules of the indulgency pattern, conflict surfaced, as Bill, the mechanical and electrical foreman, told me:

Then you get someone like John [junior site manager], now I don't know how you get on with him, he's probably, well I don't really know him, but he's a right bombastic little bastard. And I get on with anyone normally, but him? It's just when people turn round and say, 'I want it done now'. Normally I'd do it, I'd say all right, yeah I'll do it. But when you get people saying, 'I want it done now', you won't do it. I won't follow his orders, I'll try anything just to get up his nose, but it's just the way he is. It's why people like that, whether they get on or not in life, they won't get on in the buildings.

Bill was referring to the junior site manager who administered the small job at Keyworker House 3. By being ordered to do something, Bill's stubborn independence surfaced, and he would 'try to do anything just to get up his nose'. If management administered orders without respect for workgroup culture, their hegemony broke down.

All of the labourers acquiesced in the legitimacy of management hierarchy. However, the tradesmen's situation was slightly different because they were almost completely autonomous, and site management were virtually invisible to them. Such invisibility either made management a non-issue or engendered some negative attitudes. This negativity was apparently due to a lack of understanding concerning the work the management actually did, and it centred most frequently around the imposition of formalised bureaucratic rules onto the tradesmen's work-day.

Formalised managerial impositions had particularly strained the relationships between management and the mechanical and electrical workers. This was partly the result of the organisational alliances that occurred between the various building parties whereby Assured Consultants and Sparks M and E shared a network relation (see chapters 3 and 9). Trick expressed this strain:

There seems so many office bods, and everybody you get in an office it seems that they've all got to establish some sort of paperwork routine. The reason that is, at the end of the day, when you get to the bottom line, is that they've got to make themselves indispensable. Now if they start some little scheme off where they say, 'Trick, everyday I want you to write in what you did there and then go and put it over there', I mean they're gonna stamp it and put into a file, and they've started this little chain going haven't they... Everybody likes to get a bit of paper stamped and cleared, nobody bothers to look at the bit of paper to think, all this is, is did he clean the toilet out. What the fuck does it matter? Do you know what I mean? A lot of it is just nonsense... I don't have to see office side of things, I mean I'd love to see sometimes. I think I'd love to see what's on these bits of paper and how important they are. I don't say it's all their fault because I suppose they're being asked by the customer who wants a price for this and a price for that and a schedule for it all. And then the client don't like the price or they don't like the schedule and then it's 'oh, can you redo it'. So there's that side of it for them. It's not do it once and the customer likes it, they've probably got to do it three or four times. But bits of paper ain't building the bloody thing is it.

Trick conceded that the 'paper chase' might not have been 'all their fault', but he could not understand why so many management were on site who were essentially unproductive in building something. This was particularly apparent towards the completion of the first year of the works where there were literally 'more chiefs than Indians' on site.

Only one of the builders, Bristles, expressed an entirely anti-management attitude:

I am a firm believer in this and I will stand by it 100 percent: it's always been them and us. And this most probably goes back to when I was stabbed in the back at Fleet Street, where I would never trust anyone in a tie. In the office, them and us, always. I've always said this, I wouldn't trust them. Steve, I would not trust him, I would not trust that man with nothing. I wouldn't trust him with my time keeping if I had a half a day off, I wouldn't trust him not to tell Ernie Coat that I took a bit of paint home. I wouldn't trust that man, that is a career Topbuild man.

DT: But then Jamin works in the office and he comes walking in the canteen when you're skiving and you just mess about with him?

Jamin ain't got a shirt and tie on has he? No, no, no, he's not one of those, he never will be. I think deep down he'd like to be but I don't think he ever will be. Because, well in that office he wouldn't be, cos I think they're erm, they're too far up their own arse and they are racist... Like they are the bullies of the playground, especially when Steve and Kevin get together. Who the fuck do they think they are? I really do treat people as I find them. He could be a one-legged China man with dirty dark skin but if he's all right, he's all right by me.

Bristles expressed disdain for 'anyone in a tie', consequently he would not trust Steve to indulge him in time banditry and pilfering because he saw Steve as embroiled in a career. However, Bristles' concerns were unfounded because Steve did indulge the workgroups in many of their informal desires, and he had no appetite to ascend the building career ladder any further than he already had done. Steve considered himself to be 'site' with an aversion to working in Topbuild's 'dead and stuffy' head office. Furthermore, the indulgency pattern became more pronounced as one ascended the building ranks where relationships between the various parties were characterised by long-term personal ties, informal favours, and closed information networks (see chapter 9). Bristles' disdain was, then, embedded (reflexively) in his own prejudices, and not in the actuality of relations on the site itself. It would seem that Bristles' past experiences and, I would argue, the invisibility of the managers to his autonomous work as a painter, had framed his attitude. Steve was not unaware of this *lacuna* in understanding, and it agitated him:

It's a very, very complicated job you know. I don't think a lot of people realise what's involved in what I do. There's a lot of things going on here [in the office], and to actually co-ordinate it, even down to the labour, where the bloody labour goes, you know... There's men out on site and you think 'fuck I must go and see them', and you don't. But they're thinking, 'he don't give a fuck about what's happening out here, he's probably sitting in there swanning it up'. There is an element of that, but there is a lot of work going on you know, and sometimes you can't get out [on site]. That's where the building industries fucked, site managers stuck in the office and the general foreman runs the job.

Direct Day-Works

Labourers

I quite like it sometimes, no pressure. Labouring you do what you're told and that's it, end of story... I do enjoy it for the crack. We have a good crack don't we? (Michael)

So, labourers, all right they don't earn the money they should earn, but then again in my mind, you can turn it off [tape recorder] now, they are too fucking stupid anyway. Yeah but we [painters] don't work, you know what I mean, we do fuck all, labourers really have to work.

Let me explain myself to you. They work, they take the shit, all right say the painters. A painter is one above the food chain right, and labourers are one below him. A painter can tell a labourer what to do. Now these men are not stupid in their minds, some of them are very intelligent people, and I mean *very* intelligent, but they just can't handle the pressure. A labourer just plods along. In the mind it's not academically taxing or anything like that, but they have got the brain and they can do it. I mean, you see labourers doing bloody *Times* crosswords. It's that they just can't handle, maybe deadlines, a labourer don't have any deadlines; two bags of sand this week, I might do one; need to sweep up, I'll do it next week. I mean you've got on our site, what have you got, Michael, Aidan and Danny for instance. All right, I don't know much about Michael, I haven't worked with him. I spoke to him a couple of times, but this is nothing to do with personality or anything, I think he is a nice bloke I really do. Erm Aidan, see I don't know Aidan at all, but to me I think he could do a lot more than be a labourer... he just don't want to, he just wants to plod along. Danny was born to be a gangerman. The midwife when she picked him up and slapped him, he most probably slapped her back and said 'get back to work, a bit more production please'. (Bristles)

The labourers worked longer hours than the tradesmen, and the sheer physical nature of their work meant they also worked harder. Their position of being under orders, as opposed to in control of their own work tasks, meant they were regularly tied into a web of command issuing from foremen and management. This was manifest in the positioning of the labourers' tea-room next to the site office in both Keyworker House 1 and 2. From this position, management could closely monitor the labourers working and break hours. However, even under such close observation, the labourers did not work for formally specified work times. Starting work slightly late, drawing out breaks, and finishing slightly early was a kind of formal/informal rule.

On my first day of labouring, Aidan verbally instructed me on the unofficial working hours. Time-talk of this kind is common amongst builders, and discovering the unofficial work times is part of the first-day-on-the-job banter. I do not remember ever working on a day-work building site where full official hours were worked. Aidan described how knowledge of informal work hours was elicited and transmitted:

When I first started I like to suss things out. I'll say, what time do you go to tea and all this business yeah. I roughly know what it's like, but you don't really know. Like I'd never met Danny before. I'm thinking, does he let us in before 10 [for tea break], or does he let us in here just after 10 you know. Sort of, the proper time's half 7 till half past 4, but then you find out the crack and say, what sort of time do you get away? It's like the first week I was here, I'd been paid yeah, I'd started on the Monday and started sussing it out. So I wanted to go to the bank and I hadn't seen Patrick [a fellow labourer] for a couple of months, so we were going for a drink. What I done was I left about twenty to 10, went around the bank and err, paid me money in, went to Benjy's [sandwich shop] as well. Then I come back, back before 10. Come in, sat there, where's the nearest bank I says (laughs), and everyone's telling me 'it's up there' and all this business. And that Phil I fell out with, one of those fellows yeah, he said to me 'I'll show you', and I says, I just wanted to know where it was, when I'd already been you know. I didn't want him to know I'd been. Then me and Patrick got a few pints in at lunchtime. Danny don't mind, he goes for a drink himself.

The labourers, including Danny, the labour foreman, would begin work at 7.45/50 rather than the official 7.30. They would leave to 'go to the shop' at least 15 minutes before each break time, and finish their breaks 15 minutes late. They would also begin to 'get ready' to go home almost half an hour before they were officially supposed to leave, and they almost always left 15 minutes early. Site management were aware of this but they indulged them, handed out concessions to manufacture a reciprocal and thus consenting relationship. Also, all of the trades were 'well away' by four o'clock, having shorter work hours than the labourers. For the labourers, then, time concessions seemed 'only fair'. In a similar vein, Danny tolerated lateness. One of the labourers, Patrick, was regularly late and hungover. Danny would simply tell him, in his avuncular manner (despite being much younger than Patrick), to try to be on time tomorrow, 'because Steve will start to say something'. Patrick was also found asleep on one occasion. Aidan told me that he had a 'big one' the night before.

To facilitate management control of the labourers, Danny was issued with a two-way radio through which he received orders from site management and general foremen. This functioned to deal with some of the difficulties occasioned by the nebulous physical space of the building that blocked lines of command. Danny spent much of his day moving around the building, monitoring where his labourers were and what they were doing. He seemed to have a peculiar talent of appearing

seemingly from nowhere saying, 'please, please, let's have some production' in his distinctive Donegal accent, when the labourers were 'leaning on shovels' and 'having the crack'. Often we would hear his radio or spot him before he spotted us and we would jump to performing our work (see chapter 7). Of course Danny could not always find us. Keyworker House contained numerous areas in which to hide, and the labourers possessed an armoury of excuses to justify their disappearance or inactivity: 'I had to go to the bank', or, 'I had to go to the shop to get some fags', being almost institutionalised in builder-speak to mean almost anything but having been to the bank or shop. Alternatively, 'I couldn't find a barrow', or, 'we hit loads of rocks digging this out', as excuses for having done little work. Even the fact the builders were informally allowed to leave work and go to the shop or bank revealed they were afforded a certain amount of autonomy.

Danny could not be continually present to monitor the labourers. When he was present, it was often to 'muck in' and 'do a bit' with 'his lads'. In this respect, foremen were subject to most of the same work pressures as the troops, and more (see below). However, when Danny was not alongside the labourers they would work at their own rate; if holes were to be dug and debris transported to the skip, they would 'take their time' (see chapter 7).

The labourers' work was not always slow-paced, sometimes there was a large element of what was termed 'hurry up' (see again chapter 7). A hole would need to be dug 'now', because for instance, the screeder would be arriving that afternoon to fill the hole. Or a 'waiting load' skip would have to be filled as fast as possible because the skip was specified and paid for only for a short duration. During these times, the labourers worked fast and hard, and, as Steve said above, 'when I need them to do something for me, they do it'. The labourers informally knew this was the protocol and were implicitly aware they could lose their concessions if they failed to observe the rules of the game. As Aidan already quoted above explained, 'You know how to take Steve now, sort of being friendly, learn the ropes you know'.

Hard-paced work could turn into masculinity contests. Each man would try to outwork the next or at least keep-up with the group. The contests were maintained by piss-takes; slights that somebody or another was not 'pulling his weight'. Even the older men performed their strength in these contexts, and masculinity was, in this sense, a form of work control, albeit an informal and group imposed one that was external to the work process itself (see chapters 7 and 8).

Although it was problematic to directly control the labourers, they did experience the coercive effects of the *possibilities* of observation (c.f. Foucault, 1977). When Steve was not on site, the perceived pressure of his authority was positively reduced and the labourers would become more relaxed in their work. This did not mean they became undisciplined when authority was absent. For example, during my participation as a labourer, Danny went on holiday to Ireland for two weeks. Our effort and hours of work remained the same during his absence: we just worked in a more relaxed manner. This was an effect of the labourers' reciprocal clan-type work transactions; we really could be trusted to carry out the work unsupervised.

Carpenters

The carpenters and joiners are the top-hats of the building trade... the *elite* among operative builders (Booth, 1895:72. Italics original)

Akin to labouring work, much of the carpentry was almost impossible to plan prospectively. It was difficult to estimate a lump-sum cost for the work and the carpenters were therefore paid directly by the day by their subcontractors but remained answerable to Topbuild's site management on a daily basis. Their work varied from the labourers in that they were more autonomous and not continually under orders. For example, they would be instructed which doors to fit or windows to replace, and they would undertake this work in their own time and under their own control. They were overseen by the general foreman who spent perhaps half his time working in the site office and the other half instructing 'his chippies' and overseeing all the other trades. In this sense, the general foreman extended the power of management to the carpenters and others, but in doing so, he simultaneously defused some of that power. The general foreman was a member of the same ethnic group as the carpenters, and had known many of them throughout his life. He was entwined in the social pressures and loyalties of a close-knit ethnic network and thus held a strong allegiance to the carpenters (see chapter 9).

Jokes concerning the carpenters' slow pace of work were common. It was an image that enraged one of the site managers, who was also very racist. During the move to Keyworker House 2, the carpenters were consequently instructed to take their breaks in the labourers' canteen that adjoined the site office. The racist site manager wanted to check their work times, and he began to enforce formal working times. All

this occurred near to the time of my leaving Keyworker House, but it was evident that it was already beginning to promote dissent amongst the carpenters. Arguments occurred, and one of the carpenters informed me that he was now looking for another job because of the actions of the 'fuckin' bastard' site manager.

The site manager refused to indulge the carpenters' informal culture and a backlash was beginning to form over the location of the frontier of work control (Goodrich, 1920). Conflict ensued and the carpenters began to slow down their work-rate further, defaulting on the effort bargain. In response, the site manager employed two agency carpenters to 'prove' the Kutchis were slow. This, much to the enjoyment of the Kutchis, backfired because the 'agency blokes' worked at an even slower rate. I commented to Jamin that I thought one of the 'agency blokes' had died whilst repairing one of windows because I had not seen him move for thirty minutes. Jamin said, 'that's the best fuckin' thing that fat cunt's [racist site manager] done since he's been here, getting those agency blokes in'. It looked liked the Kutchis were winning the battle just as I left the field.

This story illustrated a number of factors. Firstly, to take away workers' informal concessions was counterproductive; it only functioned to slow them down even more. Builders possess a high degree of autonomy due to the problematic nature of observation and because they feel that they can always get another job somewhere else (especially at the time of the fieldwork when a building 'boom' was occurring). Secondly, administering indulgence is contingent upon the political views of the administrator i.e. if a manager has antipathy towards an employee or group of employees, he is unlikely to indulge them. And thirdly, building workers paid by the day must be trusted and reciprocated for their work. 'Agency blokes' are widely known in the building trade for being slow, unskilled and lazy. This is partly because they owe no allegiance to anyone; they are employed short-term, on a low(er) wage rate, and thus are not pulled by loyalty towards any kind of reciprocal clan relation with a core work group, subcontractor or site manager (see chapter 9).

Indirect Day-works

All of the other trades, except the carpenters and labourers, were employed by their subcontractor on a fixed price. This did not mean that the subcontracted employees were working on a fixed price themselves because their subcontractor paid most by the day. In this work relation, it was the subcontractor, and not Topbuild's site

management, who held an interest in securing an effort bargain from the workers. As I noted in chapter 4, the subcontractors organised jobs on other sites all around London. They could not then be at the job observing their workers all the time and had to a large extent to trust their workers to work to an efficient speed and quality. Below I shall use the example of the painting group to illustrate how the indirect day-work mechanism operated.

Painters

The painters form perhaps the most disorganised and composite group in the building trade, not excepting the labourers. The chief explanation of this is found in the character of their work, for the class includes many kinds of operatives, from the 'brush-hand' who has picked up a certain knack, and who may be anything (or nothing) from a sailor to a waiter or a scene-shifter; or from the mere hanger-on, supported by his wife's earnings when he has no painting job on hand, to a highly skilled decorator, who, constant to the craft of which he is master, would consider it an indignity to be ranked with the industrial gadabouts who call themselves his fellow craftsmen. (Booth, 1895: 79)

I joined the painters at the beginnings of the 'Year 2' work at Keyworker House 2, to decorate the external face of the building. I had been a participant observer with the labourers and in the site office previous to this time and, after my first day with the painters, I wrote:

It was very hot today and I found the work quite tiring, but the day just flew by, it seemed like half a day. In a way it *was* a short day, as we didn't start until about 8 am and were off the scaffold by 3 pm. Bony said, 'officially' we finish at 4. We started later and finished earlier than both the labourers and the chippies. (Fieldnotes)

The painters' official work hours were from 7.30 until 4. Every morning we would begin to organise our tools and materials at 8. By 9.45 we were walking off the scaffold to go to the shop to buy our breakfasts. At 10.30 we went back out to the scaffold. At 12.45 we would 'down tools' for our lunch, and at 1.30 we would go back to work. The painters' informal work-times were always regular, and Jimmy, the painting foreman, did not like these to be broken. However, finishing times in the afternoon tended to vary, and the afternoon was always a leisurely affair because bodily energy and concentration were depleted during the morning. Most commonly we went to 'put our tools away' between 3 and 3.30, but often it was earlier than this. Even if we were told not to leave work before 3.30, we would almost always 'down tools' at around 2.30 and stand around chatting and moaning that we wanted to 'get off' home.

Work times were imposed by the painting subcontractor, Ernie Coat, and not by the almost invisible site management. The painters took their breaks in their own private area, and management rarely came out of the office onto the scaffold to where the painters worked. Occasionally Jamin would walk around the scaffold but he generally left everybody to undertake the work unsupervised. However, the faster the work was completed, the more profit Ernie Coat would accrue, but he could not monitor 'his' painters all the time. He could only make 'random' spot-checks otherwise he had to put his trust in Jimmy, the painting foreman, to get the work done. Jimmy, like Danny, faced the same battles with time and energy as all the manual workers, as did all of Ernie's other painting foremen. In their battle with time and energy, the painters on all the various sites where Ernie had contracts would collude with one another as to Ernie's whereabouts *via* their mobile phones. Spot checks were therefore, never completely random.

The inter-site collusion was carefully crafted. Many of Ernie's painters had worked for him for a long time, and as a result, they developed a kind of informal routine activities theory of his daily and weekly movements (c.f. Felson, 1986). Their theory construction was partly the consequence of their tightly entwined local networks, because they not only worked together but also lived in the same geographic areas, frequenting a small number of pubs there. Ernie utilised these networks to inexpensively and efficiently recruit trusted labour (see chapter 4), but the networks also acted to conspire against him.

During tea and lunch breaks Jimmy's phone would ring. It would be information from one of the other sites as to Ernie's whereabouts. Usually, one of the 'lads' would also have some information to share, as they had also spoken on the telephone that day to their painter friends. This enabled Ernie's movements to be specifically pinpointed, and, if Jimmy concluded from the information that there was small chance of Ernie visiting Keyworker House that day, the painters would leave work early, but never before 2.30. I am sure Ernie was aware of the on-going cat and mice game but the power of performance out-stripped actuality (see Goffman, 1955; 1959; and chapter 7). Furthermore, Ernie's paternalist reciprocal relations with his workers (see chapter 9) also functioned to glue them into an effort bargain in that they almost never left work before 2.30, even when Ernie went on one of his numerous holidays to Spain.

The painters always fulfilled their informal work hours because of their reciprocal relationships with Ernie Coat and the possible violence of dismissal. During work-time, moreover, Jimmy made sure that ample work was done, and, if the painters did not 'pull their weight', he became angry and threatened dismissal. For example, one of the painters, Frank, was regularly threatened with dismissal because of his inexperience and low skill, which meant he completed less work within the specified times than the better skilled painters. This pressurised Jimmy who thought that Frank could 'give the game away' and expose the time banditry. The situation led to the ill-treatment of Frank by most of the other painters (see chapter 8). He was made a scapegoat for almost any problem that arose, and he was eventually sacked.

Snake in the Grass

To commit acts of time banditry (and other informal work activities that will be discussed in the following chapters), the work groups had to trust one another not to let the team down. Work-group trust was vigorously maintained and enforced through demonisation of the informer, or, the 'grass', who held a very low status amongst the men, almost akin to the devil. As Matza (1964) argues with reference to delinquent boys in North America, group collectivity and demonisation of the 'grass' is enforced rigidly amongst the group precisely because they cannot trust one another. Similar processes were at play at Keyworker House. Group rules and collectivity were rigidly enforced because often there were few group rules due to the ephemeral nature of building work practices (see chapter 8).

Bristles clearly expressed the builders' disdain for the grass, and the function of such disdain:

Certain people in the tea-room if they had a chance of dropping other people in it, I'm sure they would. Why don't they? 'Cos your life wouldn't be worth shit in the building if you grassed. I'm easy going and laid back but if someone grassed me up, well, that's a different story. Grasses are just not acceptable. I mean they [the labourers] still talk about that 60-year-old bloody labourer they worked with at Curtain Street. I think he's 67, he's as strong as an ox and no bigger than a matchstick, honestly, but they call him a grass. In respect of, he's gone to work one day and saw the previous bloke not doing anything, he's most probably told the site agent [manager] that he's no good, he's not pulling his weight. Now that's something you just can't do. We are different on the buildings in the respect we are free spirits. We can go a lot of places but that name will follow you, because I have met many people from 20 years ago, people still come up to me on a building site and like, 'oh how you doing'. You have to watch the seeds you lay.

'Grasses are just not acceptable'. The work groups had to 'keep things quiet' because they were breaking formal rules. Any group that performs informal practices will necessarily attempt to control its members to maintain the flow of information within that network (see chapters 9 and 10). Work groups must hide their informal activities, and their impression management techniques should be authentic. If not, the game breaks down and clan relations with subcontractors and/or management fracture (see chapter 7).

Through these cultural attitudes, the builders were able to expel from the site those whom they did not trust or did not like (see also Foster, 1969). Aidan illuminated this point:

[Phil] he's one of those fellows who doesn't understand why people don't get on with him. He tried to make himself out to be Danny's best mate, which was a lie anyway. Danny tolerated him, kind of showing a front all the time. [Phil] he was telling me I wasn't doing this properly, I wasn't doing that properly. He's one of those fellows sort of, he's gonna get me off this site as fucking soon as possible, fuckin' grass me up, which was no reason for. Course you notice it in the [workgroup] camp, no one sort of got on with him. He jacked [left the job] in the end anyway... Look at it this way, your working day, don't get me wrong, but I'm more with you during the day than I am with my girlfriend. I see her two or three times during the week. I ain't being funny but you got to get on with everyone... I hate that when someone new comes on board saying this and that. I was working with him [Phil] for about a week and he was always looking down to me saying, sort of telling me what to do. Until that Saturday morning come and I just blew up [became aggressive] on top of the scaffold. He was a fuckin funny fucker he was, oh Jesus, cranky as fuck.

Careers and Attitudes

Both the painting and the labouring group were involved in collective acts of time banditry. Through my observation of the working times of the other trade groups, it was evident, with the exception of site management and surveyors, that everyone stole time. It might be assumed that the reason for such banditry was because the builders did not enjoy their work and would attempt to do anything to avoid it. However, this would be incorrect.

Work Attitudes

In an ethnographic account of the lifestyles of builders in a working-class tavern in North America, LeMasters points out that in Terkel's (1972) *Working*, 'one of the persons who enjoyed his work most was a stone mason' (1975: 199). In fact the mason was one of only four workers, out of over two hundred interviewed, who

expressed such an enjoyment. Builders, including those at Keyworker House, enjoy their work. Bill for instance, was a work enthusiast:

I love being an electrician. As I say I've always liked working and I get job satisfaction. All weekends I work at people's houses. I do my own private work and you see it, the finished product. It's just job satisfaction when you know you've gone in there, you've explained what you're gonna do and they either like it or they don't like it, but you know there's a finished article.

Gerry, a painter, also 'loved' his work:

Oh, I love it, I really love it. I wouldn't rather do anything than be a decorator. Some jobs are just beautiful... My brush is like a wand, the wall is my canvass and together we can make beauty.

Bapu said the same:

Some people like drinking, well, he's an alcoholic. I like working, I'm a workaholic. I like to be the workaholic, I love the work. A lot of time I work the weekend as well. So I built a staircase, I made it myself. And the window as well, new window, I made it myself, you know what I mean? ... Some don't like to do the skilled work or the hard work, but I like it here, love it. Still I love it. I'm never tired it's true. I never get bored. I never have day off. Only an emergency, then I can take the day off. Otherwise I come in working everyday without fail. Work is important you know.

Bill, Gerry and Bapu, all expressed enjoyment in making something; in producing a 'finished article'. Because the tradesmen could see the product of their labour, most of them expressed enjoyment and pride in their work, but it was not just making something they enjoyed. Take, for instance, Jamin, talking about his work as a carpenter:

I do enjoy the actual work, and what I like about it is I've been doing it a long time now and I don't have any difficulties with it. I know really what's what and I can get on with it literally with my eyes closed, you know, no hassle, not having to look after anybody or make sure they're doing it right, do my work, go home. Peace of mind basically, no paperwork involved, no nothing... On the tools it's no problem, don't have to think about nothing, just get yourself to work, do your work, done. And I'm the type of person that likes to do a good day's work, you know, I hate people telling me that this is not enough work. If anybody was to ever tell me that right, I'd walk off...

If there is one good thing that I can say about the building game, which I have enjoyed, is the freedom, the freedom and the change of environment, change of jobs. I've been here a year and a half and it's the longest I've been on a building site and I don't like it man. I'm not fussed do you know what I mean, it's a living, and it's decent money so I can't complain really. The freedom, it's one of the few bonuses. You're usually left to get on with it and you can move around and get to see new places and new faces. I must have worked in every single part of London in my time. I mean looking at it, I can't hate it because I wouldn't be in it. I suppose everybody moans about what they do.

Careers

The foreman role is the first step on the career ladder for builders who work for contractors and subcontractors. Builders often become foremen on small jobs where they work with people from within their own social networks. In these situations they only hold a fragile and negotiated authority, but they organise the flow of work and materials, and they communicate with subcontractors, managers, and clients. As shown below, most of the builders were happy to perform this kind of role on small jobs, but they expressed an aversion to it on large jobs. Such attitudes, and the instability of building work, manufactured a situation where one who is foreman today may not be a foreman tomorrow.

Rising above the foreman ranks is problematic for the majority of builders. Site managers usually emerge from the carpentry trade, and occasionally from bricklaying. Site management positions are therefore blocked to the majority of tradesmen and labourers. Site managers must also be able to read, write, operate computers and communicate with a multitude of parties, tasks that would be highly problematic for a number of workers, including the majority of migrant workers from agrarian areas for instance. Furthermore, not all building companies employ site management. Official statistics are misleading (see chapter 1), but the building industry seems to be characterised by a large number of small firms that are likely to be administered only by an owner, his wife and a trusted foreman who is out and about on site. In these firms there are simply no career ladders to climb.

Not being able to ascend the ranks was secondary to not wanting to ascend them. Foremen had to be trusted in particular ways by the management, but they spent the majority of their day working physically with their 'blokes' and not in 'the office'. They had therefore, to show allegiance and gain respect from their workers whilst simultaneously appeasing their subcontractor and site management. However, employing foremen as 'time-police' was rather a paradoxical exercise because they were subject to similar time and physical pressures as everyone else on the tools (see below). Jamin explained these problems:

I don't really like doing the foreman stuff, I don't really like doing it at all. It's too much hassle man, too much hassle. You've got to try and get the blokes to do as much work as you can, which puts you on the bad side of them. I'm not really that type of person to shout and scream. I mean I'm quite happy if I've got like 4 decent blokes who don't need to be told to hurry up and all that, then I'm quite happy. When you start getting big jobs and loads of chippies, it pisses me off. You've got to try and keep them in the office happy, and you've got to try and keep your governor happy, all three of

them, so you're in the middle, whipping boy in the middle. So no, I don't really enjoy it. I would much rather earn £5 a day less and come to work and get my tools out, take my time, do my work and go home. Prefer to do that and get less money... I always seem to get hooked into this fucking foreman crap, really get hooked into it. I mean I sat my governor down one day and said, look I don't want to fucking do it, just leave me alone. And he was all right for a couple of days, but the bloke who he put instead of me was fucking having a hard time. So then he said, 'look please, it's not working out, can you come back and do this and that, you're good at it, help me out'... Maybe I'm just too loyal sometimes you know. I should have put my foot down and said, fuck you man, I just want to go on the tools, now leave me alone, but it doesn't work like that. [See chapter 9].

It was partly the problem of being set down in the middle of the lines of command that made the foreman's job so problematic. His was the 'marginal man's' position outlined by Wray where: 'The poor fellow is in the middle, of course, in the sense that a person may be the middle one of three in a bed; he gets it from both sides!' (1949: 301).

All the foremen I interviewed told me their work life depended upon who were working for them. In particular, a high turnover of men made their jobs difficult, again highlighting the importance of trust in the building industry. As Danny, the labour foreman, told me:

Not a problem being the gangerman [foreman] here really, a decent group of blokes you work with and it's no problem. It's different when you're on a big job and it's a high turnover of men, new fish coming in, and it would be totally different. Not on this firm, it's no problem. Yeah, no high turnover like some.

It was for these reasons that many did not wish to ascend the building ranks. I was never told that they did not want to become part of the management because it was not 'men's' work, or that it was seen as a job of the enemy (c.f. Collinson, 1992). They simply did not want the extra responsibility of becoming the 'whipping boy in the middle'. Furthermore, many, like the general foreman cited above, expressed a desire to remain 'on the tools' because they wanted to be 'left alone' and 'take their time', retaining their independence. For foremen, time was no longer their own; they could no longer be the unrushed master of their work task. They were obliged continually to respond to others' demands and time was taken out of their hands.

The question remains as to why the builders wanted to be left alone. Throughout this chapter I have alluded to the problems they encountered with time and corporal energy. In the next chapter I examine the structures of time and energy and describe how they impinged upon the builders' workday and culture.

Chapter 7

Doing Time

... when the workers arrived in the morning they wished it was breakfast-time. When they resumed work after breakfast they wished it was dinner-time. After dinner they wished it was one o'clock on Saturday. (Tressell, 1914: 92)

Working on the line changed the way you experienced time altogether. The minutes and hours went very slowly, but the days passed very quickly once they were over, and the weeks rushed by. Some days were even slower than others, and everyone agreed whether the morning was fast or slow, and whether the afternoon was faster or slower than the morning. We joked about how we were wishing our lives away, wishing it was 'going home time' or Friday afternoon. (Cavendish, 1982: 112)

During Ruth Cavendish's participation on the production line of an electrical components factory, she became acutely aware of the problematic nature of work-time. Indeed, a review of work-place literature demonstrates that researchers who participate in and experience manual work often notice and theorise the structure of work-time that their subjects take for granted.

Unlike Cavendish's factory workers, most of the builders enjoyed their work. It might be paradoxical then, that the builders were involved in acts of time banditry at all. Prior to my fieldwork I experienced informal activities, including time banditry and pilferage, on almost all other building sites. The activities were commonly accounted for by anti-management/boss vocabularies of motive; infused with speech concerning the boss/managers' wealth and/or disrespect, or, that it was only fair to rob time or materials from the company because the company was exploiting and disrespecting the builders. This led me to believe that informal actions were associated with some kind of deeply embedded class-based conflict of interests resulting from the capitalist work process. However, at Keyworker House, informal actions were not really accounted for at all. Jokes or simply wry smiles accompanied time deviance and pilfering. These meta-accounts seemed to indicate that the builders were conscious they had deviated from formal rules because the accounts were social mechanisms communicated to repair rule infractions (c.f. Garfinkel, 1967). Meta-accounts, and 'meta-language' are also associated with informal trading networks (Henry, 1978; Mars, 1982), and can be viewed as an ambiguous and marginal form of communication that is framed and occurs, by and on the edges of, interactive ritual (see below and chapter 10).

Many commonly used indicators of industrial conflict were absent at Keyworker House. Institutionalised conflicts in the forms of strikes or stoppages were non-existent, as were unions or stewards to represent that conflict. This was partly because unionisation had been pushed to the sidelines in the building industry through casualisation, self-employment and Thatcherism (see chapter 1). Yet, informal measures of conflict, including high absenteeism or high quitting rates, were not present either. I witnessed only one act of industrial sabotage, which was targeted at Pete, the general foreman, by a transient painter group to bring him 'back down to earth' when he got 'too big for his boots'¹.

The builders' workplace autonomy, and the managers' respect for the builders, kept conflict to a minimum. However, if, as was shown, the builders were highly autonomous, indulged in their informal cultures, satisfied with their work, and in the majority possessed positive attitudes towards site management, why did work deviance occur at all? The answer, I think, lay in their desire to 'take time'.

The organisational and subjective problems encountered by time structures are the focus of this chapter. Although the builders, and perhaps everyone, dwelt subjectively in 'multiple-times' (c.f. Adam, 1990), for conceptual clarity I have divided time into 6 main types: cyclical, progressive, metronomic, commodified and subjective.

Temporal Selves

As the seventeenth century moves on the image of clock-work extends, until, with Newton, it has engrossed the universe. (Thompson, [1967] 1993: 352)

Formal time schedules subjectively and organisationally guided the builders' everyday action, yet the schedules did not concretely delineate that action. Whilst mortal and metronomic time are imposed, concrete and shared, they are also subjectively negotiated.

Throughout the workday the builders talked about time. Time-talk was as common as topics concerning beer/pub, football, the work and, women: 'Is it nearly

¹ This was a surreptitious act of sabotage. The painting group left an up-turned can of black oil-based paint on a board situated on the scaffold. When one of the labourers tidied the scaffold and moved the can, the paint splashed down the masonry and windows of Keyworker House 1. The painters were disillusioned with the general foreman's talk about how he was going to become a site manager and ascend the Topbuild management hierarchy, and they came to dislike him, seeing him as undeserving of his position. Because they were on 'price work', they essentially 'ran rings' around him and undertook sub-standard work. Topbuild's management refused to pay the painters' subcontractor and heated arguments ensued between Topbuild and the subcontractor, which were on-going when I left the field. Following this episode Topbuild returned to contracting only Ernie Coat for painting works.

breakfast yet?', 'It's bloody draggin' today innit?', 'Christ, it's gone fast this morning', 'Only another two days 'till Friday', 'Do you reckon we'll get away early today?'. Such comments were omnipresent, and battles with time appeared to be at the forefront of the builders' minds.

One Friday morning when I was working with the painters, we were drinking tea and getting changed into our 'whites' for the day ahead. Everyone was sanguine, and saying things like, 'thank fuck it's Friday today', 'best day of the working week today'. I commented, depressingly, that the problem was that we would have to come back to work and start all over again on Monday. Perry replied, 'as long as I get the weekend in between I don't mind'. He appeared to have adjusted his thinking to the time-cycle.

One of the painters, Gerry, expressed his view of work-time and explained how he had subjectively adjusted to it:

We always seem to be away nice and early. On some sites you'll be fuckin' about until twenty to five, I can't hack that, it flies by on here. Everything's in sections, just think about sections, units of time. There's only so many units in the day, three main units: morning till breakfast, breakfast till lunch, then just the afternoon. I think of it all in sections; first, second and third section...

There's so many ways of killing time, you become an expert at it, so many ways: ah, let's go and get the steps, go and get some paint. After so many years of fuckin' working then you know how to deal with it. You're just going on for years so what is the rush? Time is only made by man isn't it? Years ago they used to have time to do that work, why the rush? What's coming, a fuckin' comet or something? Man stresses, he does, doesn't he? And it's man-made things, generated by man. You have to get money to be in a house and so on, blah, blah, blah. They don't want to give you the keys for the big world out there, you can't get at it. It's not a decent reward is it? It's like we're just above the sea, you're sinking while you're swimming, you're never fuckin' going for it. The next thing I look around and I'm 67 and so on. Isn't it strange that we wish time away when we don't have enough time to do all the things in the world? It's very fuckin' strange because when you're on your deathbed you'll be wishing your way back again. I'll wish I was back 25 years on that scaffold and it's 25 past eight.... Monday, Friday, back to Monday, long day, everything just comes back round. That is life, it's a strange and wonderful thing. It's continuous, it will never end, continuous, nothing ends... Well this is what I think anyway.

It's like we're all in a routine, course we are aren't we? We're often thinking ahead, it's very hard to join the moment of time, just go with it and flow with it. There's something special about taking the day as it is. Most of the time we're jumping behind or jumping forward, and we wind our own heads up. We really do overload, it's madness. If not, we're chasing fuckin' shadows, we really are, and we're being used. We're not even actually chasing them, we think we're chasing them but in actual fact we're being used. Just part of the fuckin' machinery. But I've had some of the greatest times, the most hilarious times, by going to work with the right crowd. You'd hate yourself if you had the day off, because what it was is an understanding with the crowd. But that's what makes work worth doing. It makes the world of difference to work with

good blokes and have a laugh. But there's some devious bastards out there. What's the point of that? We got to work together, let's get along together.

Gerry's careful theory of work-time demonstrated how he got through the day by utilising time-markers, or 'sections' as he called them. He also 'killed time' by varying his work; leaving his work-space to go and get steps and paint so as to break up the day. He also expressed an almost Buddhist view of time as 'continuous', and, although he saw all people as 'part of the machinery', he viewed working with the 'right crowd' as 'some of the greatest times'.

In talking about the pros and cons of being a builder, Jamin expressed a similar view in relation to being 'part of the machinery':

The insecurity [of the building trade] is the downside of it really, definitely. But the freedom is the upside, do you know what I mean? That's what I like about it. But then again you see you're not progressing anywhere, you're just like a machine going on and on and on.

As mentioned in the last chapter, most builders learn their trade and carry on their life in that trade. They do not progress through a career because there is little career structure to follow. In this sense, time to the builder who remains a builder can be conceptualised as a form of cyclic time because each day, week, year, and decade, comes back around. The work simply becomes easier to do in terms of their accumulated knowledge; they have to think about it less and less. Alternatively, it becomes physically harder for them as they age. Many builders in their twilight years turn to entrepreneurial private work, or maintenance work. However, for labourers this is not a realistic option, they simply carry on labouring (see chapter 10), and some of the labourers at Keyworker House were in the seventh decade of their lives. Linear progression for them was almost non-existent. Their lifetime was not flagged by career progression or even an end-point of retirement: life was work, work was life. If they were 'fit' enough, they carried on the cycle of work until their bodies deteriorated. As Danny, the labour foreman, said, for example: 'Depends on being healthy. If I was healthy I'd carry on [working after retirement] for a while but there's still a few years yet'. Mike Fixit expressed a similar outlook:

I might [consider being the tea boy] if I'm coming up to 6 months or a year until I retire. Then yeah, I might think differently about it. I don't know really, I might do it. I got 16 years until that but I can't see myself retiring at 65. Most people in the building don't retire until they're about 70. If I'm fit I'll carry on, probably. I can't sit around all day with her in doors.

During my years working as a painter I was acutely aware of the cyclical nature of time and I found it impossible to psychologically adjust to. I would stand at work on a Monday and despair that I would be doing that same thing for the rest of my life. Beynon noticed something similar to this in his study of Ford production line workers, where he describes the ‘sheer audacious madness of a system based upon men wishing their lives away.’ (1973: 1100).

Cyclical time was a problem for me, and incomprehensible to Beynon, yet the builders were somehow able to deal with and adapt to it to a large extent. Conceptually, most builders work within metronomic-cyclical time. For example, both Jamin and Gerry enjoyed their work but they thought themselves to be ‘part of the machinery’, ‘not progressing anywhere... like a machine going on and on’. And as Gerry revealed, the flow of the cycle was structured by man-made time, or what might be termed the timetable (c.f. Foucault, 1977; Thrift, 1990). The builders used a machine metaphor to account for their work lives (c.f. Adam, 1990), and they (and I) felt, literally, part of a relentless metronomic cycle. Work was, for most, Monday morning until Saturday afternoon, and took place within formally tabled hours to metronomic beat. However, as described in the last chapter, the builders did not adhere to the formal timetable; they worked to their own informal times, routines and rhythms.

Rhythms

When someone is in control of their own work task they have a mastery over their approach and the time in which they do it. Task-mastery implies ‘taking time’ and, many of the builders enjoyed taking their time. However, whilst builders often work alone in a workspace, they may also work side-by-side with their trade colleagues. In these circumstances, the time taken to do a task was not ‘my time’, but ‘our time’.

‘Our time’ is ‘chosen’ by the group rather than synthetically imposed by authority or timetables. An example of ‘my time’ and ‘our time’ occurred when I first began work with the painters. I was a little out of practice, and during the first week was shadowed by Jimmy, the painting foreman, who kept a close watch on me, much to my disdain. His gaze pressured me to work fast and rush. But when he could see I was knowledgeable, quite fast and accurate at my job, he left me alone to do the work by myself, in my own time, which I much preferred. Approximately two weeks into the work, Jimmy instructed me to begin glossing the prepared external windows,

working alongside Perry and Bony. At first I struggled to keep up with them, and my work was a little messy. But after a day or two I began to 'get my eye in', and 'get into a rhythm'. My hand-eye co-ordination was improving and I began to fathom the most efficient way to apply the paint to the large sash windows; to start in a particular area, and move the window sashes up and down in the most efficient order so as to cover the total frame with paint, and I soon caught up with their speed. Bony was officially retired, indicating that he must have been over the age of 65. He also had back problems that made it difficult for him to bend down to paint the lower parts of the windows. Perry was 34 years old and fit. I assume he had slowed down to Bony's speed because they were working at a synchronic pace.

The more frames I glossed, the faster I completed the task. I was not consciously aware of this, or even trying to work faster by this point. My bodily actions were almost automatic, caught up in a rhythm, but somehow subconsciously improving on speed and accuracy. I found I could work at a faster rate than my two colleagues, but I knew from past experience that it was always a good idea to work just slightly slower than the fastest man. Working even slightly faster than the man next to you can develop into race and I did not want to race, I would rather take my-time. Perry, Bony and I, fell into a group speed and rhythm. In Jimmy's words, 'you're all flying through those windows'. I found I had time to stop, smoke a cigarette and chat to the passing labourers and carpenters between each completed window. I also found that I enjoyed the work. Painters commonly say they like glossing; a shiny end product is achieved. However, the learning process and the rhythm itself also made the work anodyne and quite rewarding. It was satisfying to be the un-rushed master of one's task.

Routines

Richard Sennett (1998) usefully discusses work routine. He cites Diderot:

In his *Paradox of Acting*, Diderot sought to explain how the actor or actress gradually plumbs the depths of a part by repeating the lines again and again. And these same virtues of repetition he expected to find in industrial labour...[Using an example of a papermaking factory] Diderot believed – again by analogy to the arts – that its routines were in constant evolution, as workers learned how to manipulate and alter each stage of the labour process. More largely, the 'rhythm' of work means that by repeating a particular operation, we find how to speed up and slow down, make variations, play with materials, develop new practices – just as a musician learns how to manage time in performing a piece of music. Thanks to repetition and rhythm, the worker can achieve, Diderot said, 'the unity of mind and hand' in labour... he believed that

through mastering routine and its rhythms, people both take control and calm down.
(pp. 34 - 35)

Sennett moves on to look at Adam Smith's description of a pin factory in which Smith argues that where a task is broken down into small parts, workers lose control and become bored and apathetic. Sennett concludes from this that routine is destructive, that Diderot's idea is false, because the worker, unlike the actor, has no control over his work where his time is commodified:

The industrial worker thus knows nothing of the self-possession and mobile expressiveness of the actor who has memorised a thousand lines; Diderot's comparison of actor and worker is false, because the worker does not control his or her work. The pin-maker becomes a 'stupid and ignorant' creature in the course of the division of labour; the repetitive nature of his work has pacified him. For these reasons, industrial routine threatens to diminish human character in its very depths. (p. 37)

Sennett then takes from Adam (1990), Marx's comparison of Smith's pin factory with the German system of *Tagwerk*, where:

... a labourer was paid by the day; in that practice, the worker could adapt to the conditions of his or her environment, working differently on days when it rained than on clear days, or organizing tasks to take account of the delivery of supplies; there was rhythm to such work, because the worker was in control. (p. 39)

It might be considered that the builders' work mirrored Diderot's actor and Marx's *Tagwerk*, even in twenty-first century capitalism, where labour is divided on an intensely global scale, and the machine is dominant part of daily life. In this respect, building work was markedly different from pin-making or factory work.

In the last chapter, the painter in Bristles' description was only 'one above the food chain' in building cultures' trade status rankings. The builder colloquialism, 'if you can piss, you can paint', highlights this. Painting is arguably the least skilled of the building trades. Yet, jobs such as glossing are really quite enjoyable; there is a rhythm to the work, a honed skill and a tangible finished product. From this it may be inferred that all other building trades are at least as enjoyable, and probably more so, and the interview data reflected this. Like Diderot's actor, the painter masters his routine through rhythmic repetition. However, painters do not perform rhythmical mastery in their own-time, but within group/our-time, which is situated further within commodified time. And, for the day-worker, time is not money. Imposed time is rather something to be played with, to be twisted and turned not only in real tabled work-time, but also within subjective time.

During the glossing work, Bony, Perry and I worked side by side in a line, sharing the same section of scaffold. Despite working next to one another, we talked little. There were the usual time requests, occasional jokes, comments, and profanities when elbows were banged or splinters forced in to the skin of our hands, but that was about all. However, when we stopped to smoke cigarettes in between glossing the windows, we did talk (or at least Perry and I did, Bony rarely said anything at any time). We did not want to engage in conversation when we were caught-up in our rhythm. Personally, I was at once concentrating and, at the same time, not painting windows at all; I was somewhere else, wandering around in my subjective space, thinking about this chapter and daydreaming. Daydreaming is a form of psychological escape from the constraints of time (c.f. Cohen and Taylor, 1972) in all its forms. It releases the dreamer out from cyclical or linear time into somewhere else². As Cohen and Taylor (1976) argue, attempts to escape everyday reality form a substantial element of human culture, and the subjective effects of daydreaming may be compared to contrived and mediated dreams that take the form of entertainment in stories.

In an ethnography of truck drivers in North America, Blake (1974) noticed the positive effects of work rhythms. Although trucks are big, powerful and masculinised machines, the experiential aspects of truck driving appear remarkably similar to that of the painter and the builder in general. Blake writes:

In so many situations, intense concentration is required to accomplish a task at hand and this may result in a new kind of experience. A point is reached at which the subtle and complex intricacies of the task begin to 'come naturally'. At the same time, the task is such that a continual adjustment to the situation is necessary so that intensity of concentration varies intermittently over time. This continual readjustment, too, 'comes naturally' and a *situational rhythm* emerges in which the person becomes one among a number of elements co-existing and co-acting in the situation. Mere concentration (that is, 'surface attention,' see Walker and Guest, 1952: 13-14) is required of a number of occupations (including factory work), but situational rhythm is required of only a few (including truck driving).

While in the state of situational rhythm the individual is capable either of reflection on totally different situations or of total situational immersion; the later meaning that he 'lets himself go', he gets 'high'. The situation of total immersion engenders a feeling of situational power that is real to the extent that it reflects the fact of temporal, immediate control. (1974; 206-207. Italics original)

² I first consciously learnt this whilst working as a farm labourer. The work was so hard, dull and monotonous that I forced myself to project into the future and imagine almost fairytale-like scenarios. Without doing this, the 12-hour work-day was like psychological torture, utterly unbearable. However, I probably firstly unconsciously learnt this at school, and in consideration of the cultural similarities between builders and 'anti-school' subcultures (see chapter 8), it might be useful to consider how time is applied in schools and its relationship to educational under-achievement.

The situation described above is what Clayberg (1949) term's 'steriogenesis', where mind, body and motion combine with a tool or machine to produce rhythmical mastery of the task. This turns work into play and thereby makes manual work an enjoyable task, and, it explains part of the reason why the builders expressed enjoyment in their work.

Situational work rhythms also provide a clue as to why foremen did not enjoy their responsibilities and expressed a desire to return to 'the tools'. Foremen must move around the total workspace under other people's orders. In any work the foreman attempts to do, it is likely that he will be 'pulled off' it to organise his men or answer to the demands of management. This upsets personal rhythm and smashes mastery. The foreman becomes an effect of others' demands, and such demands are set within a commodified time frame. The completion date of a build sets synthetic time limits which management must try to adhere to, but almost never achieve (see Bresnan, 1990), and the association of time with money, prompts many requests for 'hurry up' (see below).

Subjecting Time

Anyone who has ever been in a hurry and had to wait three minutes at a London underground station for the next tube train will be aware of the vast contradictions between clock time and subjective time. One passing minute can seem like tens of minutes. The philosophical colloquialism, 'time flies when you're having fun', illustrates the antonym of tube station time, and further reveals that time is a negotiable subjective entity. Even seemingly inevitable biological/mortal time can be subjectively negotiated, most commonly in the form of religious belief (see Adam, 2004).

Like tube station time, boring work, or work where one is unable to develop a rhythm, can 'drag out' subjective time immeasurably, and, whilst some building work is rhythmical and enjoyable, some of it is not. None of the builders expressed dissatisfaction about their work because it was physically hard, dangerous or dirty, in fact they commonly embraced such tasks. Dissatisfaction was expressed when the work became boring; when time dragged. The worker, like the foreman, was not always permitted to 'harmoniously interact' with his task due to the demands of the work process. This was particularly so for the labourers. As Michael told me:

Yeah, the time goes when you're busy. I'd rather be kept busy. The busier I am the better I like it. I don't like to be hanging about, a day will be like two days umm. That's what I don't like, but that's the way it goes innit, that's the way it is.

As mentioned in chapter 6, the labourers enjoyed fast-paced hard work. Shovelling a mound of sand into a wheelbarrow or 'gunning' and digging holes, was enjoyable, despite (or possibly because of) it being physically tough. During these tasks, for which the labourers possessed a rare amount of autonomy and an end product of sorts, work-rhythms were established and, the rhythms had an effect upon subjective time, making the work more enjoyable.

Time Markers

Shovelling sand had an end-point: one knows where to begin and when they are going to finish. In these situations, the labourers could plan at which rate to work, when to stop for a break, and progression through the task could be tangibly perceived. As Trick, talking about how he liked his mechanical and electrical job, illustrated:

I enjoy doing anything where you've got all your tools and all the gear you want in one area. Like doing those showers, you're carcassing out [removing all of the old mechanical material from the area] a whole wall of pipe-work and you're being left alone. As long as you know what you're doing, and what they want... Yeah it's good, you enjoy it 'cos you look back on the day and you think yeah, you know in yourself what you want to get done. It doesn't matter if it's cutting a hedge and you want to get a quarter of a mile of it cut back that day, or paint half of a building, you know where you should be and what you want to do. So with the showers, you carcass one out, get on with the job and you say, yeah, I enjoyed that, good.

Unfortunately for the labourers, unlike the tradesmen, they were not left alone in one place for much of the time. Consequently, they could not comprehend the tasks they would undertake within a specified time-frame, and thus they could not always set themselves task and time markers. A labourer may begin a task only to be 'pulled off' it through the demands of 'hurry up', or conflicting orders. As Aidan explained:

Well an example is yesterday. We're short on labour and all this business yeah. Now Pete and James wanted me to do one job yeah, Steve wanted me to do another job, and Danny wanted me to do another job. I knew what I was gonna do, which I started, sweep all the roof off yeah, knowing the day before that I was gonna do that. But by the time I'd got up there, things had changed. So I was pushed onto another job. Pete wanted me to go check all the work we'd done for him last week, and then the lightning conductor blokes come down and said the holes wasn't big enough. And now it's only me and Danny [to do all the work]. So they are all rushing and all this business. I mean a little bit of organisation you know what I mean? That's what I don't like about it, organisation yeah, I like planned.

Part of Aidan's problem was that there were not enough labourers on site to do all of the 'hurry up' work. It was not that Aidan wanted to shirk work, but he was given conflicting orders from different areas of authority, which was a common scenario for the labourers because their work was general and almost everybody was their boss.

Disturbance of personal and group rhythms upset psychological mechanisms for subjectively dealing with time. However, defence mechanisms existed to manage the upsets. One way, as indicated in chapter 6, was to steal time, to prise back timetabled time and transform it into personal time. The term 'break-time' literally reflects this. I never enjoyed my participant observation so much as when I took my break-times when working as a labourer. It was time to physically rest and take 'time-out' of imposed orders and time frames. Even the managers acknowledged this if they entered the labourers' canteen during break-times: 'Sorry lads, have your lunch first, but could you go up on the roof and get all the old roof tiles down when you're done'. The managers would always be 'sorry' for making demands in break-times.

Having the Crack

Task mastery, taking breaks, and stealing time left the remainder of work-time to be negotiated and dealt subjectively with. Another mechanism for dealing with time was to break up the day by 'having the crack'. In talking about why he liked to work as a labourer, Aidan spoke about this in some detail:

I do like it [labouring] yeah. I like meeting people, getting to know them, having the crack with them you know. I've known Patrick [a fellow labourer] now, well, a long time. I used to have great fun with him, having the banter like. They lie to me and I tell them lies. Make big stories up, you know what I mean (laughs)? Getting people to believe you and all this business. And you think in your mind you know, where Patrick came out the other day and said he went for fish and chips that night and the fish was so fresh it ate all his chips (laughing). All things like that you know...

I'd say to Patrick, 'cos he knows my dad see, oh I saw so and so in the pub last night. All these different names and all this business, pick on people you know. Oh I met him last night and he was asking me, 'oh what are you drinking'. It's all lies like. And then telling him white lies, having the crack like. I was telling him me and Danny were working Saturday afternoon and all day Sunday, like £70 a shift, and all this business (laughing). Having a good laugh in the morning, I think it sets the day up. You go in there and get some long faces and all that, but there's always one of us out the group that'll come out with something interesting or something funny. Or we pick on someone just for the sake of it, 'Poor old Paul's over there and all this business, fat bastard this, fat bastard that'. But he's not there with us is he, but he's sort of made a joke of you know... That's why I like winding them up, you can always see them thinking, now is he winding me up. Things like that, like mind games, having the crack, no offence to anyone.

Almost all the builders expressed enjoyment in 'the crack'. They liked their work because they 'had a laugh', and, jokes, lies, piss-takes, and 'wind-ups' were a central aspect of their work culture. The form and content of the crack was integral to Anglo working-class cultures in general, and the builders' reminded me of the antics of the 'lads' described by Willis (1977) in both the school and the factory; what Willis describes as 'shop-floor culture' (see also chapter 8). The crack served to break up monotonous dragging-time, but it also framed a kind of cultural adhesive amongst the culturally diverse builders. Mike Fixit:

On a building site everybody's lumped together the same. We're all there, we all know what building work is like, we all know it's hard sometimes and we all know its easy sometimes. And the blokes, they, it's a special group of men that work on building sites, they're like their own sort of family. You get the odd one or two that are a bit loud and this that and the other, but they don't really last long on a building site because everyone's there for the easy life; get the job done, go home. With small firms you can get to know everyone and have a laugh and a crack. Even with the management, you can get to know them, have a laugh with them.

The content of the crack was frequently framed by a masculine discourse that formed a major constituent of the builders' cultural adhesive, which also had consequences beyond breaking-up time (see chapter 8). The crack is common in the literature of the workplace and embedded in culture in general. At Keyworker House it released workers from dull and dragging time through breaching reality and/or by manufacturing excitement (Matza, 1964) through linguistic jousting tournaments (see below and chapter 8). Huizinga (1938) argues that tournaments, play and games are a source of play in which excitement transports players into another subjective world, into a higher order of consciousness. And, as Lyng (1990) comments, excitement suspends reflexive consciousness, separating Mead's 'I' and 'me'. Excited individuals are thus released from normative sociality and metronomic temporality, and intersubjective 'dragging-time' is relinquished.

Roy's (1960) participant observation of factory workers graphically illustrates the function of the crack. Roy found that the monotonous workday led him into a battle with time that was eased by developing a 'game of work'. This involved setting personal targets and sequences in the work process, much like that described as 'sections' by Gerry. Like the builders, Roy's work group eased the battle through taking informal time-out and by joking and messing around, and, without 'the talking, fun, and fooling which provided a solution to the elemental problem of 'psychological survival' (p. 155), 'Monotony was joined by his twin brother, Fatigue' (p. 158). Roy

demonstrates that bodily fatigue is to a large extent socially constructed, whereby having the crack not only released workers from the constraints of dragging-time, but also subjectively provided corporal energy with which to do manual work.

Drug Use

Drug use was common amongst at the Keyworker House builders, and almost all of the men stimulated their physical energy with the use of caffeine and nicotine. One of the older labourers, Patrick, would follow his morning cup of tea and cigarette by sucking a large pile of snuff up into his black-coloured nostril. It was also common to visit a pub, particularly on Friday and Monday lunch-times, and, as I mentioned in chapter 5, alcohol consumption is almost institutionalised within Anglo cultural groups on building sites. Alcohol is a psychoactive depressant that numbs minds and, like excitement, it suspends reflexive consciousness. It has also become historically tied up with the ideals of 'strength' which are entwined in masculine discourse (see chapter 8); for the builders, to drink was to be a man.

It was not only legitimate drugs that were used throughout the workday. Along the scaffold one could literally smell the use of illegal drugs. The common character of illegal drug use amongst builders was illustrated by the statistic that painters, scaffolders and roofers are more likely to die through drug misuse than any other occupational group (OPCS, 1995). This may bear more relation to the social backgrounds of these trades than the content of their work tasks (see chapters 5 and 9), but it came as no surprise. The majority of painters I met at Keyworker House regularly used drugs in and out of work. As Gerry explained:

I love to smoke [cannabis] at work. I've been doing this [work] for 25 years, and when I'm doing it I'm not thinking about silly things like work, I'm just stoned and playing little mind games with myself. The day just flies by.

Not thinking about the work in hand helps time to pass quicker. The hallucinogenic properties of cannabis may help to stimulate vivid daydreaming and thus assist the user's release from dragging-time. Gerry also used amphetamine, cocaine and ecstasy (MDMA) at work. He was not alone. Another of the painters, Frank, religiously boosted his day through with amphetamine (see chapter 8).

Doing Nothing

Labouring work can be dangerous, boring, tiring and dirty. Yet, all of the labourers, including me, much preferred to do something rather than nothing. It was however, common to have days and hours where there was little to do; where the labourers had to 'scratch around' to find work tasks. In addition, the nature of labouring sometimes actually necessitated a slow pace. This was partly because the work was physically tiring, but also because the labourers were forced to try not to 'snooker' themselves and run out of things to do. Labourers reacted to the demands of others; if holes were to be dug, materials transported, or mess cleaned up, they were ordered to do it. But materials and plant did not always need transporting, holes were not required everyday, and, sometimes, there was not much mess created by the trades. If a labourer was required to dig a hole for the afternoon therefore, he would make sure that he timed it correctly so it took him the whole afternoon to complete. If he were to finish the task early, he may have to begin another task, which could possibly take him too much time in terms of his working hours that afternoon. Alternatively, if there was nothing for the labourers to do on a particular day, they would have to 'make-work', that is, perform the actions of work without actually doing any.

A rigidly enforced rule exists for labourers on building sites, and that is to not be seen to be sitting down. In this sense their time was not theirs, but was owned by their employers (c.f. Thompson [1967] 1993). If labourers could sit down during slow-times they would not face the problem of 'a day will be like two days umm'. Filling time and making-work are thus part of the labourers' skill because those that rush to get everything done might find themselves out of a job.

One method of evading time ownership problems or having to make-work, was for the labourers to group together and have the crack. Almost every afternoon leading up to four o'clock, the labourers would group around the skips at the back of Keyworker House. Doing this always incited piss-take comments from the other trades, commonly, 'How much they paying you to hold that fence up?'. However, Danny was not always so jocular when he found them 'holding fences up' or 'leaning on shovels', but he could not sack, or even really reprimand, the whole labour team for doing nothing. If he was in a 'cranky' mood and expressed dissatisfaction towards their malingering, he was met with an onslaught of excuses and disdain, and it would have been very problematic for him to sack all his 'lads' at once. Their group collectivity shielded management power through distributing managers' reactions to

work deviance amongst the numbers of the group. Here, the builders' not only negotiated time through the excitement of having the crack, but their numbers also formed a kind of worker power through, what may be termed, creating a situation of safety in numbers.

Make-Work

Doing nothing slows down subjective time, and doing nothing is not an option for labourers for most of the time because they must 'make-work'. Goffman (1959) considers make-work a performance of standards of decorum exchanged between workers and bosses. To not make-work within the gaze of the boss would be considered disrespectful, thereby breaking the rules of the work-game. As an example of this, Goffman quotes from Archibald's (1947) study of a shipyard, which is worth reproducing in full:

It was amusing to watch the sudden transformation whenever word got round that the foreman was on the hull or in the shop or that a front-office superintendent was coming by. Quartermen and leadermen would rush to their groups of workers and stir them to obvious activity. 'Don't let him catch you sitting down' was the universal admonition, and where no work existed a pipe was busily bent and threaded, or a bolt which was already firmly in place was subjected to further and unnecessary tightening. This was the formal tribute invariably attending a visitation by the boss, and its conventions were as familiar to both sides as those surrounding a five star general's inspection. To have neglected any detail of the false and empty show would have been interpreted as a mark of singular disrespect. (Archibald, K, 1947: 159; reproduced from Goffman, 1959: 112)

Make-work for the labourers at Keyworker House usually took the form of finding a broom and endlessly sweeping-up dust and cigarette butts. The term 'endlessly' comes into play here. Make-work involves no sense of a beginning, middle or end; there are no time markers, nor is there a finished product. In my experience, and, as intimated in the words of Michael above, make-work slows down time almost to a stop. It also all but completely drains physical energy and forces 'clock-watching' which, as all manual workers are aware, functions to drag-out subjective time.

Games

The only situation in which make-work shortened subjective time was when it was not imposed by having nothing to do, but was chosen by the worker. In *choosing* to do make-work, builders enter into a game with work authority. Burawoy (1979) argues that informal games workers play with their superiors are related to attempts to relieve

tedium, create a sense of accomplishment, and to undermine management objectives. The game, he argues, is embedded in working-class culture. He points out however, that by taking part in the game, workers inadvertently submit to and create the very system of oppression that they were attempting to resist. Put simply, playing games with work authority cannot release workers from the oppression inherent in capitalism because the very act of going to work to play these games supports the system rather than smashes it.

Burrowoy's notion that workers were battling with the work process as a source of oppression may have been a product of his neo-Marxist perspective, or simply an aspect of factory work in a (Western) bygone time. Collective political anguish for the majority of the builders on the site centred upon the 'invasion' of Britain by new migrant groups rather than upon the capitalist system itself (see chapter 9). They viewed themselves proudly as hard working providers for their families, and not as the down-trodden slaves of capitalism. Collinson (1992) focuses on this point through the screen of Foucault. He viewed the factory workers on the shop-floor as compensating for their dull, meaningless, highly controlled working lives through reverence of masculine notions of breadwinner and provider. Collinson argues that the factory workers laboured so they could have leisure in the family unit where they were the boss, and thus they drew a sharp divide between home and work (see also Cockburn, 1983). In contradistinction to this, the builders talked about how they enjoyed the freedom of being on the tools, and saw their wives as a problematic source of control over their lives. To them, work and the pub offered more freedom and autonomy than the home (see chapter 8). This was not to say that the builders, like Sennett and Cobb's (1972) socially mobile North American working-class, did not account for and claw meaning from their working lives in terms of sacrifice for their families. Families were central to their lives (see chapters 5 and 8), and were given by many as a reason for going to work. However, if the builders did not feel controlled at work, why did they take part in the game? Again, the answer lies in the structure of work-time. Games at work are a source of the manufacture of excitement; a means of combating dragging-time. Consequently, when the builders chose to do make-work, it was when they were bored and/or listless, or when they grouped together for the crack because of that boredom and listlessness.

Non-imposed make-work in this context was a game, and games are by their very nature, fun, and fun transforms dragging-time. As Goffman (1959) comments,

make-work is a performance of etiquette, and the performance is more salient than actuality. These encounters are thus caught-up in a kind of 'surface acting' surrealism whereby each party performs their part in the encounter whilst logically being aware they are 'blagging' one another. Managers know the worker is merely performing, and the worker knows that the manager knows, but each party is entwined in the ritual of surface performance rather than actuality. Goffman (1955) demonstrates that such performances are sacred, and consequently, for a manager to accuse a worker of mere performance would be to contravene ritual etiquette by discrediting the worker's honesty. This could open up a panoply of often aggressive excuses and interchanges in which the manager risked 'losing face', thereby relinquishing respect, breaking the indulgency pattern and stiffening reciprocal elasticity.

The examples cited in the last chapter concerning 'going to the bank/shop' can also be seen as false performances. Building knowledge has not been monopolised by management systems. As a result, task performance cannot be accounted and, builders can therefore exploit the knowledge lacunae to toy with management authority. For example, when I participated in the site office there was an occasion when Danny could not be contacted *via* his two-way radio. He later appeared in the office and excused himself saying that he had 'gone to the bank'. The managers accepted his excuse and gave him his orders but, when he left, Steve and Jamin laughed and joked about the performance. Steve said, 'gone to the bank my arse, he's been to the fuckin pub'. It was pure performance they had taken part in. If Danny said he had gone to the pub, it would have invited an onslaught of abuse and reprimand from the managers. However, by Danny offering an excuse and playing the game, the managers had no need to become involved in an encounter where they would have to admonish or discredit him and run the risk of 'loosing face'.

Contrived make-work and excuse performances, being false in themselves, were a game of play-acting. Workers felt they had out-witted managers, and, out-witting someone is integral to most games. The performances were a source of play, fun and excitement, tied integrally with the structure of work-time in particular, and social life in general.

Time, Money and Bureaucracy

Officer Time

The managers worked longer hours than the trades and labourers and were the only group that did not steal time. Part of the reason was simply that their physical energy was not depleted during the workday in quite the same way as the manual workers. For those on the tools, break-time was for sitting down and resting, whereas the management sat down all day, or could sit down whenever they wanted. It was also rare for higher management to over-see the site managers, leaving them to work in their own time. Furthermore, the managers' work consisted mostly of talking, and as shown in chapter 3, the content of that talk commonly took the form of the crack. Managers worked alongside one another everyday, and thus negotiated an explicit rule system between them, that is, they knew exactly what they could and could not say to one another, and, because the rules were negotiated, they could say almost anything within the realms of masculine discourse. The crack therefore flourished unbounded in the office, and the managers also had constant refreshment of their messing around by the numerous different people that came in and out of the office. Managers' subjective time was therefore very different from that of those on the tools.

Part of the intensity of office interaction meant that Steve, project manager, and Kevin, the quantity surveyor, would remain in the office to do bureaucratic work after the troops had all gone home. They turned this into a competition and competed to see who could hold the record for staying at work the latest. Kevin was winning the game when I left Keyworker House by staying until 10 p.m. one night. As Steve commented:

I do enjoy it, but it's just so much work to do now. It's just unbelievable. I try to do it to 100 percent quality so that everything is done at the end of the week as you've seen. But that's what's drives me mad about these office set-ups. I'm as bad as the rest of them, I scream, shout, and rant and rave, have a bloody laugh and a ball, but it isn't actually that productive, very unproductive. Even down there in that office [Keyworker House 2], you know, me and Paul are pulling our hair out at the moment because it's all very loud. It's a smaller office and you can't concentrate, you do need them plugs in your ears [see chapter 3]. It's a fuck up, it really is, never again, in all honesty I'd rather have all little offices partitioned off, because what happens is, to my own sort of a detrimental effect, I end up taking it home... But I must thrive on it I suppose. I mean, you never see stress do you? You don't realise what's going on in your body, not until you fucking have a heart attack... I work hard because I don't like things getting on top of me, all the bloody paper-work and that. But I think I deal with it quite well, I don't really let it build up, but that means staying late. I get the hump with it when jobs really back up, but I never let them really, really back up.

Time and Money

The managers were fiercely driven by time pressure. Much of their job was to attempt to guide the build towards its completion date. They had failed to do this in the project I studied, partly because 'extras' kept being added to the work, and partly due to problems with 'unforseens' and late arrival of materials and subcontract groups. Being behind time pressured them to enforce 'hurry up' on various occasions, and, 'hurry up' gave them something to do almost constantly. Unlike the trades, the managers therefore rarely had to make-work. Despite this, during the close of Year 1 works leading up to Christmas, there was little for the managers to do. But to deal with this, they were in the position to play numerous games of squash with one another and the consultants, and they could simply sit down and talk when they wanted. Dragging-time was therefore different for management, but commodified linear time drove their workday and affected them and the build in negative ways. As Steve told me:

What pisses me off is speed. The quality goes. You know, everything's rush, rush, rush, get the scaffold out, get the scaffold down. I know you have to have an element of that because otherwise things would start to cost a fortune. But I don't like it, it's constant pressure, monitoring things, how long things are taking, pushing things, getting more labour, getting more work out of them [workers], it don't stop you know. When the scaffold's come down there's a lot less pressure on. It's generally scaffolding and groundworks that's the main rush. When you're in the ground it's got to get out the ground, you got to get the building up. I hate brickies, they're laying bricks like fucking lunatics, and it's going up so quick and you can miss window openings. And if you're not on the ball and you're fucking farting around with your [site] diary and your paperwork in the office, there's no fucking window where you want it. And the foreman say, 'well fuck me, I didn't know'. And yet somehow the blame ends up back with the site manager, 'well you didn't fucking go out there and tell him', you know. But it is the speed, and they're there to earn money...

A lot of people want a price and that's it. The chippies we're in control of, we just have to kick their arse every now and then. But it's when you get people on price and they're up your arse saying, 'this ain't done, that ain't done'. You got to be well organised, well prepared for people to come and do their job and let them get in, make their money and get out. It would be nice to have them all on a day work, but as long as you knew you were getting a decent day's work out of them. Yeah, that's one thing I don't like, is the crash bang wallop of it all, and with that, obviously quality goes... It's hard to get quality because this [Keyworker House] is making the best of a bad job in the first place. It's bodging, we're just tinkering with everything, rather than doing it properly we're doing everything on the cheap. It's not our fault, we've only got money to do it on the cheap so we have to do it on the cheap.

As mentioned in the last chapter, undertaking work directly under the market mechanism turns time into money and forces high speed work; tradesmen work with pound signs in their minds. Speed is dictated by money, or, as Thompson put it:

Puritanism, in its marriage of convenience with industrial capitalism, was the agent which converted people to new valuations of time; which taught children even in their infancy to improve each shiny hour; and which saturated peoples' minds with the equation, time is money. ([1967] 1993: 401)

Insufficient time and money force building jobs to be poor in quality, and this has knock-on effects down the line to the tradesmen. Whilst tradesmen enjoy their work, they do not enjoy being rushed or having to 'bump' jobs, that is, to undertake work to an inferior standard. As was shown in the last chapter, negative attitudes towards management occurred if they attempted to strictly impose formal time schedules, as one of the site managers had attempted to do with the carpenters. Overarching time and money pressures reduced work satisfaction. It negated the tradesmen's sense of pride in making something and, thereby de-motivated them. Stew, one of the painters, expressed this:

I enjoy standing back and looking at the finished product. That does me well, but then again, it's like I say, it's jobs like this that I can't deal with, where there's not too much quality, just slap it up... Its things like that that annoy me, that I don't like with the job. All this untidy stuff, it's rubbish. I don't really like it at all.

Like Stew, Bill derided the effects of commodified time pressures:

All they worry about is getting in and getting out quick. Honesty's gone out the window. It's all, (sighs) there's no honesty because everyone's there to make as much money as they can for doing as little as possible. That wasn't the building game years ago. A tradesman would do the job properly, all right he might have had time, he might have had a good price but not no more... It's not quality, it's quantity. You know, we was always taught to use metal conduit, and when you do a job it stays, it's there for life, but now it's 'oh sling a bit of cable under the floor, sling a bit of plastic conduit up the wall'. To me, the way I was brought up and the way I was taught compared to now, it's basically, I think it's just cheap and nasty. We used to have inspectors come along behind us and check our work, and if it weren't right they'd make us do it again till we got it right. But now I mean, who comes along and checks the work now? Yeah, me, but half the time it's just covered up quickly because they're [contractors] in a rush to get the painters in to finish it. They don't care, just cover it up... I think personally, looking at it from the electrical side of it, the quality of work has died in the building game. It's like everything else, nothing's made to last now. It's a plastic world.

Bill pointed out that the tradesmen from the past would have more time to undertake their work. His admonition may have been partly the result of his viewing the past through 'golden spectacles'. However, the processes he described go hand in hand with Thompson's ([1967] 1993) and Thrift's (1990) analysis of the standardisation and intensification of time across the process of modernity. Even one hundred years ago, Tressell's (1914) house painters were aware of the changing nature of time and the ensuing fall in the quality of work. And, as Mike Donaldson (1996) argues, time

continues to intensify in present-modernity; speeding the work process and social life in general.

Design and Rhythms

Usually architects and consultants design buildings. These professional groups, in association with clients, design buildings with profit, aesthetic, personal ego and use in mind. Consideration for those who physically construct, maintain and repair buildings may be the last thing on their minds. Procuring contracts, client satisfaction and the end product are their main concerns, not the messy procedures that occur during and after the build. Design with disregard for those who put the design into practice can make a builder's workday problematic, and this too has knock-on effects for the quality of work in that it hinders the development of the tradesmen's' situational rhythms. Trick voiced these problems:

I'm amazed at the people up in high places who fucking bluff it, you wouldn't believe it. We was over in North London and we was refurbishing an area. I was taking down these emergency lights, and of course as soon as we hit the [main electrical] circuit, [the electricity went off and] it's gone into the emergency light mode. I've took down lights that are glowing with no cable on them, obviously because they're working off the battery inside. [Emergency lights are] only like a ruddy torch, nothing technical. And one of these designers has walked up and he's said, 'that's amazing, how's that doing that'? Because I thought he is who he is, I thought of course he knows, I thought he was joking, I really did. But he wasn't. He didn't understand how an emergency light worked! I would love to sit down, maybe in a little groups with the designer and talk about the design, like they do in the Japanese car plants. It's crazy [some of the ways they design things], all that time and money. You work on something and you've got no access to the pipes, no space to work in, and then people get pissed off with the job. There's nothing worse than getting pissed off with your job because nothing gets done does it? You lose interest, you throw it in and just think, oh fuck it, I can't be arsed, do you know what I mean, that lot up there are taking the piss or whatever.

Conflict, Co-operation and Recreation in the Labour Process

In this and the preceding chapter I have attempted to sketch the various forms of 'frontiers of control' extant at Keyworker House. To tell this story I compared Keyworker House to data from studies of the factory and the coal mine. I argued that forms of 'internal work control' and builder culture bore more resemblance to the miner than the factory worker. Almost every study of the highly rationalised factory presents workers as dissatisfied with their work, distrustful of managers, lacking in motivation and quite rebellious (an exception is Edwards and Scullion, 1982). These studies variously argue that the causes were poor management, high levels of arbitrary control, working-class consciousness and boredom.

The builders mostly drew satisfaction from their work, yet just like factory workers, they participated in resistant/deviant actions. However, the builders were not resisting management control or pulled by capitalism's dialectic, but they resisted infringements on their subjective time, or, actively negotiated and reconstructed structural temporal impositions. Work and play were therefore, not dichotomous events, but simultaneous activities. Resistance and recreation arose when formal impositions obstructed play-work.

On the ideal-typical factory production line, synthetic time, to a large extent, imprisons spontaneous play. Firstly, workers must work at the speed of the line, which destroys task mastery and imposes a metronomic synthetic rhythm upon bodies, which are, as Adam (1990) argues, partly cyclical in their biological construction. Secondly, work on a production line has no start, beginning or end and, therefore, bears no time-markers. Thirdly, there can be no sense of a finished product because of the vast division and fragmentation of tasks on the line. And fourthly, bureaucratic administration and atomisation of workers on production lines inhibits worker interaction and the crack that facilitate human mechanisms of subjectively escaping dragging-time. There can be little wonder that factory workers presented in much of the literature are so disaffected, dissatisfied and unhappy with their jobs. Despite nature's time and human mortality, time is something to be played with, and subjectively taken hold of and enjoyed. Imposing synthetic tabled-time onto people's lives ostensibly squashes life itself.

Chapter 8

Men, Boys and Builders

This chapter describes how being men impinged upon the builders' everyday self-presentation, social interaction and workplace culture. I begin by examining 'builder masculinity', and then turn more generally to the historical backdrop of working-class masculinities. Class-based masculine styles have mixed, merged and become objects of reflection in contemporary society, yet their basis lay in the social exigencies of the past. Furthermore, builders continue to lead distinctively working-class lives where class-bound masculinity remains a pragmatic cultural resource for negotiating the peculiarities of day-to-day life.

Capturing Masculinity

All the builders in this study were men. Women comprise only 2 percent of the manual building trades and 6 percent of professional and managerial levels (Greed, 2000). The building industry is a gendered organisation (Acker, 1992), and masculine forms were central to the builders' identities. Heterosexuality, strength and the related roles of protector and provider framed the builders' self-conceptions and relations. For them, to be heterosexual and physically strong was to be a man.

Throughout the thesis I described how builder interaction frequently took the form of humour and piss-takes. During initial encounters with and between the builders, and during group encounters where piss-takes occurred, I was struck by something expressed in the builders' non-verbal demeanour that was specifically masculine. This demeanour was seen as a form of masculine posturing which both veiled and expressed a certain bellicosity. It was performed through tough rigid stances; loud, deep voices; constant profanities; and in confrontational and aggressive attitudes to anyone that tried to 'push them around' or 'take the piss' too far. Their culture was similar to the working-class 'bikers' described by Willis in which 'the touchstones of this world were manliness, roughness and directness of interpersonal conflict' (1978:13).

Day-to-day interaction at Keyworker House was not a constant round of messing around, banter and piss-taking. Much of the time the builders were simply quiet. They regularly worked alone in spaces bounded off from one another; were

separated by distance and/or the noise of building work; and/or were caught up in rhythms and day-dreaming. Even break-times were often quiet, the men simply recuperated, read newspapers and dozed. However, during quiet times, few social, normative or moral signals were conveyed. Quiet times simply signified that it was acceptable to be quiet. But, loud, boisterous and masculine times projected messages outlining normative frameworks in non-quiet times. Masculine-saturated encounters therefore influenced the builders' social world to a larger extent than their actual proportion of daily events.

Multiple Selves

The performance of masculinity was not a blanket action expressed across all social situations but was contingent upon specific contexts. For instance, interaction on a one-to-one basis took different forms from group interactions, and was contingent on how familiar the actors were with one another. However, two building work contexts will be considered in this chapter, reflecting the performance of two analytical types of 'builder self'.

Representations of builders are projected into, and from, public discourse via mass-produced media, and these media projected two prevailing discursive images of builders: Firstly, the image of builder as honest tradesman; and secondly, the builder as *macho* 'tough guy'. Television programmes and advertisements commonly invert builder masculinity and sexuality; feminising builders to shock the audience into mild amusement (see fig. 9.0). These public images, or stereotypes, of tough *macho* builders, reflect building site reality to some extent but also reflect back into the building industry itself, thereby reinforcing the image by having an effect upon builders (c.f. Wicks, 2002).

Not all media projections conjure up images of the builder 'tough guy', but those that do commonly focus on *groups* of men on building sites. These are a representation of the 'site-self' i.e. the builder amongst builders on the set of a building site. Media also project images of the 'tradesman self', which is tied to the idea of the privately employed builder who works alone or in a small band constructing and repairing people's houses. The two images diverge from one another, and, as with all generalised representations, they over-simplify reality.

Fig. 8.0: Gender-inverting Advertisement attached to the Scaffold during the Refurbishment of Liberty's Department Store in Central London



When dealing with clients, tradesmen tend to project themselves as professional, honest and agreeable. Private work for clients is a form of service work, and as C Wright Mills (1951) argues, service workers must prostitute their selves to please clients. Builders have a licence to enter back stage into the most sacred spaces of other people's private worlds. Their workplace is everyone else's home and they must be aware of, and have respect for this, if they are to impress and placate clients in order to make a living. However, when builders interact in groups on building sites they tend not to appease anyone.

Keyworker House was home to 776 people, yet for the builders it was a place of work amongst the company of men; it was a building site. The tradesmen and labourers rarely had to deal directly or intensively with clients because this was the managers' role. In doing this, managers switched their actions between dealing with the builders and the many clients, and their face-work was noticeably altered in these varied settings. However, interaction between the builders, whether manual or non-manual workers, was commonly saturated by class-based masculine discourse.

Familiar Strangers

London building sites are culturally plural and characterised by ephemeralism. This restricts detailed biographical and interactive knowledge, and sustains a particular interactive order. Interaction at Keyworker house, especially *across* trade groups, was quite superficial and perfunctory. Even within trade groups, detailed knowledge of one another was not always forthcoming. As Bristles mentioned: 'Nobody on this site knows me really, they might think they do, but no one knows anything about me'.

Group interaction centred on what the men knew they had in common; what they could typically predict of one another. What everybody knew was that everyone else was male, a builder, working-class, and expressed himself as heterosexual. In this plural and interactively quite superficial environment, masculinity functioned as a collective cultural scaffold or, an interactive resource, which united the men around particular issues and actions. My fieldnotes are filled with examples of masculine interactive performances. In Chapter 6 I mentioned the strength and speed contests that occurred during group-work and I alluded to the frequency of masculine-saturated humour and piss-takes, and the stubborn independence of the builders. Keyworker House was also a home to many nurses who were mostly women, and consequently there was ample opportunity for expressions of heterosexuality through women-talk and lechery in which the nurses and cleaners were 'objects' of 'red-blooded' conversation.

Below I provide a short example of an encounter between Perry, a painter, and Bapu, a carpenter. I cite this in particular because Bapu was a practising and committed Hindu, the carpenter team elder, and one of the most congenial people one could meet. He may not be considered a masculine actor in an Anglo-Western sense, but building sites can be rough, tough and aggressive places, and Bapu had worked on them in London for over 30 years. Similar to the other first generation Kutchis, he had adapted to this world.

Bapu regularly entered the painter's canteen to ask if he could take one of the 'dirty papers'. This was the *Sport*, a soft pornographic daily 'newspaper'. The carpenters, being religious and living in tight-knit pious communities, were too shy or ashamed to buy these publications, but they did enjoy the titillation provided (or at least they made out they did). The canteens of the trade and labour groups were littered with copies of semi-pornographic newspapers. The *Sport*, the *Star* and the *Sun* being particular favourites. Only Danny's reading of the broad-sheet *Irish Times*

bucked this trend. During my participant observation, the *Sun* ran a week-long series of photographs of semi-naked women standing in building sites, wearing hard-hats, and handling building tools. Such publications were almost badges of working-class masculinity, celebrating men, sport and naked bodies.

One day, Perry and I discovered Bapu alone in the painter's canteen. Perry said in a straight-faced, but perhaps jocular fashion:

What are you doing in here you thieving old bastard? Oh the fuckin' *Sport!* Shouldn't you be praying or something, not playing with yourself? Go buy your own paper you dirty old bastard. Keep coming in here and nicking our stuff, I'll phone immigration and get you deported if you ain't careful. (Fieldnotes)

Bapu stood up straight, inflated his body size, looked Perry seriously in the eye and replied in a possibly threatening tone: 'You wanna go to hospital you bastard'? Perry gave no reply.

The event provided one amongst many occurrences of the expression of heterosexuality, bellicosity, piss-take sarcasm, racism, and the frequent impossibility of being unable to detect whether the builders were joking or not. Piss-take jokes were regularly harsh and insulting, yet, because of their possible jocularly, they were not usually perceived as insults *per se* (see chapter 9). Collinson and Hearn aptly sum this up in their analysis of informal shop-floor culture which they saw as, 'aggressive, sexist and derogatory, humorous yet insulting, playful but degrading' (1996: 68). I will return to informal work culture below.

Embodied Selves

The physical body underpins the performance of gender, both by and for us (Shilling, 1993; Connell, 1995; Bourdieu, 2001). Bodies form the backdrop for the signification of gender and are the material reality onto which gender constructs are inscribed. From birth an array of social categorisations and interactions are etched onto bodies. Individuals are named and decorated in gendered ways instantly by the association of physical body-shape with social gender. Bourdieu (2001) argues that social meaning is inscribed onto bodies through the screen of the binary oppositions 'male' and 'female'. Into these are inserted a series of sub-oppositions: – active/passive, hard/soft, strong/weak, big/small, etc. The oppositions compose a discursive symbolic hierarchy that frame human conceptions of the world, one another and themselves; drawing individuals toward gendered status and repelling them from inferiorizing

stigma. It is in these oppositions that genders are drawn, maintained and inscribed onto bodies.

Fig. 8.1: Health and Safety Notice in the Painters' Storeroom at Keyworker House 1



Bodies are a site of self-expression. Public bodily styles are therefore tied to social processes, and social processes tied into bodily styles. As Connell (1995) argues, bodies are not merely landscapes onto which the social is inscribed, but they enable, constrain and impinge upon one's self-concept. In this sense, body shape permits and restrains the possibilities of human action and culture. Bodies and social processes are intimate partners.

Size Matters

Corporal strength is a valued aspect of the cultures of men not only in terms of its practical uses but also as a source of wider discursive status. Body size and strength are part of what it is to be a working-class man. In schools, being physically strong can elevate a boy's status and self-confidence. Research into school children's fear of victimisation illustrates this. Goodey (1997) demonstrates that young boys believe they will be less fearful on the street when their bodies reach a certain size. She shows that when their bodies grow and mature they do indeed become less fearful, less emotive, more masculine. In the building trade, strength can equate to money and status. For instance, a perceived weakling may not get a job as a labourer, and because of this, one who perceives himself as a weakling may not even attempt to get a job as a labourer. This featured in Jamin's reasons for entering the building trade, where his ability to 'graft' was challenged by a friend (see chapter 5). Indeed, statistics from Sweden indicate that male building workers were on average, taller and stronger than Swedish men in general (Olofsson, 1994; from Clarke *et al*, 1999).

All building trades are based in handicraft production. Modern machinery such as mechanical plant and electric hand-tools have been developed to assist physical movements, but much of the builder's working day still relies on dextrous strength. A builder's body is thus central to his life-projects and self-concept, not merely in terms of gender status or as a site of pleasure, but as his capital. Builders exchange bodily labour for livelihood where sweat is swapped for wages, and this was ingrained in the builders' discourse (c.f. Willis, 1977). Take for example, Paul one of the site managers, who reflected on his recent change of career from general builder to site manager:

You can't really term it [site management] as earning your money. I always think to earn your money you've got to work hard for it. I don't consider this to be work, I don't know if that makes any kind of sense but I think work, I would relate it to physical work you know. This is just the lighter end isn't it, really. You really get paid

extortionately for doing no real work, but you're paid for your knowledge aren't you. It's a strange thing to say, but using your brain isn't really working, I think.

Bodies and work were intimately connected, but manual building work was not solely corporal. Even the low status trades of painting and labouring require substantial skill and knowledge (see chapters 6 and 7).

Bodies were also capitalised upon as a source of interactive power. Talk of size, strength and toughness were common, as can be evidenced in much of the interview data presented throughout this thesis. For example, when I first went to the pub on a Friday evening with the members of what was mostly site management, I noticed the sheer size of the men and how they deployed this as a power resource. After drinking large quantities of alcohol, we moved to another bar where we literally took over one section of it. We created a 'rough presence' (Willis, 1977) by barging onto the pool table, being loud and boisterous, and using sheer strength and numbers to deflect any likely criticism from the surrounding social audience (see also Edley and Wetherell, 1997). Talk of size, strength and toughness was common amongst the builders, who would often remark on what a big guy such and such a person was. It was as if being big conferred status onto a person; someone who was somehow more distinguished than a small person.

Formal Vacuity and Ephemeralism

In the building game you get blokes from all walks of life, I bet you half of them have seen the inside of prison walls. Because on the building site there's no questions asked. You walk on a building site, 'looking for labour mate? 'Yeah, start tomorrow'. They don't ask about your background, they don't ask for your CV. There's no discrimination on a building site. If you can do the work, fair enough. It's not like you go into an office job where they want to know your background, want references and all that. (Mike Fixit, maintenance man)

[In the building trade] you're moving around, you're meeting new people everyday right, new crowd everyday. Sometimes you're with a wrong crowd, sometimes you're with a good crowd. (Vin, carpenter)

The informal, almost non-modern, nature of employment and work organisation of building had an impact on the builders' everyday practices. For example, ephemeral characters that nobody really knew, and probably never could get to know, formed a significant ingredient to interaction. Some trades only worked on the project for a short duration (see fig. 2.1. chapter 2), and sequentialism necessitated that different trades did not integrate to a large extent. For instance, the scaffolders worked solely

with one another because they worked different hours and in different physical spaces to the other builders. Interaction between the scaffolders and others was fleeting; passing one another in a corridor, or merely spotting each other across opposite ends of the building. Even within trades, some individuals came onto the site for only a short duration. These might be the low skilled that were soon dismissed, or those that did not 'fit in' and were informally driven out, or, the peripheral workers who joined the teams only for a short duration, like the Spaniard and Russian employed for only a few weeks by Paddy McMurray to do the 'hurry up' work.

Trade separation and superficial interaction facilitated myth-making with respect to some trades. Aidan, a labourer, told me how most scaffolders were good drinkers and even better fighters, tough men revered for their strength and daring; and Bristles, a painter, described bricklayers as 'bulldogs' who were not to be messed with. Physical and social distances facilitated caricatured images, which in turn framed interaction; if people did not really know one another, they could not trust one another in particular ways. Again, Bristles aptly summed this up: 'People on the building sites, they're all friends, they're all enemies, they trust everyone and they trust no one'.

To trust everyone but no one was a pragmatic attitude to adopt because it was common occurrence for tools, materials and the builders' personal possessions to be stolen at the Keyworker House build. Below, I provide an example:

One Friday morning when I was working with the painters, Ernie Coat was away on holiday and he entrusted Jimmy, his foreman, to hand out the wages. Jimmy gave Frank two wage-packets - the extra one for Frank to hand to his painter friend Stew, that lunchtime. At breakfast-time Frank realised that Stew's wages had gone missing from his coat-pocket. The painters - Jimmy, Perry, Gerry, Bony and I - all searched the scaffold and canteen area but could not find the wages. Frank thought Jimmy might not have given him the wages in the first place and they proceeded to have a protracted and aggressive argument in which Jimmy threatened to take a hammer to Frank's head in response to being accused of not handing over the wages.

The wages became our focal point for the day. Privately, Gerry told me he thought someone must have stolen them and he offered a theory as to who it was. He said Frank was foolish to leave them unattended in the canteen, especially considering they were someone else's wages, because, 'you just don't know who anyone really is in the building'. We both agreed that whoever took them was low: 'You just don't take a man's wages' Gerry said. 'It's a bit fuckin' rough' I replied. Gerry told me stories of similar incidents that occurred on other building sites that he worked on in the past. Some of the other painters began, behind one another's backs, to accuse one another and Frank, of committing the offence. Frank protested his innocence saying he would have to give his own wages to Stew anyway, which he did. However, this was problematic because Frank's wages were less than Stew's as he had missed a day from work in the last week and he earned less than Stew. Soon after the event Stew phoned up from Keyworker House 1. He had gone on strike until he received the outstanding

cash and said he was going to call the police. For this he was vilified by everybody, particularly because he wanted to call the police in. 'What the fuck's it got to do with them?' Bony said.

The following Monday the wages saga continued to circulate. Two of the labourers, Michael and Aidan, told me that 'something stinks' about it all. They also told Frank to stick to his story and 'look after number one'. They said one of the other labourers had his expensive penknife stolen from their tea-room the week before. They thought one of the asphalters took it but could not be sure. Aidan reminded me of a similar incident that occurred just before Christmas when his mobile phone was stolen from the labourers' tea-room. Michael said, 'You have to watch out for this kind of thing on the buildings', to which Aidan replied, 'you expect it on big sites but not on here where we all know each other'. Will arrived and told a story about the time Danny lost his wages and everyone had a collection for him. Danny ended up with more money than was in his original wage packet, but Danny was popular and long serving at Topbuild, Frank was neither of these.

All of the builders found this event morally reprehensible and each of them censured the theft. However, no one could be blamed for the misdemeanour because it was possible that anyone could have committed the act. Yet, it was common to blame transitory outsiders for the theft of personal possessions. Of course, it may not have been outsiders who committed the infractions but they were logical and safe targets for accusation and scapegoating. Transitory 'outsiders' held few ties to Topbuild's parochial networks, and were thus free from personal ties, network morality, and the social pressure of the 'core' work-groups. It made more sense to everybody that outsiders were not to be trusted (see chapter 10)

Real Money

The stolen wage packet contained cash, which itself contributed towards the theft in the form of simple opportunity (see Felson, 1994). Subcontractors were often forced to pay some their workers in cash. For example, Ernie Coat paid Frank in cash, 'off the books', because Frank was working on a false CIS card, claiming non-working single-parent benefits and not paying any tax. Similarly Gerry had no fixed address and thus no bank account to pay a cheque into. In addition, the payment of 'subs' (small cash payments in lieu of wages, usually supplied on a Monday, after weekly wages had been 'blown' at the weekend) during the working week further reinforced the necessity for cash payments.

It is possible to exchange wage cheques for cash in certain pubs and (more recently) shops in London, but the builders preferred cash. Danny explained why:

Oh [check-cashing pubs] they were rough and ready places all right yea. Those publicans were supposed to declare all the checks but they didn't declare it at all. So

it's been all stopped now, most of them anyhow. There's a big pub, McGovern's in Kilburn, they used to do it. You'd give them your cheque, have a bite to eat and they'd charge you 4 or 5 percent. But you'd spend maybe £20, four percent for the check and 40 pound for the drink, pure con job.

DT: It's all right with Paddy though, he pays everyone in cash doesn't he?

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah (in under-the-breath whispered tone), well no not everybody, some have cards, CIS cards, not everybody, it's up to yourself.

Ernie Coat, the painting subcontractor, and Paddy McMurray, the labour subcontractor, paid in cash because their employees preferred it that way, and good employees were worth looking after (see chapter 9). Some employees were operating a tax dodge and could only be paid in cash. It was salient then, to consider social reaction to the wage theft mentioned above. No one wanted to call the police because it might attract attention to illicit employment practices (and perhaps more things that I did not know about)¹. These practices erected a barrier to the infusion of formal law and its agents, and in this respect, Jimmy's threat to take a hammer to Frank's head was an example of what the law rested upon between the builders. Their law was parochial, summary and corporal.

Cash payments and the rough edges of the building industry also generated problems for subcontractors themselves. Ernie Coat:

I've always paid cash, which I'm going off of doing now. I'm trying to get most people paid by direct payment into the bank. Basically because a [subcontractor and] good friend of mine got done in Enfield, in broad daylight. Come out the bank, had his briefcase taken, which was even locked to his wrist, but they had bolt cutters and they smacked him across the head with them. He landed up five days in hospital and he's still not back at work even now. So when that happened I thought to myself, it's time I got back to 2003 and started paying people either by cheque or through the bank, which a lot of them won't like but they'll get used to it.

Contracting Violence

Commonly no formal employment contract exists between building workers and subcontractors. I never saw or signed any kind of contract for the work I did at Keyworker House because wage rates and hours of work were agreed verbally, by a 'gentleman's agreement'. Consequently, both worker and subcontractor relied on each other's morality to loyally honour the agreement.

¹ Henry (1986) suggests that most organisations tend to invoke formal law only as a last resort. However, for organisations where illicit practices are involved, seemingly it would be even less likely for formal law to be called upon to mediate disputes.

Durkheim ([1893] 1960) maintained that contracts were framed and honoured by some kind of collective morality. If they were not, he argued, they would rarely be fulfilled in large, socially differentiated societies. During my participation with Topbuild, verbal contracts between workers and subcontractors were always honoured. This was partly due to the long-term nature of the employment relationships and the ensuing construction of (moral) reciprocity and networks (see chapter 9), yet contracts and the moral rules surrounding them were also maintained by an underlying threat of violence. Mickey T provided an example:

Before I was subbing I got an old van like, and I'd charge the whole gang to pick them up in Cricklewood, take them out to London airport and bring them back in the evenings. I'd pay them out their wages on a Friday as well. And one week they didn't get paid so they all came at me with picks (laughs), the whole lot of em with fuckin' picks (laughs lots)... I has a word with them, says it weren't my fault, I was only the fuckin' driver like. So I drove them all down to the agent's offices and they took their picks in with them and confronted one of the directors. 'Oh, oh, a mistake' he says. He went straight down to the bank with these rake [lots of] of blokes following behind him with picks and paid them out of his own fuckin' pocket (laughs). (Fieldnotes).

If subcontractors do not pay and are naive enough to remain in their offices, the collective bellicose power of working men is utilised to enforce the contract. Even in my own short building career I have twice gone armed with a knife to collect my wages.

Collective bellicosity and informal contracts could also be deployed against workers. For example, I asked Ernie Coat if he paid employees that turned up for work but who were 'toshers'² not skilled enough to do the work:

Well, no I don't actually. I pay them for the day they've done, but if they're sacked the next day by lunchtime they won't get paid for that half-day, because obviously they're no good. If they're sacked after the first day I normally pay them until tea-time or something, but they don't get paid for the whole day.

DT: And do you ever have any problems with them wanting that money?

I've never had any problem no, no, never in all the years that I've been doing it, I've never had any problems. Well, they haven't got a lot of choice really. There's a lot more blokes on site than what there are the person who's sacked. I mean the blokes who are on site have been with me for some time, so I'd have plenty of people to call on shall we say.

² London painters frequently use this term to describe their low-skilled colleagues. Interestingly its original usage was to describe the men who unblocked London's sewers in the 19th century; a trade of very low-status.

Loyalty to a subcontractor was not the only source of collective bellicose power. Similar to the relationships between clients, consultants, contractors and subcontractors described in the following chapter, loyalty could be bought. Aidan:

It's not so long ago now, like the old subbies. What they used to do is they knew some labourers out of work. If they wanted someone turned over and all this business, they'd give them a day's money for it. They might get about ten of them for it, £50 each, smashed his pub up, 'the landlord upset me', things like that you know.

Even Mr Jagers, a middle-class building consultant and a man of the law, was acutely aware of the foundations of social order in the building industry:

Some site managers, what they are doing is they're bullying people. You never get results out of bullying people. What happens is that you'll always come up against another bully. I worked on a job years ago, there was this bricklaying company that had a terrible reputation. And what happened is that the site manager kept goading them... He'd got them to take down their work and all sorts of things. One day two labourers came on the job, new labourers, and they were working with this brick company, yes. And the site manager came up to them and had a go at them. They beat hell out of him, put him in hospital. That's what happens.

The social organisation of building employment rests partly upon reciprocity and partly on the underlying threat of violence ensuing from the informal, non-contractual, physical, and non-discriminatory nature of the building industry. These ingredients facilitated a tough atmosphere amongst the builders and resulted in a performance of bellicose styles, styles which were a source of power, and which possessed a utility in terms of maintaining agreements. Reciprocity and violence are partners; one implies the other (Mauss, [1954] 1970; see chapter 9), and reciprocity and bellicosity echo archaic forms of work organisation.

Trouble and Trust

The performance and posturing of 'strength' and 'toughness' symbolically expressed a form of power, and these displays were at once instrumental and counter-productive. Spawned by what was a fear of violence, both real and symbolic, masculine styles provoked a fear of violence which thereby provoked masculine styles as a response.

Anderson (1999) describes the street culture of young black men in inner-city Philadelphia. He cites Majors and Billson who argue, with reference to black men's 'cool pose', 'If he lifts his protective shield, he risks appearing timid... This is the facade that provides security in an insecure world... to advertise the black male's willingness to resort to violence to resolve interpersonal conflict' (1992: 28-29).

Anderson also cites Mann (1986), arguing that cultural forms arise to protect oneself in situations and areas where formal law is blocked. On the streets of Philadelphia, legal technologies had broken down, leaving a formal-legal vacuum in which a 'code of the street' emerged; a cultural form to protect one's self from attack, be it real or symbolic.

It can be seen that Fig 9.0 (above) not only plays the audience by inverting builder masculinity, but this is reinforced by images of black masculinity and sexuality. Inner-city black culture is highly somatic and masculine, and it infuses London's inner-city youth cultures as a source of symbolic capital on the street where 'good' is 'bad' and 'bad' is 'good'. London's youth meld white working-class and Caribbean (predominately Jamaican) cultures, evidenced in their accents, style and swagger. Gilroy describes this culture:

It is neither a class nor, of course, a racially homogenous grouping. Its identity is a product of immediate local circumstance but is apprehended through a syncretic culture for which the history of the African diaspora supplies the decisive symbolic core (1990: 279-278)³.

Only some of the builders, for example, Jamin, Vin and Will, performed a 'black pose' (despite not strictly being black), yet almost all of the builders performed a bellicose interactive style. Many had grown up in inner-city areas where crime and violence were a regular part of daily life (see chapter 5), and thus for the 'bad boys' for instance, bellicose styles were a pragmatic adaptation to their homes and neighbourhoods. Take for example, Frank, talking about where he grew up and still lived:

It all depends how rough you want to make it. Like there's one lot of flats wanting to fight you, the other lot wouldn't back down, it was quite rough. It's like tit for tat, you know what I mean. It's just like fighting every single night; more than anything else with people who you know. I still see some of them but they're all settled down now or in prison. You try to avoid them, or not really them ones but the next generation, you try to avoid them because they're the ones who are the real troublemakers. They're the ones who're going out and getting crack-cocaine, getting stoned, getting killed, so you try to avoid it. Plenty of the old junkies down in the Cally [Caledonian Road in North London] anyway. I was one of the fortunate ones, I wanted to do something with life, but I still haven't found what I want to do.

³ 14 years have elapsed since the publication of Gilroy's article. Presently it is difficult to view mainstream black culture as anti-capitalist in consideration of hip-hop's cultural dominance and its obsession with 'riches and bitches'. I would argue that black cultures' immersion into inner-city youth cultures of all races emerges through its materialism and somatic street power. In addition, syncretic culture does not necessarily counter racism. Will, for example, performed a black pose but was generally anti-black and shared a good relationship with Jamin all at the same time. Such are the complexities of racism (see chapter 9).

Frank grew up in 'the Cally' where different groups of young men attempted to assert their power over public spaces by battling with one another. In such dangerous and legally sterile environments, the approach one takes to deal with problems and conflicts is necessarily parochial and summary. Frank stated that he was one of the lucky ones because he was not a crack or heroin addict. He was however, a regular user of amphetamine and cocaine. He was also decorated in home-made tattoos, created with his friend 'down the flats' when they were younger and would test one another to see who could bear the pain of the needle for the longest period. Again, this reflected the centrality of bodies as a central resource of pleasure, mastery, strength (c.f. Blackman, 1997) and display.

One of Paddy McMurray's employees, Will, who worked alongside Mike Fixit as a maintenance man, was one of the youngest builders at 21 years old. He was energetic, entrepreneurial and voluble. He also bore a scar that ran over a foot long from the centre of the back of his neck past his throat. It looked as if somebody had tried to cut his head off. He told me in conversation (he never agreed to be interviewed) that he was walking home three years previously near to the housing estate where he lived in Clapham, South London, when he glanced at a young man whom he did not recognise. The stranger confronted him saying he knew him from somewhere. Will thought this was possible because he was 'very mouthy' when he was younger, but he told the stranger to 'fuck off' and carried on walking home. A moment later Will thought the stranger punched him and so he gave chase. However, he soon saw blood pumping out from his neck. Will had been stabbed and slashed with a Stanley knife.

Will still had problems with his blood pressure and the attack affected some of his mental processing. He had difficulties with reading, writing and some problems with his mental well-being:

That fucked me up, fucked me up. I was mad after that. I tell ya man, never ever will I back down from anything after that. You back down, you get fucked. Not any more boy, not any more. Even my mates, if someone starts on them I'm there like a fuckin' psycho... I'm a fuckin' mad man, I don't give a shit anymore. (Fieldnotes)

The attack left Will sick and unable to work for some time. During his recovery he began to get into trouble with the police. He was already known to the police from his youth when he and his friends would go out 'queer bashing' and robbing. He made many enemies during this time and said that most of his friends were in prison and/or

had moved onto using hard drugs. However, Will still liked to spend time out on the streets with his friends 'where the action was' but it got to a point where he could not do anything without getting 'harassed' by the police or street enemies. He was known to the police and entwined in a social control net (Cohen, 1985), and his antics had strained life at home with his parents. Eventually Will's father, a first generation Irish labourer, asked his friend, Danny, if he could get Will a 'start' (a job), keep an eye on him and thus keep him out of trouble. Danny obliged, and Will became a popular character at Keyworker House, despite being in constant trouble from the tenants committee for his loud profanities.

Whilst bellicosity and 'rough' backgrounds were a fact of life for many of the builders, not everybody had or made trouble in their lives (see chapter 5). However, the statistic that painters are more likely to be victims of homicide than any other occupational group (OPCS, 1995) provides further evidence for the circularity of builder masculine bellicosity. Furthermore, staying out of trouble can be troublesome itself amongst groups of men/boys, as Pete, one of the two general foremen, noted:

I've never gone out and intentionally had a fight, I've never been like that. I'd rather love someone than fight them... As I grew up I hung around with a few lads, and the older you get you just go on building sites and rummage around and that don't you, as kids. Then they started smashing the place up and nicking everything, and then it's gone to cars. I thought I'm not interested in this, but then no fucker wants to know you. I've never ever broken into any car, even as a kid when people have walked past somewhere at night and nicked a bike out of a garden or something. I didn't want to do it but I'm there you know, and I just didn't want to be around with that. I've not for one minute even thought about breaking into anyone's car... I didn't, as a child, have a lot of friends really. There's been my best mate I live with now. He's been the same, he's never broken into anyone's cars or beaten anyone up, he's never wanted to do that. And we sort of grew up together, which is not a bad thing.

Some of the builders brought a tough culture with them to the building site. Others did not, but were acutely aware that amongst working-class men and boys, tough masculinity was the norm, and not to take part in the antics of the lads could result in 'no fucker wants to know you'. The social pressure to be strong, risk-taking and masculine may outweigh the pressure to conform formally in male group contexts.

Cultural Transmission

Frank, in talking about his eldest son also called Frank, highlighted some of the processes whereby the use, or threat, of violence as a power resource was passed

down the generations. It was through these processes and day-to-day reality that violence and masculine culture intertwined:

I don't want him to be scared to go out on the street, to be scared that someone is gonna come along and do him if that's what its going to be like. Anybody hits him, hit them back! I don't care if you bite them or hit them with a lump of wood, you hurt them... What can you do? Kids fight but I'm not gonna stand for people bullying them... They get in trouble [at school], and [my wife] Trace will explain that his dad said if he gets any trouble he's told him to hit them. I don't care. There's no way I'm letting him get bullied at school. Because if you don't stick up for yourself you'll go to secondary school and get bullied even fucking more. If he wins, fine, and if he gets beat, he gets beat. But if he gets beat he knows he can go back because he knows that he can use something, he will not get in trouble by me. If he has a fight with somebody in school and he gets beat, I say to him, don't let them walk all over you, if they walk all over you they'll keep on picking on you...

Me and my mate Dave, we got picked on at school. Until Dave thought, 'right that's it I've had enough'. He didn't want to fight them right, they chased both of us and he fought with one and then they all jumped on top of him and beat him up severely. So, he thought, 'right I'm not going to have this'. He got them one by one. He done the whole lot of them yeah, but then when they were all together they started again. He grabbed hold of the leader in the metal room and put his hand in a fucking vice, got a hacksaw and started hacking his fucking arm off. He goes, 'do you want me to do this every time you start'? They backed off and got nicked soon after and put away [in prison] anyway. I got done over as well, they kept on doing it, they kept on coming after me all the time. I'd had enough, I got a lump of wood and battered fuck out of them. They left me alone after that... I didn't feel proud of myself fucking doing it. I don't like fighting, I'd rather just live my life but I'm not going to let my son go through what we went through. There's no way I'm going to let him get done and just walk away. If he does then they're making him do this and that for them, jump for them... Because they see people backing down then they think they rule, like rule your life know what I mean.

What Frank describes above is the lore amongst boys at tough schools and on the streets. Frank was little concerned with his son's achievements in the formal world of the school. His was a pragmatic reaction to the circumstances he was in. He feared his son would live life in fear of violence and be constantly pushed around, and his fear of his son's fear led him to instil a bellicose culture into him. Urban survival and masculine pride would take precedence over remote formal educational examinations and middle-class achievement status (c.f. Miller, 1958). In my experience these parental instructions are common amongst the working-classes. The ability to work hard, fight hard, drink hard and screw hard is central to working-class masculinity. Perhaps only the minority 'formal apprentices' (see chapter 5) experienced a different life to Frank's, perhaps not. Hobbs (1994) argues that violence is a 'cultural expectation' of working-class men; a normal part of growing up, and later, its use or threat is central in the construction and maintenance of their identities.

Violence is part of the scaffold that that working men's self-concepts and social action. The public culture of the builders was in certain contexts the symbolic display of the threat of violence. Symbolised violence was a reservoir of power, and:

Power of any kind must be clothed in effective means of displaying it... Thus the most objective form of naked power, i.e., physical coercion, is often neither objective nor naked but rather functions as a display for persuading the audience; it is often a means of communication not merely a means of action. (Goffman, 1959: 234).

Common violence in the lives of many of the builders provoked a willingness to be violent, or at least to present oneself as bellicose. To deal with the threat of violence, men fight fire with fire and combat the problem with violence. Doing this however, adds further fuel to the fire and maintains bellicosity. Fortunately actual physical violence does not often manifest itself (outside of war) and I never witnessed any actual physical violence at Keyworker House. However, the infrequency of violent manifestations is a paradoxical function of violent omnipresence: violence prevents violence (Hobbs, 1995) and guides social order.

Law, Custom and Violence

Masculine expressions necessarily build upon the foundations of the past. Parental cultural transmission integrates the past and the present both explicitly and implicitly. The massive homicide rates of 17th century England bear witness to the inefficiency of legal technologies and subsequent bellicosity of the past. For example, Rock's (1983) analysis of crime and control in late 17th and early 18th century England outlines how much of the country was disconnected from a central coherent legal apparatus. Even dense urban areas of London, 'constituted a mosaic of discrete and bounded areas' (1983: 207). Law was ambiguous and negotiated where the powerful were commonly immune to legal sanction, and agents of the law were often perpetrators of the crimes. Rock argues that 'such variation had the consequence of confusing the borders between morality and immorality, between legality and illegality' (1983: 216). At best, the law was distant, parochially negotiated and ambiguous, offering little abstract or real protection from victimisation. Furthermore, the emerging legal technologies of this period began to shift from concern with injury to creating crimes against 'things' i.e. property (Thompson, [1975] 1990). People had to protect themselves from one another, and to do this, cultural forms emerged with specific codes of moral conduct and justice. The symbolism of the duel remains in the

contemporary imagination as one such method of organic summary justice. In addition to the weakness of formal control in 17th century England, Thompson (1993) argues that mass education in the 18th and 19th centuries did little to erase informal plebeian custom. Cultural wisdom was passed through the apprenticeship system and in the marketplace during a period of ‘free-time’ between paternalism and factory discipline.

Builders have never been bound by factory discipline and rarely by paternalism, and most of them subjectively by-passed formal education (see chapter 5). Like the plebeian’s, the builders’ law was not written but informally enacted within the exigencies of their everyday lives. Their law was composed of archaic custom enforced by ‘sanctions of force, ridicule, shame and intimidation’ (Thompson, 1993: 9), quite separate from modern legal technologies. Furthermore, as the historian, Stone (1977) argues, pre-modernity was a very ‘cool’ and unfriendly, characterised by suspicion and hostility⁴, similar in this respect to the ‘cool pose’ of inner-city black men. In pre-modernity, social order rested largely on violent strength and the ordination of God, but through history strength mutated into a revered, almost sacred, social symbol co-opted by men. Strength begs respect in both collective discourse and daily interaction, and its brother, violence, therefore forms a backdrop to social action, order and power.

Masculine values are expressed overtly in countless social forms. The mass produced media are saturated with stories of masculine heroes utilising corporal strength and violence to overcome adversity⁵. For those with little access to ‘over-ground’ values, who may feel the ‘hidden injuries of class’⁶ that devalue their mental ability, strength as a form of power is both instrumental and a source of symbolic status (c.f. Collinson, 1992). Marsh (1978) argues that ‘aggro’, an extreme form of bellicose posturing, is a socially evolved mechanism that prevents actual violence. Working-class men have co-opted the forms of ‘aggro’ as implicit in their self-expression, but for middle-class men, status can be achieved through art, money, science, generosity or piety. These status values, in my judgement, bear little relationship to what it is to be masculine. However, for those with negligible access to

⁴ From Pahl, 1984.

⁵ The content of almost any film that stars Sylvester Stallone for instance, portrays the oppressed physically and corporally battling his oppressor.

⁶ Sennett and Cobb (1972) view the injuries as a result of the working-class being part of a non-descript mass. I would add that the symbolic injuries are also composed from the devaluation of working men’s humanity, in particular their intellectual abilities.

these values, masculinity supplies a reservoir of status embedded in collective discourse.

Class Variation

Middle-class expressions of masculinity have diverged from the symbolic expressions of strength and violence that are cloaked in the strut of the working-classes. The construction of the idea of the *gentleman* clearly illustrates a middle-class alternative masculinity. Dominant groups distinguish themselves from the ruled through creating mythical distinctions (Mason, 1970). Leaders of archaic societies maintained rule through divinity, which later became replaced with evolutionary-based mythopoesis concerning the abilities of those 'born to lead'. Training sons in leadership difference disciplined them to gentlemanly conduct, and the growing numbers of middle-class professionals in the 17th and 18th centuries became trained in the courtly culture of the aristocracy, reinforced by the structure of the career (Elias, 1983; Newton, 1996; McKinlay, 2002), and polarised class masculinities emerged⁷. A more recent example of these processes was the clientalist-feudal system in mid-20th century Rwanda:

It was essential for the Tutsi [rulers] to be always self-controlled and polite; only vulgar people like the Hutu lost their temper and showed emotion. The whole social system revolved on the superiority of the Tutsi, who were regarded by the Hutu as different from themselves not only physically but morally. They were believed by both Hutu and Tutsi (writes Maquet) to be 'intelligent, capable of command, refined, courageous and cruel', while the Hutu were thought by both groups to be 'hardworking, not very clever, extrovert, irascible, unmannerly, obedient, and physically strong'. (Mason, 1970: 14)

Mason may as well have been describing generalised cultural differences between the English middle and working classes (excepting perhaps 'obedience'), or between white British colonists and black colonised (see Blum, 2004).

The notion of gentleman arising from feudal leadership forms manufactured 'difference' and removed the utility and necessity of bellicose interaction. The gentleman did not need to prove or posture his power because it was underpinned by his social, economic and political position, and dramatised through myths and discursive structure. For the mass however, their power was summary and interactive, and perhaps one of their few weapons in struggles against the powerful in early modernity (see Thompson, [1975] 1990). Furthermore, dual-class (or race) masculine

⁷ See also Foucault (1976) for a description of the construction of class-based sexualities in the same period.

oppositions enacted a process whereby each team's culture reinforced and solidified definitions of the other, framing cultural development within an antagonistic circular process.

Gender Variation

Historical class and race variations in masculine expression, and concomitant hegemony of the powerful, might help to illuminate to gender variations. Like the taken-for-granted nature of management and middlemen described in chapter 6, masculinity is hegemonic (Connell, 1995) in that many women (historically) may have little objection to 'false reciprocity' between them and their male partners, and in wider social relations in general (Hakim, 1991). Clues to the making of hegemonic masculinity can be found in the past.

Godelier (1999) describes the actions of men's violent domination of women of the Baruya in New Guinea. Like an archaic ruling elite, the men were motivated to dominance by fear of women's power, and they justified their dominance through a sacred ideology dramatised by their possession of sacred secrets and objects. Later in history, men symbolically justified their dominance through their ability to protect and provide. Analogous to the construction of the gentlemen leaders, men's ability to protect and provide was/is legitimised through evolutionary and scientific mythopoesis. Thus men are naturally stronger, bigger, more assertive, less emotional and more practical. Again, antagonistic identity framing formed a process which polarised identities through binary signification. The ideology of man as provider and protectorate makes him indispensable; like god he can never be reciprocated for his life-giving position. However, God can punish as well as provide. Hegemony rests upon violence in its final instance (see also chapters 6 and 9).

Webs of Meaning

Maleness, it can be seen, is an eminently relational notion, constructed in front of and for other men and against femininity, it is a kind of fear of the female, firstly in oneself. (Bourdieu, 2001: 53)

The power of violence spun a web of meaning within collective discourse. Cultural forms from the past crystallised in the present through processes of generational transmission and their continuing utility in everyday encounters (c.f. Berger and Luckman, 1966). Symbolised violence became guided and amplified by positioning

within the field of signified referents, which further dramatised its symbolic power. Just as archaic gift exchange functioned to prevent violence (Mauss, [1954] 1970), masculine posturing functioned as a mechanism to collectively get things done and to dominate without recourse to actual violence (Marsh, 1977). Working-class masculinity further crystallised through its opposition to femininity and middle-class masculinities, and through fear of actual and symbolised violence⁸. Interactions and intra-actions usher feelings of low self-esteem and stigma to those who descend a symbolic hierarchy, and part of the persuasive power of symbolised violence rests upon its ability to provoke descent in the symbolic hierarchy (see below). Furthermore, the idea of strength, in addition to being a real source of interactive power, became conflated with a whole series of other sub-oppositions related to masculine gender. Thus, 'independence' and 'strength' occupy similar positions on the masculine binary apogee, drawn in relation to the 'feminine' signifiers 'weak' and 'dependent'. It is these meanings that frame everyday reflective action.

Group Work

Amongst groups of men working along side one another, the group itself has a tendency to become more than the sum of its parts because group rules emerge in group situations. Chapter 7 highlighted how 'the crack' was a means of manufacturing excitement. The content of the crack was regularly based on masculine linguistic jousting, or what the builders called 'piss-taking'. Analogous to the piss-take is 'sounding'; a means through which young men elevate their status in the group by challenging the masculine status of others (Matza, 1964). In this sense, naming another as a 'gay sissy' presents the speaker as dominant-heterosexual and challenges the listener to prove somehow that he, like the speaker, is not the subordinate gender of 'gay and sissy'. A tactic to deflect the challenge is for the listener to find ambiguities, or lacuna, in the speaker's biography and behaviour, and return the challenge (see also Willis, 1978). Piss-takes can only function within a discursive constellation that valorises tough masculinity and stigmatises other subordinate genders and sexualities. The outcome of piss-taking is to make linguistic challenges appear as normative guides, thereby refreshing discourse day-to-day and moment-to-

⁸ I mean this as a separate notion to Bourdieu's 'symbolic violence' because symbolised violence involves conscious intentionality.

moment, making it seem contextually real and all important (see also Goffman, 1963). This has unintended consequences in terms of both race (see chapter 9) and gender.

Matza (1964) writes that male group members suffer 'status anxiety' that cannot be talked about or shared amongst the group as this would become ridiculed, and ridicule functions as a way for other group members to overcome their own anxieties. This results in 'group pluralistic ignorance' (from Dollard, 1937) whereby each member believes the piss-taking assaults to be real despite the fact that they sometimes or often privately disbelieve the meanings. These processes were at work at Keyworker House. Amongst the builders, piss-takes/sounding revolved around jibes at one another's badges of identity, in particular their masculine identity. During the piss-take each opponent attempted to out-manoeuvre the other by finding general status weaknesses in one another's identity and symbolically drawing these out as to descend the opponent in a symbolic hierarchy⁹. The processes restricted group interaction to guarded and superficial levels. Stew expressed how this could operate:

It was like this guy I worked with, I told him too much. It doesn't do good to be so open, it's the wrong thing to do. I should be working him out, but why I'm doing all the talking he's working me out. Anyone can pretend to be someone they are not, the way I am is that I am genuine, but a lot of people are not and they take advantage of that.

Stew's sincerity was not recommended because it opened him up to gossip, exploitation and piss-takes. He learned not to be so expressive and interact at a more superficial, and perhaps, publicly more masculine level. By interacting this way the builders reproduced the masculine discourse that they may have privately disbelieved. The processes manufactured pluralistic ignorance whereby guarded social performances provoked guarded social performances that established contextual norms.

As evidenced from the interview data, the men tended to be open and, I think, honest towards a 'trusted' individual when in a one-to-one situation. It was the presence of company and distrust that restricted interaction to the superficial or overtly masculine and the piss-take and/or the 'crack' were both cause and effect of this. In addition, the situation of company elicited the telling of extraordinary masculine stories that also served to refresh discourse and form guidelines for action. The stories concerned sexual conquests, violent battles, and extreme drink and drug-taking (which were possibly apocryphal. See Patrick, 1973). They were exciting to

⁹ This was reminiscent of, although a less structured form to, 'playing the dozens' that occurs in black street culture (Majors and Billson, 1992) and which eventually developed into the musical forms of rap and hip-hop.

listen to and emphasised the masculinity of the teller. However, they framed normative boundaries for listeners and served to force the teller into substantiating their authenticity when or if they encountered similar situations. For example, one who says that he usually drinks 20 pints of lager in an evening, or always fights his aggressors, will be forced to do that when in the company of men, or 'lose face' (Goffman, 1955).

There were more tactics other than simple returning of jibes during piss-take encounters. Bristles once strolled into the site office announcing 'I'm a raving homosexual'. His was a method of seizing and playing-up linguistic self-presentations which provoked laughter from the social audience and paradoxically conveyed the speaker's solid masculine confidence. However, there were also limits to the piss-take ritual. A piss-take too far could result in people becoming 'pissed off' or in the perpetrator looking foolish and discrediting himself as a result. As Aidan mentioned:

I don't go overboard with people, I wouldn't go overboard with people, cos you can. When you're young yeah, like you can see young Will, he's young but he gets a bit bolshie, he thinks he knows life yeah, but he hasn't. I mean we was like it that age. I can see that. It's no good me saying, you stupid cunt why don't you shut up. You gotta say to yourself, I was like that, and I was. Just laugh at it, you got to laugh at it.

Matza argued that when juveniles grew older and moved away from the street-group into work and relationships with women, they also moved away from the trappings of group pluralistic ignorance. However, whilst this may be the case to an extent, and was illustrated by Aidan's account of Will, what Matza neglected to say was that in moving into working-class jobs the juveniles would end up in other masculine groups where similar processes took place (c.f. Willis, 1977). In this sense, 'boys will be boys' and continue to do the same sorts of things as juveniles. However, delinquencies in relation to the building industry occur in space controlled by the groups themselves, the workplace, and not in the street or school where formal law resides. Consequently, men no longer get into trouble for doing the same things as boys' and it is therefore possible that they do not grow out of 'status deviancies' at all, but merely do these undetected¹⁰.

¹⁰ Not always undetected, men obviously spend time in the public world. The high levels of violence that occur when men meet in the night-time economies of British town centres, or at football matches for example, can be seen as status deviancies of this kind.

Families

The notions of strength, independence and the related role of provider and protector, crystallise around the family (Collinson and Hearn, 1994; Connell, 1995; Sasson-Levey, 2002). Sennett and Cobb (1972) argue that working-class men subjectively negotiate their working lives as a sacrifice for the sacred nature of the family; they worked so their children would have better opportunities than themselves. This was also the case for many of the builders, as Jamin told me:

I know a lot of guys who fucking don't give a shit about their kids and leave it to the missus to bring them up, down the pub every Friday and Saturday night, I'm not really one for that at all. I want to be at home with the kids; sit down, watch a film, have a laugh with them, go out play football, teach them. Help them along in life, know what I mean? When I look at my kids I see myself. Sometimes how they behave, things they do and say, and what they're scared of and what they're not scared of, it brings me back to when I was young. I don't want them to make the same mistakes. And the only way you can do that is by spending time with them, even if you just sit there of an evening and watch a film and have a laugh with them. They learn from that you know. Now maybe because my dad never done that with me, he was just too busy working and all that. I never went to football with my dad or went to the pictures with him, never man. I mean he was good to us, he wasn't bad or anything, but he was never, we were never close in that kind of way you know, not like I am with my son. And I love all that, I love sort of like helping him along in life and making sure he don't trip-up where I tripped up.

DT: Would you be happy if your kids went into the building trade?

No, you're fucking joking, not as manual labourers, be it chippies, plumbers, no way, no way man... I do push them at least to do some sort of job where you've got job security you know... Why fucking get dirty when you can sit in an office, you know what I mean? I definitely sort of push them into doing some sort of office work, or not necessarily office work but something better than this. I mean when I say not in the building game I wouldn't mind them being an architect, surveyor, or something like that. I mean when I wake up in a morning and I'm the first cunt at the train station, you must know that. We get up early, we get dirty, we're fucking fools man... I don't want my kids doing that.

Many of the builders were working to make their children's' lives better than their own. In this respect the role of provider was a salient form of 'external' work control. However, as Donaldson (1991) argues, masculine notions of provider are also largely tied to pragmatics in that working-class men, on average, are able to earn more money than their wives. Stew was aware of this:

At the moment [my partner] she's extremely frustrated. She wants to get out but she's trapped with the two kids, one of them's only two years old. I've give her the option to get out at weekends, go do something, or during the week, go to college learn something... I mean painting and decorating, I showed her a few basics and there was one day I'd come home and she's stripped the front room, she'd smashed the fireplace up, knocked all the cupboards down, done everything the way it should have been done. She put the render in there, plastered it up, she was bang-on with it, everything

yeah... She turned round to me one day and said 'why don't you not work and I'll go out and work'. I says to her, well, that's because if we do that you'll be lucky to earn £180 a week, if that. At the end of the day it's impractical, you ain't gonna earn much money unless you go out and learn a trade... I've worked with women painters, better than I was, quicker an all, outshone me by far...

Stew's account of being the provider was not cloaked within masculine discourse, but was accounted as a pragmatic response to the economy and society in which he lived. However, the intersection of structural economy and discursive masculinity set a dynamic that reinforced itself. Furthermore, the role of provider is conflated, *via* discursive notions of masculine strength, with the role of protector. Fathers who have, and are socially guided to have gendered strength, are those elected to protect the family in patriarchal societies. As Frank mentioned, 'I would not let anybody harm them kids, nobody, I'd go to prison first, seriously'. Discursive notions of protection encourage men to work and to fight in wars, men who are not necessarily psychically integrated into a nation, but they risk their lives in war *via* discursive notions of protectorate of the family (Sasson-Levey, 2002) and of one another (Kier, 1999).

Working-class masculinity and informal culture have been objectified as a social problem for centuries. This appears perennially in writings of the past in the guise of the mob and rabble; and in the present as: delinquency (in criminology), worker intransigence (in industrial relations), naughty boys (in education studies), and as exploitative patriarchs (in gender studies). These *foci* might be a product of middle-class fear and constructed through the intelligentsia's own oppositional middle-class difference. However, it is the very same 'problem' culture that motivates men to fight and die in wars, and to undertake dangerous work in peace time. In these contexts informal masculine culture is not deemed a problem at all.

Attitudes to Women

Talk about wives, girlfriends, mothers and sisters was quite different to talk about women in general. Women in public worlds were described as ineluctable slags and women in private-worlds as impudent nags. I mentioned above that tabloid badges of masculinity generally portrayed women as sexual objects. The builders similarly objectified female strangers in the public world in this way. The builders' terms including 'slag' and 'bitch' used to describe public women were perhaps symbolic put-downs to counter 'public women's' autonomous sexual power, for in the public world dependency is more opaque and masculine power less substantial.

Published sociological literature frequently portrays working men as those who, because they are belittled at work, compensate by having power at home (Cockburn, 1982; Collinson, 1993; Massey, 1994). Perhaps builders were a different case to printers, miners or factory workers because they were relatively autonomous at work. Yet for the builders, wives were talked about at work as problematic sources of control, and the pub and workplace as affording more freedom than the home. As Stew mentioned:

There's only one thing I can't really deal with at the moment and that's me missus. She moans about such trivial shit. If she could step into my head for 5 minutes she'd soon shut up... She moans about me going for a drink with Frank 'cos we always end up langers [drunk]... as I say it's enough to turn you to the bottle (laughs).

I did not observe actual home lives during my fieldwork, I only heard about them, but empirically wives *are* sources of control and conformity. Whilst men possess corporal power over women, women and the family unit have power over men through the morally integrative power of the network, and as Durkheim ([1993] 1960) argued, social integration is a salient source of collective conscience and thus conformity (see also Hirschi, 1969). I asked Bristles' what his third and longest-standing wife had that the others did not:

Well, she's truthful and honest, and she knows how to look after her man. When I go home and I've had a hard day she'll say, 'right kids come over here, leave your dad alone, he's having a nice quiet cup of tea. Here's a cigarette, ashtray, chill-out, I'll run you a bath'. And she puts up with some shit from me... Now if there is one thing she needs to know, it's where I am. As long as I tell her, she's great like that, she don't care where I am. If I said I was in a brothel, she'd say 'where?', I'd say France, she'd say, 'okay, what time you coming home?'. And then she knows, you know what I mean.

Escape Roots

Talk concerning how wives applied control could function as an expression and escape from masculine pluralistic ignorance and group pressure. For instance, saying one cannot go to the pub because the 'old lady' will not let him, releases him from piss-takes for not going to the pub. The actions of Danny went some way to corroborate this. Without fail, when Shane was not in the site office, Danny would enter and phone his wife to see how she was or to discuss some family business. His sentimental actions were inconsistent, although not incompatible, with his talk about 'the old lady' as a source of control. Thus despite the builders' publicly expressing attitudes about their wives as impudent nags, actions like Danny's contravened this to an extent; wives were thus both 'nags' and companions. However, using wives as an

escape route from masculine plural ignorance could back-fire. Some of the builders severely 'took the piss' out of Mike Fixit for his regularly not going on drink-ups because he said he had to go home to the 'old lady'. Mike was subject to a barrage of disdain for not leaving his disabled wife at home to look after their alcoholic son.

Thoughts on Violence and Hegemony

The construction of class and race-based masculinity solidified those masculinities because of social-structural blockages to other resources of status and power, and physical strength became a valuable and tangible source of working-class social and symbolic capital. The valorisation of 'strength', bravery and daring are discursive values that we all share (Matza, 1964). For manual workers however, poor access to other sources of status perpetuate that valorisation. Furthermore, formal national culture was frequently by-passed in the school and on the street where it had little day-to-day utility, and archaic cultural tradition became informally passed-on in the workplace (see chapter 5) and the family. This informal culture provided an effective cultural tool-kit for negotiating everyday life where formal-legal vacuity necessitated the expression of tough masculinity.

Some groups have access to more/better resources of violence than others, and naked violence often evokes counter-violence. Through history, dominant groups engaged in mythopoesis to legitimate their rule and symbolically dramatise their violence. Dramatised violence was a 'serious theatre, with its multifarious and persuasive scenes' (Foucault, 1977: 113), and as Foucault argued, all discipline is anchored by violence, violence that makes disciplinary power pervasive. Theatres of violence are reproduced from moment to moment by the existence of managers and work processes, men and masculine action, and the state and its armoury of police, prisons and armies. Foucault argued that corporal power was superseded by the disciplinary power of knowledge, yet he saw that modernity was shaped like an archipelago, with small islands of the past anchoring the discipline of the present. Social order is therefore partly predicated on a 'deep structure' of the violence of economy and polity. If this is the case, gender structures might also be predicated upon the violence of the body.

Symbolic performances of the dominant and their institutions radiate power. This power may not have inculcated minds, as Foucault ([1975] 1991) suggested, but it commonly functions to skew reciprocity, and consent to this skew may be termed

hegemony. In the following chapter I analyse reciprocity, its skew, and subsequent hegemony. I focus on trust, the performance of reciprocity and gift exchange that characterised the builders' social networks. I then move on to look at the relationships between economy, social networks and social structures.

Chapter 9

Networks, Economy and Social Structures

The builders' formed social networks that sought to cushion themselves from structural impositions upon their lives which were largely independent from their own control (chapter 4). However, these social networks patterned the builders' lives by contributing to the formation of class and race dynamics and structures. In addition, it was not only the manual workers who enacted and sustained informal social networks, but relationships between subcontractors, contractors and clients were also bound by network associations, and, these too contributed to the formation of wider social structures.

Reciprocity, Trust and Social Control

The operation of informal social networks was guided by norms of reciprocity, gift exchange and trust. Gifts and debts create trusts and trust *is* predictability. When somebody or something is trusted, it is because there is a probability that it will perform as we would wish. For example, we may trust our mother or spouse to care for us if we are ill but we may not trust them to help us in a street fight. Alternatively, a best friend or brother may be trusted to help us in a street fight but may not be trusted to look after us if we are ill. We trust them both in different ways, and we trust them because we think we can predict them. As Gambetta (1988) argues, trust is a way of coping with the limits of foresight that exist between people. However, trust is not formed in information alone but is also tied to gift exchange.

Trust can be enforced by one's membership in a network and maintained by the 'norm of reciprocity' (Gouldner, 1960). Reciprocity is fuelled by the exchange of gifts, gifts which are not necessarily material but can take the guise of information, favours, or even trust itself. Gifts are what Mauss ([1954] 1970) called *prestations*. Giving a gift establishes a debt that requires a counter-gift. Counter-gifts do not involve an exact return of goods or services in a rigid temporal framework like formal economic exchange systems, but return is elastic, situated and moral. Gouldner comments: 'The norm, in this respect, is a kind of plastic filler, capable of being poured into the shifting crevices of social structures,

and serving as a kind of all purpose moral cement' (1960: 175). Gift giving involves and reinforces human relationships, and as Sahlins observed, 'If friends make gifts, gifts make friends' ([1972] 2002: 186).

Reciprocal gift exchange is a collective method evolved to limit the consequences of egoism, which seems to be why it has evolved as a common, universal norm; it is a collectively beneficial way of doing things together. The exchange of gifts and favours binds individuals through the elasticity of reciprocation, operating like Durkheim's ([1893] 1960) conception of moral solidarity where *prestations* are part of the fabric of social life. The norm of reciprocity, then, manufactures network members who are perceived as trustworthy, that is, predictable, because failure to abide by the norm, and I would add, other network morality, will result in exclusion from the network, violence and/or stigmatisation (see chapters 7 and 8).

Social integration and control rest upon membership to particular groups. For example, new recruits who are part of an employment network will experience social pressure extant in the network's collective *mores* i.e. to be a member of a network one should adhere to its rules or expect exclusion, stigmatisation or sanction. As Hirschi (1969) argues, individual's involvement in, and commitment to, the groups in which they are embedded promote conformity. The network thereby reinforces the trust mechanism by enhancing the predictability of member's actions through the informal social control radiated within the network. Furthermore, information that accrues in a network will likely remain within it. *Á propos*, network groups, whilst circulating information to their members, may also act to conceal information from those outside (see Grieko, 1987). The system of trust and debt can thus act to conceal illegitimate activities from outsiders. Portes (1995) suggests that within subcontracted work in ethnic enclave areas in North America, regulatory measures to protect workers are hidden from regulatory governance because the groups seek to keep things to themselves without invoking formal law. This was also found to be the case at Topbuild. For example, part of the intensive job information new recruits received through their informal networks enabled some to work for their subcontractors whilst simultaneously claiming State benefits. Only trusted and informal links with a subcontractor would enable them to do this. (see chapter 8 and below).

Informal reciprocal exchange binds all manner of social groups - families, neighbourhood communities, friendship and work groups. Even in rigid formalised bureaucracies, informal networks have been shown to operate (Dalton, 1959; McGuire, 2000), indicating that formal and informal processes are often intertwined. I expand on this further below, but it should be noted that network reciprocity is a social, moral, political and economic relationship. The family for instance is an affective social group but it is also a source of status, employment, housing, goods, services and money, and it thus serves economic, political and social functions in contemporary society (c.f. Pahl, 1984).

Caveat

The norm of reciprocity does not operate in all contexts. The relationships at Topbuild were set predominately in masculine networks and framed by archaic rules of conduct. Reciprocation only occurs within networks embedded in reasonably egalitarian power relationships because power functions to negate one's responsibility to reciprocate. For example, reciprocity between men and women in 'traditional' marriage relationships has a tendency to disintegrate (see chapter 8). Within a patriarchal order, the power of husbands over wives may negate men's duty to reciprocate within the family setting. Slavery is another prime example of non-reciprocal exchange, as are employment relationships which skew the norm through the power and violence of dismissal (see chapter 6). For instance, informal reciprocal relations bound the building tradesmen to their subcontract bosses, yet these relations were characterised by false reciprocity because the subcontractors took more than they returned. In effect, services were given by the tradesmen but only small monetary payment was given back by the subcontractor. Power therefore skews the norm of reciprocity. As Gambetta (1988) remarked, co-operation is not contingent solely on trust, but can be enforced by coercion, and, I would add, hegemonic consent (see chapter 8).

Non-reciprocal situations commonly provoke resistance from participants and abhorrence from knowledgeable observers. Because of possible sanctions, such reactions may not be publicly proclaimed but privately held, but breaking the norm of reciprocity is commonly felt to be unjust exploitation or domination. The commonality of moral censure towards non-reciprocal situations illustrates further that reciprocity exists as a fundamental social norm.

Contacts and Contracts

The building subcontract system bears similarities to the *oyabun-kobun*, or, 'labour-boss' system present in Japanese industrialism (see Bennett and Ishino, 1963). This system, with its roots in feudal Japan, functions as a distinct undercurrent in Japan's modern economy. Wedded to a system of privileges and duties based upon strict paternalism and reciprocal relations, the labour-bosses supply peripheral subcontract labour to large companies and contractors, and are trusted by employers because of long-term business relationships and notions of feudal honour. Employees are tied into the system by explicit reciprocal duties whereby bosses train workers and pay them when they are sick or out of work. Workers reciprocate by remaining loyal to the boss and are thus trusted to carry out the work competently.

British-based building subcontractors do not take the role of hegemonic father towards their employees, but, because no formal contracts exist between them, subcontractors relate to their workers, in part, *via* informal reciprocal mechanisms. For instance, Ernie Coat employed as an apprentice the 16-year-old son of one of his most skilled workers, Gerry. Ernie's interest in doing this was partly to bind the Gerry to the business. Subcontractor reciprocation only occurred for more permanent, reliable and exceptional workers, the subcontractor's 'core' employees. The form of these relationships were illustrated by Bill, the long-time and hardworking foreman of Spark's M and E:

The governor is a real first class governor to work for. I mean he can be an old bastard, but I've had things where he'll go and pay for my holiday, or come Christmas he's popped £1000 in an envelope, you know little things. One day I phoned up and he says, 'what's the matter with you? You sound like you've got the hump'. I said, fucking fridge-freezer's just packed up' and I'd just been out and bought all the food. Next day there's a £500 fridge-freezer delivered to the door. That's why I suppose over the years I've gained his respect and he's got my respect. He's been a decent fella and a sort of loyal fella to work for. I get me company car, don't pay no petrol, company phone, I give him the phone bills. I don't go begging to him but if I need anything it's always there, it's set out for me.

Subcontractor reciprocation maintained respect and promoted loyal relationships that reinforced trust. These informal employment relationships were wedged in a sociological bygone time, or alternatively, in an aspect of human behaviour that labour-process theory has been blind to. The relationships looked conceptually non-modern, displaying the feudal notions of nepotism, ascription, reciprocity and loyalty.

Traps and Springboards

The more one relies upon a fixed network group, the more one becomes anchored into that network; choices and contacts become increasingly limited to that sphere of contact, and contingent work possibilities become fewer and fewer. Granovetter (1973) describes how 'weak ties' are more beneficial for employment advancement than 'strong ties'. This is because one will tend to receive broader and more varied information through 'weak tie' linkages, information that lay outside the reach of smaller 'strong tie' networks (see also Grabher, 1993)¹. In migrant communities where family networks tend to be strong and contact with other ethnic groups is limited (due in part to the network itself), 'weak ties' will be fewer in number and therefore occupational advancement restricted. Thus networks, while having important economic functions in terms of getting jobs, housing, goods and services (see chapter 4 and 10), also functioned to restrict economic opportunities. Networks are necessarily finite, if they were not they would not affect employment chances in the first place (c.f. Granovetter, 1974)². This is how clusters of individuals inadvertently reproduce social structures when performing in-group reciprocity (see below and chapter 10).

Strong ties can also restrict occupational movements because of the binding and elastic nature of favours and loyalty. Jamin provided an illustration:

I know him [subcontractor boss] from school see, he's all right, he's a mate of mine. I mean it works both ways, I'm tolerant with him and he's tolerant with me. I don't take the piss just because he's a mate of mine, and he doesn't really take the piss with me, well he does but I don't mind. At the end of the day I get my money.

DT: What do you mean he takes the piss?

Well you know, I don't get paid every Friday, it's not a great, it's not a big thing. Sometimes I get paid Monday or Wednesday, or sometimes I get two weeks together. But they do look after me, they're all right, I can't complain.

Jamin did not complain to his subcontract boss even when he was not paid on time because a friendship and community relationship bound him. This reciprocity was expressed as 'I'm tolerant with him and he's tolerant with me'. His actions at Keyworker House provided further evidence of the binding nature of his network. On many occasions Steve, the project manager, asked if Jamin would 'come on the

¹ This is subject to some debate. See Pahl, 2000.

² Studies such as Milligram's ([1967]1989) small world problem are purely artificial in that it no one is asking the recipient for a favour, just delivering a message to him/her, rather like an informal-ambiguous postal service.

books', and work directly for Topbuild as a general foreman instead of being subcontracted by Turner's. This would have provided Jamin with the possibility of promotion to site management and removed him from the costs of subcontract casualisation. Jamin frequently said he would think about this but never seized the opportunity, largely because he perceived that he owed loyalty to his boss because he was his 'mate'. The opportunity for Jamin to leave his parochial employment network was rejected because Jamin's work networks crosscut his family and neighbourhood networks. Again, this was a situation where work and home life crosscut each other, where social and economic categories become false dichotomies (see chapter 10).

Such examples illustrate how loyalty to a subcontractor was a two-way process. Despite having no formal responsibility to their workers, and occupying the powerful end of the reciprocal relationship (which as aforementioned, skews reciprocity), subcontractors often gave more than just a job to their employees, primarily because they could not constantly monitor them. Valuable employees' loyalty towards their subcontractor was thus bought. In this sense, money could mediate and replace other forms of *prestation* by symbolising reciprocation.

Trusting their workers was not the only reason for subcontractor reciprocity. Being a member of a network also immersed subcontractors into the moral world of network obligations. For example, the plastering subcontractor, Luke Screed, unusually paid his Seychellian workers sick and holiday pay. Luke's morality, coupled with the *mores* of the small and quite pious Seychelles community, necessitated that he did this. The labour subcontractor, Paddy McMurray, did not pay sick or holiday pay but did pay for his employees' funerals if they died in poverty (which many did). In this case, Paddy was obviously not buying trust from his dead employee but was enacting and enforcing the morality of his network group. His moral involvement in the surrounding local community acted upon him to do his 'duty' as an employer. He may not have been subject to overt community pressure but his self was grounded in that community and their morality were his morality.

Networks can act as both a trap and a springboard. For example, a builder may undertake work to the private home of a company director of a multinational firm. The builder may be honest, reliable, able, adaptive, and his work exceptional. The company director may come to like and trust the builder, but it would be more beneficial to keep the builder in his place as a builder rather than offer him a job as

manager of the company. The director may offer a managerial position to someone he did not even know but who was linked to him via his family or business contacts. In doing this, the director maintains reciprocity with his family or business contact and keeps a good builder. At Topbuild, the general Foreman, Pete, was not employed because of his foreman skills (see chapter 6). Pete was not a tradesman nor had he served a long time working in the building industry, but he was ascribed his position through his local community relationship in Kent with James, one of the site managers. Where James worked, Pete followed. Danny, the long-serving labour foreman, was much more experienced and suited to the general foreman's role but he remained Pete's subordinate. Pete's particular position within a network relation acted as a nepotistic network springboard and propelled him to his rank of general foreman, and later to the position of junior site manager.

Competition and Embeddedness

Ernie Coat, Paddy McMurray and Mickey T had subcontracted skill and labour to Topbuild for 30 years or more. The fact that these long-term relationships continued to operate within a competitive market was surprising given that new subcontracting entrepreneurs, especially new migrant groups, could under-cut existing subcontractor's prices. In a sense, the long-term relationships echo of a partnering system long before management theorists envisaged the idea (see also Lorenz, 1988), but there were practical and structural reasons for these relationships.

However, contractors always face a stark decision when selecting subcontractors: should they choose the cheapest quote; a subcontractor whom they trust to carry out the work to a required standard; or a subcontractor to whom they owe a favour? Eccles (1981b) indicates that in almost all countries there is actually a stability of relationships between many contractors and subcontractors over time. He terms these relationships 'quasifirms', and demonstrates that contractors in only 20 percent of cases used competitive bidding because they preferred to employ subcontractors whom they knew and trusted. Yet, it was not simply trust that framed the contractors' decisions at the Keyworker House build.

Undercutting and Contacts

Granovetter (1985) doubts the validity of the concept 'quasifirm', arguing that economic relations between separate firms are frequently lodged in long-term

relations which build social control or trust, into economic relationships. He argues that economic relations are not characterised by 'economic man' and free markets, but by interdependent 'Durkheimian-man' and embedded markets.

Rivals can always undercut subcontractors. This was an integral feature of the volatility of the building industry (see chapter 1). For example, Ernie Coat's painters would not work for less money than they thought they could earn elsewhere, but a group of Russian migrant painters may, and do, work for half of this wage. The two Russian painters sacked by Ernie Coat (see chapter 4) were reported to be working for £50 per day, while some of Ernie's painters earned almost double this wage (see chapter 10). The builders were aware of migrant wage-undercutting processes and it provided a backdrop for a certain amount of racism (see below). A Russian diaspora subcontractor could for example, tender for works at a lower price than a subcontractor representing a more ingrained cultural group. Further, a newly formed subcontractor might not take a high percentage cut from the wages of his workers in the first instance, or may even operate a 'loss-leader' so as to build initial relationships. To maintain lucrative positions therefore, subcontractors needed to develop good relationships with contractors and/or assure that their work was exceptional.

Despite the possibility of cheaper prices offered by subcontract groups, and resultant price undercutting, the threat of rival subcontractors was not ever-present. This was in part the result of the finite functioning of business information networks because only a select group of subcontractors' were in the position to bid for work. As Jamin explained, in discussing the history of Turner's:

Turner's, I was with them when they started the company. What it was, me, my governor [subcontractor], all of us [Kutchis], were all working for a firm called Woods. My governor, he was the first one to work for them, the first Indian on that firm. They were all English people and he was doing well with them. Then he bought me in there, 2 of us, and then 3, and then 4, and then we started getting a bit of a posse together. And he [Mr Woods] liked the way we operate, liked the way we worked: regular, no hangovers, no days off, on time. 4 became 5, 10, 20. In the end there was about 25 Indians working for Woods. My governor became foreman, so every time Woods needed a chippy, he'd get them, he knew loads of chippies see. Things were going all right and my governor had a little bit of an idea. He says, 'I'd like to try and do my own thing with Topbuild'. He was just making a few enquiries and his dad knew a few people. His dad had a firm as well, he knew one of the top blokes in Topbuild and it just so happened that Woods were doing work for Topbuild at the time. My governor, he was sort of connecting with Topbuild, he wasn't really trying to take the work away from the bloke but he was just trying to start his own thing. But the governor from Woods must have got wind of it because he sacked him. But by this time my governor had sown the seeds, spoken to the right people. But Woods just fucked him off, and he

was loyal to that bloke, he'd got him some of the jobs and run the jobs for him. He was loyal, and the bloke just [said], 'out', ruthless fucker. So my governor says 'right okay, if that's the way you want it'. So he started his own company. At the start there was 3 of them [subcontract bosses of Turner's], they took on 1 or 2 chippies, then 3 or 4, and all these chippies were taken from Woods, so they were white-washed. I mean they're still surviving now, just, but my governor took the chippies away and they came and worked for him. Turner's have been going for about 5 years now. I've worked for them for nearly all of that time.

Although social networks have an impact on the structural opportunities that individuals and groups confront, those in higher, more lucrative business positions were also presented with opportunities *via* their networks. The father of 'the governor' of Turner's Carpentry was linked to 'the right people' in the Topbuild management hierarchy. Without these links it would have been difficult for him to acquire the information necessary to bid for work. Furthermore, the rates that Turner's charged for their carpenters were slightly less than other carpentry subcontractors. Turner's were willing to take less of a percentage cut from their workers' wages so that they could, at least initially, undercut their rivals. The youngest carpenter, Vin, explained how racial mechanisms and cheap labour functioned together in the subcontract system:

If I come into Indian company, they don't ask for papers [qualifications], as long as you know the work they'll employ you. But if I go to a big company with white people, normally they will ask for not just what you know, they would want to see papers as well. With Indians it's all right, as long as you know them they will take you on and employ you. It's because they will be paying less. If you want more money, then obviously you have to go to someone else with papers and you can get what sort of money you want. Generally, like all the Indians I've worked with it's less money than any other company. For example, if you go to a white person's company, or I'm not talking generally Indians, I'm talking, you know Singhs [Punjabi Indians], they generally pay more, but not as good as white people - they pay the top wages. Indians, it's as I say, they are known for trying to get the cheapest labour that they can.

Quite how Punjabi carpenters formed such embedded relationships in the building industry was outside the scope of my case study. However, they are famed in the building industry for their skills. They also carry a highly masculine culture more akin to that of the white English working-class than of the Hindu Kutchis. Through their embeddedness they were able to charge higher prices for their work and pay higher wages than the Kutchi group, but still not as much as white English groups.

Migrant Labour and Work Power

In the old days, 50s and 60s, no stop in rain, work away. Those days are all gone, for the best... Oh it's much easier now, of course, much easier. (Danny, labour foreman)

Many of the labourers said that the building trade had become easier and softer over the past 50 years. They told stories about working in rain and snow and eating their lunch in damp, unheated and squalid huts. They suggested that 'youngsters' did not know how easy they had got it these days. Times, they said, had changed. Certainly health and safety legislation since the 1970s enforced rules that make building sites safer places to work and stipulate warm and dry domestic areas to rest in. However, a cursory look recent migrant groups such as Eastern Europeans, highlights that they still work in the rain at a faster pace and for a smaller wage than more established groups. As one of the labourers, Aidan, mentioned:

My brother is a subby, does groundwork, underpinning, drains, paving and all this business. He employs Bosnians because they're cheap and they'll work like donkeys. He employed one for £25 a day and he's out there in the rain breaking his fuckin' back. Poor fuckers some of them.

Eastern Europeans, being recent migrants to Britain, had little informal work power because they had not secured relationships embedded in the industry. This situation was similar to that of the Irish 50 years ago, but, as time passed, Irish contractors and subcontractors secured a virtual monopoly over groundwork and, because of this, their power over the work process increased. The Irish bought and sweated their way into a niche in English economy. As Bristles, who was second generation Irish, illustrated:

Years ago it was hard, there was loads and loads of gangermen and they all seemed to be Irish for some reason. They all seemed to be six foot four and that's just from one side of their shoulder to the other! Why invent shovels when they had hands the size of them anyway? I worked for a firm called McHannon's. The dad came over with a shovel and a pick, started digging away. Well, their premises now, this was only like 40 years ago, their business now it's actually been floated on the stock market. Worth well over one hundred million, and this was just through dad starting off digging holes. Same as Murphy's [large groundwork contractor] really, he's no different, no different at all. But it's changed round slightly now, it's more like the Kosovans and the Russians and people like that, they're the ones doing the hard graft now. It's funny how things change round. I suppose in 10 years it'll be them running it and then maybe we'll have an influx of Chinese, seeing as, well, we haven't got that many countries left to come over here.

There was a dynamic at play in building subcontracting whereby new groups offered cheap and hardworking labour in order to get a foothold in the industry. By and large, this could be done only in times of labour shortage (as the Irish had done in the 1950s) or through membership of the relevant network groups. The dynamic may remove more entrenched groups by competitive undercutting or the groups may exist

side-by-side. But as time goes by, and subcontractor groups come to solidify their relations with contractors, prices and wages appear to rise. Also, as new groups make more contacts in the industry, workers have more choice concerning which subcontractors to work for. Migrant worker networks, contacts and, therefore, power, consequently increase over time and the workers will no longer ‘break their balls’ in the rain.

Competition and Racism

Racism is a very complex and emotive phenomenon, and while it is certainly a social problem, it is not the problematic of this thesis. For these reasons I provide only a cursory analysis, but, as I argued in the last chapter, inferiorizing processes take similar form with regard to class, race and gender (although, with respect to class and gender, inferiorization has never resulted in genocide). However, as I revealed above, racial discrimination in the building industry was largely the result of economic and network processes, and not symbolic domination processes, although these probably formed an ingredient to network positions.

Blum (2002) provides a clear and well-reasoned analysis and definition of racism. He argues that racism can be defined as ‘inferiorization’ and/or ‘antipathy’, on a personal, social or institutional level, towards a group of people on the basis of their ethnicity. Casting groups as inferior on the basis of ‘race’ is a historical construction formed to justify exploitation (see chapter 8). Blum cites Allport ([1954] 1988) arguing, that whilst everyone makes prejudicial judgements, racism is the power to enforce and sustain prejudice. Social life is perceived through the screen of shared social typifications (Berger and Luckman, [1966] 1991), and generalised pre-judgement is part of how people order and comprehend the world around them. Individuals make prejudicial typifications about all kinds of social groups, usually related to gender, class and race indicators. Inferiorizing typifications about an ethnic group manufactures antipathy, and, the creation of antipathy frames all kinds of exclusionary and exploitative actions.

Competition and Accounts

The builders were aware that recent migrant groups offered cheaper labour than more ingrained groups, and many perceived this as a threat to their livelihoods. Stew, a painter, spoke for many of the men when he said, ‘Without being racist, you’ve got all

these people coming over and working for peanuts, they're just fucking up the [wage] rates, and as time goes on it's just getting worse and worse'. The subcontract dynamic therefore, provided some of the builders with a tension and means through which to express racist attitudes. It was common parlance to blame recent migrant groups for falling wage rates as opposed to blaming the capitalist market, because ethnic groups represented an easily identifiable scapegoat (c.f. Hall *et al*, 1978; Solomos and Back, 1996; Bowling, 1999; Foster, 1999). These views were fuelled by broader antipathy towards new migrant groups projected by mass produced media, particularly the right-wing tabloid press. Economic tensions were also accompanied by additional views of recent migrants as dangerous and low skilled. As Bill commented:

I got Kosovans or whatever coming up to me [looking for work] and I have to tell them to go away, you know, not nasty but I said no, no work. And they'll work for £10 a day if you give them a chance 'cos they're desperate for money. But then comes in the health and safety. They can't talk English and yet Topbuild - all building sites are the same yeah, really strict on health and safety, you must have your boots, your papers [qualifications], your [hard] hat. But they have blokes walking about who can't even talk English. So if you say to them, 'mind your head there's a brick coming down', they don't know what you're talking about. They're dangerous, simple as that.

Both Bill and Stew were white English and, in terms of their racial affiliations, were a dominant group. However, their racism was not elicited by the skin colour or a colonial history of others because their words were directed at white Eastern European groups. Furthermore, it was not only the white English that expressed such attitudes. Take for example, Naz, an Indian carpenter:

In another 10 years I can see a shortage of building trades, unless of course the Europeans coming in and taking over. But they got problems, like Topbuild was doing a job in Hackney and there was Albanian and Romanian. Somebody tells me to tell them to do job but they can't understand so I have to go and show them, I might as well do it myself while I'm showing them. But most of them, they have picked up tools and just started building, some of them are fast picking it up you know, pick it up quickly as they go along... I mean you pay an Indian labourer for £50 [per day] because he's got a house, wife and children, he can't survive on less. But you get an Albanian or Romanian or whatever, he's living with 3 people in one room, he can do £20 a day and he wouldn't argue about it. Plus the physical fitness is different, they can work harder than the Asians because they've got more height or body weight... It's a two-way story. If I was a boss then I'll help them because they are hard workers. If I was employed by a company then I'd say, fucking hell they're not giving me a chance to get my [pay] rise because the boss can get two of them for [the price of] one of me.

Builders sell their labour in the marketplace in a tangible and direct fashion. Wage rates are negotiated at the start of each new job and new jobs are started frequently (see chapter 1). Furthermore, because builders are non-unionised and possess very few working rights, they can be instantly exchanged for cheaper labour at bosses'

discretion. As shown above, this occurs infrequently because of the finite functioning of information networks, but, the shadow of cheaper and harder working labour represents an ever-present threat. Naz alluded to the 'Europeans' 'picking it up as they went along' i.e. they were not formally trained. This was a common jibe concerning new migrant groups, yet the majority of the builders had learnt their trades informally, including the carpenters (see chapter 5). The Kutchis were thus as racist in this respect as the other (white) groups. However, as Blum (2002) argues, racism is more morally reprehensible and socially damaging when projected by the historically dominant upon the historically subordinate. The complexities of racism rain down here. For example, it would be debatable as to whether the Kutchis were more or less historically inferiorized than the Eastern Europeans. In the Kutchis' present position in London's building industry they were certainly more dominant than the Eastern Europeans, although subject to everyday racism themselves. I asked Jamin if he had experienced racism in the building trade:

Oh yes, of course I have yeah, but nothing major, just day to day thing, nothing too, I can have a laugh about it so it's never, it's never bothered me. And the thing that comes into it again is on a building site you're only 6 months here and then you move on. So you know, it's not nothing that really goes on and on and on and on. But I've never had any serious problems, not at all. Because as I say I was brought up here and I generally get on with most people, so no I can't really say that I have any problems. I mean you get it here and there but how seriously you take it is up to you, you know, you can brush it off or you can go into a raging fit which is pointless really. I just tend to ignore it. Some people take it seriously, some people don't, I don't take it seriously. Works both ways doesn't it, I give back as good as I get really. At the end of the day they're just strangers really, they're not really part of my life so why should I take it seriously, what's the point? If I take it bloody seriously I'd be fighting every day, you know what I mean? And generally in London it's not too bad, it's all right... any dangers out there are as dangerous for you as it is for me.

I asked all the carpenters who agreed to be interviewed if they had experienced racism in the building industry, and all of them told me they had experienced very little. Bapu was more representative of their accounts than Jamin:

No, no, no. I haven't [experienced racism]. I tell you the truth, never even any little argument in 30 years. If somebody's trouble I straight away give up, 'sorry my friend, my fault', I give up, I don't want any trouble. I never had any problem about racials, never. Never with me because I'm straightforward man, never trouble.

The carpenters' accounts were peculiar considering that racism in the form of words and piss-takes was an everyday occurrence (see chapter 8), and Bapu's statement, 'If somebody's trouble I straight away give up', was not quite the case as I observed him challenge a racist piss-take (see also chapter 8). Piss-taking between the builders

centred most commonly around symbolic jibes to one another's trade status, football team, masculinity and/or racial category. However, piss-takes were generally *presented* as harmless fun; as a form of game-play. Racism expressed in this form enabled the carpenters to laugh along and account for it simply as a joke. As Jamin said, 'If I take it bloody seriously I'd be fighting every day', indicating that he had little choice but to account for it as a joke.

Bill's racial-flavoured piss-takes were particularly venomous but he did not consider himself racist:

I'm not racist, you hear me take the piss out of Jamin and you hear me fucking run him down sort of like, but I'm not a racist as such. I won't knock em. I won't say anything about them because they work hard. Where else can you get a packet of fags in the middle of the night? I don't knock em, they're working people, it don't matter what race you are or whatever... Just because you're black you're second class citizens, that is totally wrong, totally wrong.

Bill's account that 'I'm not racist as such' appeared to reflect reality to an extent. In chapter 6 I described how Bill 'stuck up' and 'stuck his neck out' for Jimmy J, the electrician, who was threatened with the sack for being found asleep at work. Jimmy was first generation Caribbean and black, and, in this sense, Bill's racist piss-takes may have been simply piss-takes, the product of ignorance rather than antipathy. However, piss-takes are by their very nature inferiorizing, and I personally found Bill's piss-takes very offensive but, the carpenters for instance, did not express offence (at least publicly) about Bill's actions. However, as Blum notes: 'Acts that make use of racist sentiments, jokes, symbols or images, even if the person performing the act is not motivated by antipathy or an inferiorizing attitude, may be labelled racist' (2004: 14). Bill's piss-takes took the form of wild generalisations concerning the carpenters' 'Asianness', and were embedded in the harsh piss-take culture of the builders, and further within a racialised historical discourse. Whilst the piss-take was commonly framed as a joke, expressing it promulgated status boundaries, and institutionalised racist discourse. This discourse manufactured a kind of 'pluralistic ignorance' (Matza, 1964) whereby it became normal and natural to express such attitudes. Bill and others therefore, propagated racist discourse through their ignorance, but essentially Bill was both racist and not racist; racist in one context and not in another.

As the examples highlighted above, illustrated that everyday racism at Keyworker House was not usually expressed as hate (excepting one of the site

managers – see chapter 6), and the fact that Jamin was the general foreman bore testament to this (Bobby, the trainee quantity surveyor was also Asian). Only one of the carpenters, Mehl, said he faced real problems with a racist boss, and this had occurred early on in his career, and, like Jamin, Mehl's solution was to leave the job. In this sense, racism in the building industry may not be quite so severe as in more permanent occupations where the employees become stuck into a single job, are reliant on references to get other jobs, or desire promotion through a hierarchy. In the building trade they could simply exit the problematic situation and try to find work somewhere else, and perhaps, amongst trade groups of their own race.

Piss-takes directed towards the carpenters usually took the flavour of their having 'just got off the boat', their 'Asianness', or concerned their (illusory) lack of skill and poor quality tools. For the Irish labourers, comments generally related to their mental skills; a racism embedded in English culture, frequently in the form of jokes, which even today are considered publicly legitimate. Unfortunately I never asked the Irish how they felt about this because all my interviews with them were rather stunted and awkward (perhaps partly as a result of their experiences of racism in England). However, the Irish may be seen as having historically been more frequently the recipients of racism than the Kutchis. For example, Indians were not enslaved by the British quite like the Irish were (Blum, 2002), and, in addition, when in East Africa, the Kutchis were a middle class who dominated and exploited the native population (Ghai and Ghai, 1970). Perhaps in relation to this, the Kutchis did not feel themselves to be a subordinated group. As Naz mentioned:

I've been in this county since 1969, all right I got a couple of smacks from skinheads, apart from that I had more arguments and fights, literally fist-fights, with Asians or Gujaratis, than anyone. I've never had a fight with Blacks, with Pakistanis, or Whites, apart from my home village people, you know [where I fought with Pakistanis].

Shared Experience

Although acquaintances find it peculiar, I barely heard the Irish expressing racism. Many years spent working at the bottom end of the building status structure and having to work and share canteen spaces with all kinds of other races appeared to have erected boundaries to what the Irish expressed. At Keyworker House their tea-room was shared with the plasterers, who were mostly black and from the Seychelles, and the plaster subcontractor was a well-respected man who shared a similar Christian religion with the Irish. The labourers would talk about what a pious and generous man

he was. The labourers also migrated to London at much the same time as Caribbean groups and they have traditionally lived along side one another, and were *both* inferiorized by the host population. The title of John Lyden's autobiography, *Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs* clearly illustrates this.

It may have been the historical and multi-cultural composition of London and its building workers that muffled hate-racism at Keyworker House. Certainly I have heard much worse on other London building sites. Also, the carpenters and the labourers worked on Topbuild jobs for many years, as had many of the other tradesmen. The trade groups were all accustomed to working on the same building sites and thus familiar with one another. It may be assumed, then, that normality kept racial tension to a minimum. Furthermore, the trade groups were so tightly stratified by race that they were not actually encroaching on one another's jobs. Yet as shown above, racism did occur, but some men were more racist than others, and some were racist in one context and not in another.

Fear and Racism

Racism did not grow solely from the operation of the subcontract system. Attitudes were brought to the workplace pre-existing in parochial cultures and present reality. Some of the economically deprived white English builders competed with recent migrants over access to social housing, women, and for power on the street. Take Frank, a painter, for instance:

I grew up in York Way in the Cally before it got all done up, before all the refugees moved in. At least we had a load of pals round there, now it's all gone... Five years now I've been on the housing list. They [social security office] keep telling me they ain't got no information, blah, blah, blah. I just want to settle down, get a flat. If I was a fuckin' refugee I'd get a flat straight away, but if you start mentioning refugees, you're racist, you know what I mean... Around the Cally the majority [of residents] are white, you get a lot of refugees round there selling fags and that, but when I go down to the market round Holloway you look around and you think its completely different. Up there (whispers) are untold blacks you know what I mean? You could say it was Nigeria or Africa because that's what it looks like at the end of the day. We're like the refugees up there... The black birds [women] are nice man but its just the geezers, they go round thinking they got a chip on their shoulder, going round cussing people. And like if you got a crowd you gotta walk around them, if you bump into them they're gonna cause an argument and all that. They got their little community and we're meant to have ours you know, but up there it's just like no go area for some people. I don't know, it's just fucking stupid, everyone's got to live together... The only thing I ain't going to do though is let my daughters go with blacks. And that's not being racist because I'm not. At the end of the day there's enough white blokes out there... I tell you the best black bloke you can get right is a dead one (laughs) even though I've got black friends, you know what I mean?

DT: Yeah, well they're all right though aren't they?

Well yeah, but when they're like in a group, right, let's say I went out with them yeah, and they met up with all their mates and they're all black. What are they going to be like to you at the end of the day, like all their pals saying, 'what's the white boy here for blah, blah, blah'. Even though these two, Billy and like Si [Frank's black friends], they will do anything for me, always look out for my family and my brothers and everything else. But at the end of the day they can turn.

Frank alluded to his perceived disadvantage of obtaining social housing in competition with 'refugees'. However, his words also highlighted a reflexive racism; that for expressing his opinion he would be branded a racist (c.f. Jencks, 1992). Furthermore, Frank's black friends would 'do anything' for him, but like an animal they could 'turn', especially when part of a 'pack' on the streets. As Mason (1970) argues, dehumanising 'other' races permits the possibilities of ill treatment, so whilst Frank's racism was context-bound in terms of his having black friends, he also expressed to me that they were almost inhuman. His words bore frightening similarities to the National Front member, who in 1975 shot dead a West Indian man, afterwards telling the police, 'Niggers mean nothing to me. It was like killing a dog' (quoted in Bowling, 1999).

Frank's fear of, and competition with, ethnic groups, were transformed into racist attitudinal accounts that he brought into the workplace. The nature of workplace divides and competition for jobs nourished the persistence of racist attitudes in general, and, historical discourse permitted them in the first place. The various ethnic groups were competing over finite resources, most commonly jobs, housing and women, and within the competition, ingrained groups formed teams whose membership was signified by their ethnicity. The teams attempted to devalue their opponents in a dangerous symbolic game in which inferiorizing linguistic jibes were directed at the opposing teams, and, as Mason (1970) and Bowling (1999) argue, negative symbolism forms a backdrop to violent racism, ill-treatment and genocide.

Race and Networks

Part of the reason for recent migrant groups working harder and for less money than more ingrained groups was not primarily because of racism but their network position i.e. they did not have the necessary contacts to gain strong footholds into employment. In this sense, racial discrimination was predominantly structural, and not symbolic.

Recent migrant groups earned less, worked harder and had even less stable jobs than builders in general, but, paradoxically, the groups were creating part of this structure for themselves by willingly submitting to it, albeit being forced to do so by a dearth of options and structural disadvantage. They worked for less money in worse conditions than more ingrained groups because that money and those conditions were subjectively positive to them, especially, as Naz pointed out, where large family units pull/pool together to make a living. Carving a niche in London's economy took precedence over challenging how that economy functioned, but, rather than blaming the economy for low or falling wage rates, the various ethnic groups blamed one another.

Racism was also fuelled by network processes that created the very concrete ethnic enclaves in London in general and on the building site in particular (see chapter 4). Divides make distance, and distance makes typifications that make divides. Racial divides maintain themselves through preventing the flow of accurate information across the divides, and insubstantial information fuels generalised typifications. As Blum (2002) argues, viewing a specific group as 'Other', leads to an accentuation of that group's difference from other groups and an accentuation of homogeneity within that group. Divides also restricted gift exchange between groups, preventing the formation of multi-racial networks and thus restricting the development of trust across racial divides. In this sense, symbolic racism and economic discrimination were intertwined (see chapter 10)

Gift Economies

The more ingrained ethnic groups were able to charge higher rates for their work despite their members being unwilling to work as hard as the less well-established ethnic groups. The outcome was that Topbuild participated in a construction market that was conceptually distinct from the dominant economism and Thatcherite conceptions of free markets. The guiding invisible hand of the economy was only 'invisible' because of its informal nature, and the construction industry marketplace was itself quite the opposite of ideal-types of modern capitalism. It was in fact ascriptive and pre-industrial.

New subcontractors must undercut their rivals and accumulate enough profit to maintain relationships with incumbents of contractor management. Like social networks in general, the linkages were maintained by supplying and withholding

information, giving favours, making debts and creating trust. As Granovetter (1974 and 1985) argued, social networks operate in all sections of the job market and function between separate companies. In this sense, there is no reason to think that network relationships would not exist between the management, bosses and subcontractors of separate building teams.

Doing Business

Anti-trust cases – related to cartel forming, monopolies, price fixing, bid-rigging, and other anti-competitive practices – have a measure of irony in that business normally espouses free and open competition yet can be seen to manipulate markets under certain conditions... In general there is an assumption that corporations tend to enhance predictability in turbulent and insecure environments by engaging in networks to interfere in the working of a freely competitive environment. (Punch, 1996: 95)

It would certainly seem that such factors as personnel acquaintance, goodwill or favours owed, often come into play in the setting up of the construction team. (Higgin and Jessop, 1965: 30)

Punch (1996) convincingly argues that business organisation is criminogenic, echoing the earlier sentiments of Sutherland (1949) who viewed North American capitalism as founded upon illicit practices. Punch describes how the competitive market provides numerous opportunities, motivations and rationalisations to facilitate illicit business practices. He demonstrates how managers manage impressions of themselves and their businesses as formal, respectable and legal, yet ‘back stage’ they tend to do business informally and often illegally, justifying their activities through the language of business (see also Dalton, 1959; Granovetter, 1992). This trait was also the case at Topbuild.

Before beginning my fieldwork I read Topbuild’s company reports and public relations material. Topbuild presented itself as a modern construction company that undertook highly complex and intricate works to a high standard for the private and public sector. They were members of the ‘Considerate Contractors Scheme’ and stated that they used only the highest quality materials and professional subcontractors and tradesmen. After reading this I was quite concerned that Topbuild would be an unusual example of a building contractor because I had never previously worked for or even heard of such a professional and considerate contractor. However, a short duration of fieldwork revealed clearly that Topbuild was representative of the building contractors I had experienced in the past, and their company information was

a piece of impression-management. What was surprising is that they had allowed me to do the research at all.

It is rare to work for a building company where rumours of ‘back-handers’ and ‘brown paper bags’ do not commonly circulate. Clinard and Yeager (1980) reinforce this view, finding the building industry to be one of three main business crime ‘recidivists’. This, I would argue, is the result of the ‘criminogenic’ properties of fierce competition and market uncertainty characteristic of the building industry.

You Scratch My Back, I’ll Scratch Yours

Topbuild were reluctantly forced to subcontract Spark’s M and E because Spark’s and Assured Consultants shared a pre-existing network relation which obscured the day-to-day running of the job (see chapter 3). However, the contractual arrangement, under the auspices of a partnering agreement, stipulated that the consultant, in association with the contractor, could select which subcontractors to employ. Because Assured Consultants occupied the powerful end of the business relationship, they had *veto* in choosing subcontractors, and the bosses of Spark’s and Assured were ‘friends’ i.e. they shared a network relation. Bill highlighted how this relationship operated:

You scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours. I mean he [Mr Sparks] does all right. I did him a favour this morning. I’ve been to the house of the boss of Topbuild putting sockets in. Tomorrow I’ve got to go to another place to put cookers and fucking hobs in. This weekend where am I? Working at his [Mr Assured’s] house, putting in a new bathroom and new showers and whatever. It’s all for nothing, oh I get paid but my governor don’t get paid for it. But my governor isn’t doing it for nothing though. He knows he’s got something coming on the end of it... My boss is Assured’s boss’s best mate. They’re all the same guys, all the ones that over the years they all go for their monthly meals and their big meeting up in their lodge or whatever it is. That’s how Topbuild gets on so well with Assured Consultants and Opportune Housing, because they’re all mates at the top of the ladder. Everyone’s getting their 10 pence worth out of it, except us. I can’t ask anyone for anything. Well I can, but when you do, you think fuck me you’re tied to them or whatever. But that’s just life in the building [industry].

The skills of a subcontractor’s employee are a useful and valuable form of gift. It might be assumed that anyone involved in higher management in the building industry would own a well-maintained house. As mentioned above, gifts serve as a network adhesive, elastically binding the members into a reciprocal relationship. And, I witnessed many gifts being exchanged between the building parties during my fieldwork. For example, four site managers, two surveyors and myself, drank champagne and cocktails in expensive Central London bars, had our entry paid to a night-club and were given free food in a restaurant afterwards, paid for entirely by

Turner's Carpentry. During the time leading up to Christmas, the site office literally overflowed with alcoholic gifts that were given by subcontractors to site management and surveyors. At this time I was observing the site office and I was also presented with gifts. Luke Screed offered me an expensive bottle of malt whisky saying, 'I may need you to do something for me one day'. Even small-time subcontractors practised this tradition. Mickey T only subcontracted himself and three employees to Topbuild, but he told me how he had acquired a drinks list from 11 site managers. He was required to give each quantity surveyor and site manager a bottle of what they stipulated on the list and an additional bottle of wine. Failure to do so may have fractured Mickey's relations with the management: debts must be paid and the network maintained.

The existence of formal drinks lists illuminated how gift exchange was virtually institutionalised in the subcontract system. Note that these were gifts that I actually observed being exchanged. There may have been numerous others that I could not have seen because they were shielded from me. Whilst I never witnessed any money passing between the managers and subcontractors, I was told by numerous tradesmen and labourers that they had seen 'brown paper bags' change hands. The site management also talked about 'other' site managers who took bribes and booked in 'dead men', and there was frequent talk about one of the contract directors 'doing deals' with various subcontractors and clients. The term, 'booking in dead men' is a building colloquialism describing collusion between site management and subcontractors who employ labour that does not actually exist (see also Dalton, 1959). Such stories at the Keyworker House build might have been based on rumour but, because so many people talked about 'back-handers' and 'brown paper bags', it leads one to suppose the assumed normality of such practices³, and the existence colloquialisms highlighted their historical frequency⁴.

Pre-industrial Forms

Mauss (1954) argued that in primitive societies, gifts were exchanged to create relationships that functioned to prevent violence from neighbouring clans and

³ See Shibutani's (1966) analysis of rumour. He describes how pre-existing expectations guide sense-making when other sources of news are either not forthcoming or are not consistent with expectations.

⁴ In the 17th century, the clerk of works on the building of Saint Paul's cathedral in the City of London was reported to have possessed huge wealth beyond his means. This was discovered only when he died and it was later found that he was 'booking in dead men' and excess materials.

individuals. In the client-contractor-subcontractor complex, gifts were exchanged to shield against the violence of the market, that is, to create lucrative business relations and prevent their severance. In the competitive world of contracting, subcontracting and consultancy, members attempted to engineer the network by supplying gifts and creating reciprocity. Reciprocity may be contrived to some extent in all forms of social network, and as was shown above, these mechanisms lead to the creation of particular social, ethnic and geographical enclaves. In client-contractor-subcontractor relations, social networks functioned to create 'business enclaves' which confirmed contractual relationships and bound business alliances. The alliances restricted the flow of information within the network, thereby providing a barrier to competition. They also contributed towards the formation of ethnic trade enclaves by restricting entry into the construction market of non-embedded recent migrant groups.

The operation of social networks highlighted why many of the contractor-subcontractor relationships at Topbuild had been in existence for such long periods of time, despite constant competition from new subcontract groups. The mechanisms also provided a clue as to why it was that Topbuild had been undertaking work for the same housing associations and state departments for many years, and, may further illustrate why Topbuild had recently been bought-out by a larger building contractor, despite running at a loss and having not lost many of its higher management staff or company name. Topbuild and its managers were wedged into particular relationships that would be lucrative to the new parent-company. These relations were embedded in loyalty, nepotism, hospitality and trust, and therefore opened the way for corrupting and illegitimate practices (c.f. Punch's analysis of the BCCI, and chapter 10).

The client-contractor-subcontractor organisational system can be conceptualised as pre-industrial, almost feudal in its form. Nepotism and ascription were facilitated and accompanied by withholding information within finite networks and doing business informally. In the following chapter I describe how the builders themselves made a living. They not only earned an income by working for Topbuild, but they were involved in an informal economy in which they supplemented their incomes. Just as the client-contractor-subcontractor complex was characterised by informal social action set against the backdrop of a competitive and unstable market, the builders also did business informally so as to cushion against the possible insecurities of the market.

Chapter 10

Making a Living

The builders made a living by selling their labour in the formal marketplace but this was largely supplemented by selling and trading labour, goods and favours in an informal marketplace. I use the term informal rather than ‘hidden’, ‘underground’, or ‘black’, because this economy was neither hidden nor underground, but was overt, above the surface and took place in the light of day.

Formal economic action is any utilitarian activity that is overtly monitored, registered, and accounted for by governance systems. Informal economic activity is any utilitarian action, purposeful or not, that goes unchecked by formal accounting systems. The term ‘utilitarian’ is meant here in a broad sense in that the activity will be of direct or indirect social, political or economic benefit to the actors involved. It is the relationships between the formal economy, the informal economy, and urban modernity and capitalism, that will be the focus of this chapter.

Formal Economy

Going home to her [my partner] after work with a couple of screaming kids. I deal with it the best I can, but it’s just knowing that I got to get up the next morning and do it all over again. By the time I get my wages, go home, pay the rent, give her some money and everything else, I’m back to square one again, fuckin’ absolutely brassic [penniless]... All this fuckin’ labouring, painting and decorating, they are just shit wages. (Stew)

Writing about builders’ income *en masse* is problematic because as a class of workers their income varies substantially: some are affluent, yet equally some live on the breadline. A building consultant earns a higher wage than a labourer, and one labourer may earn a higher wage than another. Builders’ wages also fluctuate temporally, by employer, the state of the housing market and wider economic fluctuations. Wages depend upon the relationships between worker and subcontractor, the builder’s work experience, the type of job he is working on, whether this is price-work or day-work, the racial origins of the builder, and of course by his trade. Even wealthy contractors and subcontractors experience uncertain economic lives. As Ernie Coat described in chapter 4, and as can be evidenced from the numbers of building companies that go bankrupt every year (see chapter 1), the building trade is economically unstable even

for large, well organised and experienced contractors and subcontractors, and, this is why they form business enclaves.

The majority of the builders at Keyworker House were not wealthy entrepreneurs, and all the trade teams were paid by the day rather than undertaking price-work where 'big money' could be earned. Price-work involves working at a fast rate for long hours and, many of the men, particularly the older and less skilled, were not able or willing to work at these speeds. Further, price-work is commonly more unstable than day works. 'Price-work psychos' as Steve termed them, tend to move from job-to-job in search of the 'big money'. As I described in chapters 6 and 7, the work rate at Keyworker House was quite slow because the builders 'took their time' for an easier but smaller and more regular wage than could be earned undertaking price-work.

Wage Rates

Topbuild directly employed managers and surveyors who received job perks that many employees in intense capitalist societies take for granted: sick pay, holiday entitlements, works pensions, regular wage raises and career prospects. In 2003 Surveyors and site managers could earn incomes of anything between £25,000 to £60,000 per year. For the builders 'on the tools' however, all of whom were technically self-employed, wage payments were far less and they received none of the formal fringe benefits of the directly employed. However, individuals such as Bill, a highly skilled and trusted mechanical and electrical foreman, earned a relatively high wage and was awarded informal benefits by his subcontractor in the form of holiday money, telephone calls, a van, and various other 'favours'. I did not know Bill's exact wage, I never asked him. Bristles provided an illustration of why:

There's only one dying question in a man's heart on the buildings and this is the question that will go on now until building work finishes forever. It's how much you earning? That is the only question they need to ask, but obviously don't ask... Why? 'Cos they all earn different money that's why. No one talks about their wages on the buildings, or if they do, they're a liar. Either they want to keep it quiet 'cos they're earning more than the man next to them, or they don't want to look bloody stupid 'cos they're earning less.

Bill told me that qualified electricians and plumbers expected to be paid approximately £470 per 5 day week, net (i.e. after tax has been deducted¹). This was

¹ None of the wage rates were quite net because the builders themselves were supposed to pay 2 percent National Insurance contributions after tax has been deducted.

slightly more than the £420 net, laid out by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (2002) in an industry-wide guide to builders wages. The disparity was due to the slightly higher wage rates for builders in London. Mechanical and electrical workers were the top earners, partly because of a shortage of these skills in 2003. Next in line were the carpenters who received a smaller wage than carpenters in general because they were a recent migrant group (see chapter 9), and they earned approximately £350 per 5-day week (net). Next were the painters and labourers. All the labourers received equal wages to one another (as far as I was aware), which were £250 per 5-day week (net). The labour foremen received an extra £5 a day, and the maintenance men, employed by the labour subcontractor, were the lowest paid at £230 per week (net). The painters' wages varied substantially between them depending on their skill and relationship to Ernie Coat. At the bottom of the skill pile was Frank, who received just under £230 a week (net), slightly less than a labourer, and rates rose substantially according to increases in the particular painter's talents. For instance, Gerry, who was very good at his job, received £320 a week (net).

Managers, Carpenters and mechanical and electrical workers received a reasonable wage, but most of the painters and all of the labourers earned a small wage. £250 a week is £12,500 (net) per annum *if* the builder worked for 50 weeks of the year, which was impossible taking into account illness and enforced public holidays. Their wage was less than that of most nurses or teachers for instance², who also received all the fringe benefits associated with being a State employee and, their wages rose with seniority and age, none of which was open to the builders (see chapter 6). Fringe benefits are worth a substantial amount of one's income. Illustrative of this were the builders' aversion towards Christmas and bank holidays because building sites usually close during public holidays and builders do not get paid. Paul, one of the site managers, talked about the benefits of recently becoming a direct employee after almost 10 years working on the tools:

[On the tools] it's an unstable life yeah, very insecure, you never really know what's going on. Say you earn £500 a week and you go on holiday for two weeks, that's just cost you £1,000 worth of income. So it's a very expensive business to take holidays but you've got to have holidays haven't you. Well, I'm 38 now and last Christmas was the first time ever I've been paid to have a Christmas dinner basically. I've always dreaded bank holidays but I quite like them now, your whole perspective changes... Actually if you multiplied my daily rate [earned on the tools] by 5 times 52, I'm actually £1,000 a

² Nurses wage rates in 2004 went from a bottom-end entry wage of £17,060, ascending to £34,920 (gross) for the most senior. The carpenters earned £23,750 (gross) *if* they worked for 50 weeks of the year and regardless of seniority.

year worse off [being a site manager], but I get five weeks paid holiday, all the bank holidays, they pay 5% of my salary into a pension, and I add to it as well. So I'm really much better off... It's also the back-up, you know, working for a big firm, it is just secure you know. And with the security you want more things yourself, like I've never been interested in a nice car but now all of a sudden when you've got a stable income, you think, yeah I'll get one. And also when you've actually dug a hole for money it's less easy to part with it...

Private Property

Many of the older labourers and painters had bought their houses from local authorities following the 1980 Housing Act. Others rented local authority or private houses, or had bought them from the local authority. All the carpenters owned their own private houses, and some of them owned more than one (see below). However, for younger builders, trying to buy a property in London at the time of the fieldwork was quite problematic because of soaring prices in London. In 2003 the average price of a London property was £262,000³ which was beyond the means of the younger builders. Indeed some of the builders thought that their relative economic position was getting worse because wages 'in the building' had not risen equal to the rising cost of living since the 1970s, and, as I revealed in the last chapter, recent migrant groups were commonly blamed for these problems. Naz highlighted the problematic extent of the relative fall in wages:

I was at Stanstead Airport for two years when they done the new terminal out, I think it was 89, 90. I was getting £75 a day then, now I'm getting £95, and the cost of living has gone about 100% higher. But I used to travel far remember, 50 mile going, 50 mile coming... It doesn't pay on a building site anymore. Say for instance if I was to marry now and have a child, buy a house, my wages wouldn't even make up the mortgage. So it's not balanced out. Before a builder was reasonable earner but now it's nowhere near... Anybody who has got responsibility; house, children, wife, it's getting harder for them. Very, very hard for them.

Informal Economy

The informal economy encompasses a multitude of activities ranging from the circulation of goods originating from illicit activity, such as burgling houses or robbing jewellers, to having one's parents baby-sit for their children or receiving 'hand-me-downs' from one's siblings (c.f. Pahl, 1984). In a broader sense, the informal economy is simple gift exchange, for example, getting a lift in someone's car, or preparing a meal for a visitor. All these actions are economic in that they spend, accrue, and/or save money, and informal in that they are not officially

³ Guardianunlimited, 10/11/2003.

accounted for, yet they constitute part of the total economy and probably a very large part. By its very nature, the extent of the informal economy is especially problematic to estimate. Mars (1982: 1) cites evidence from self-report surveys between the 1940s and 1970s that indicate between 75 and 92 percent of people 'criminally' add to their incomes. 'Fiddling', he concludes, is universal; we all do it. Whilst this may be the case, some groups fiddle more than others, and different groups have different motivations and opportunities to fiddle. Even within groups, some individuals fiddle more than others.

Writers such as Portes *et al* (1989) distinguish between formal, informal and illicit economies, viewing the informal economy as characterised by subcontracting. This definition however, would drag the majority of the British building industry into the informal category. Portes *et al* also argue that economic action exists on a continuum of legitimacy running from formal activity through informal activity, to illicit activity. However, as I have illustrated in almost all the preceding chapters, formal and informal activities exist side by side and merge with and within one another, and, whether legal or not, all these types go unregistered and thus are informal. Prescribed formal rules are guides to social action, they are not concretely or rigidly binding. The performance of 'economic' action therefore, has a tendency to reinterpret prescribed rules resulting in the intertwine of formal and informal economic action (see chapter 9). As Harding and Jenkins argue, 'even the most formal contexts are comprehensively penetrated by and implicated in informal social relationships' (1989: 175). Furthermore, informal activity will only become consequentially illicit if it is followed by a public reaction (Becker, 1963), or, deemed and registered illicit by formal governance systems. Much of the informal economy is so taken-for-granted that there is no public reaction, and thus no personal or wider social evaluation of the legitimacy of the act (Ditton, 1977a; Foster, 1990). Informal economic actions are therefore only illicit because formal law deems them so. The distinction between formal and informal economy is thus false, a construct of modernity's nomenclature, knowledge differentiation, and the iatrogenic nature of the disciplines (see below).

Historical Construction

Ditton (1977b) traces the history of ‘perks, pilferage and the fiddle’ back to medieval England. He describes how game rights, grazing, gleanings and firewood rights became criminalised during the Acts of Enclosure. He quotes Gonner:

Thus with enclosure, the number of geese owned by the poor are said to have decreased: cows were given up; the poor lost food, being deprived of the privilege of turf cutting; the commonage in the stables which enabled them to keep pigs and geese is theirs no more: and with these went other small advantages such as gleanings, which came to be more carefully restricted. (Gonner, 1912: 364. From Ditton, 1977b: 43)

Ditton argues that the creation of the working-class entailed criminalisation of reciprocal feudal rights where fiddles became the ambiguous space between perks and wages. Owners and bosses seized power over the ambiguities, providing them with the discretion to criminalise workers for engaging in informal activities. As Thompson argues:

In the seventeenth century labour had been only partly free, but the labourer still asserted large claims (sometimes as perquisites) to his own labour’s product. As in the eighteenth century, labour became more and more free, so labour’s product came to be seen as something totally distinct, the property of landowner or employer, and to be defended by the threat of the gallows. ([1975] 1990: 207)

Tellingly, the term ‘perk’ originates from the word ‘perquisite’, denoting ‘a thing which has served its primary use and to which a subordinate or employee has a customary right’ (*OED*, 2001); the term’s meaning originating from the Latin to ‘search diligently for’. The specific nature of perk has changed through history but its origin and meaning remain wedged in the past.

Henry (1978) challenges Ditton’s historical account and cites evidence from Hall (1952) illustrating that ‘larceny by servant’ and pilfering of timber on large ‘public’ constructions was recognised as a problem in England as early as the 13th and 14th centuries. However, modernity was a creeping process, and servants and builders were a wage labouring ‘working-class’, before the making of the working-class in which the places and products of their labour were not their own property (see chapter 1). This ostensibly indicates why traditional rights became perceived as problems in relation to these groups in early modernity.

Several centuries later, Rude’s (1985) analysis of crime and conviction rates in early 19th century England show that pilfering and fiddling were widespread. Most crimes of the period, he argues, were ‘survival crimes’, which tended to rise in association with economic downturn. In Sussex for instance, 89.2 per cent of people

convicted of an indictable offence were labourers (presumably, most of whom were agricultural proletarians, or unemployed liars) who mostly committed acts of 'survival-theft' in which they stole food, firewood and animals, exactly those offences that were basic rights two-hundred years previously. Further, Foucault ([1975] 1991) argues that changes in methods of governance characteristic of the modern project were largely driven by a requirement to iron-out 'general illegalities'. General illegalities can be viewed under the category of informal economy, that is fiddling, gleaning, poaching, pilfering and non-payment of taxes i.e. those convictions which Rude documents as the majority of registered offences in the early 19th century. Furthermore, Thompson's analysis of the 1723 Black Act, and its ensuing harsh sentences of death, imprisonment, transportation and, impossibly high fines, are a further indication of the evolving legal technologies of the period, where: 'Non-monetary use rights were being reinforced into capitalist property rights, by the mediation of the courts of law' ([1975] 1990: 244).

The creep of modern legal systems created formality. The written word, information technology, bureaucratic rationality and the modern state, manufactured a system of governance that constructed the formal (Harding and Jenkins, 1989). If informal activity is defined by its opposite, formality, it was the construction of the formal that created the informal; the two are inseparably linked. In the 18th century, law and custom intersected and rights were parochial and negotiated. Customary right was 'lived through' and held in place by generational transmission and local reciprocities (Thompson, 1993). In this sense, most 18th century economic activity was informal, but, with the transplantation of modern bureaucratic law, traditional rights were transformed into crimes. The processes were not a singular case of social construction but also marked a shift in relations between the powerful and their subjects. Whilst feudal lords occupied the powerful end of relationships with their subjects, these were balanced by local ties, dependencies and reciprocities. However, modernity's brother, capitalism, obviated much of the necessity for reciprocity between the classes through widespread use of money, and the violence of the market and executioner. In this sense, pre-modern rights were an outcome of an indulgency system because the populace could not be tightly monitored and governed because systems of governance were inefficient and inchoate⁴. Thus the modern project and its

⁴ Thompson (1975) describes what happened when indulgency was replaced with disorganised unilateral control by the new ruling-class. Agents of the Whigs stamped on local customs and rituals, to which the foresters fought

new ruling-class constructed general illegalities in order to govern in a depersonalised and more efficient manner. As Foucault argued, noting the modern shift:

Each crime will have its law; each criminal his punishment. It will be a visible punishment, a punishment that tells all, that explains, justifies itself... The great terrifying ritual of the public execution gives way, day after day, street after street, to this serious theatre, with its multifarious and persuasive scenes. ([1975] 1991: 113)

Foucault suggested that ‘persuasive scenes’ were inculcated in people’s minds, making the law seem normal and natural, wiping out general illegalities. However, the evidence that people were convicted for such illegalities, and that almost everyone fiddles to some extent, illustrates that modern legal technologies cannot have infiltrated the minds of populations quite as Foucault argued. General illegalities were never ironed-out, but constructed, concomitant with private property and the demise of *noblesse oblige*. However, the nature of illegalities did alter over the course of modernity, hand in hand with the intensification of capitalism.

Before and during the transitional phases of the ‘making of the working class’ (Thompson, 1963), it was common for family units to pool their resources and generate income from sources other than paid work (see Pahl, 1984). In chapter 1 I described how medieval building guildsmen commonly supplied materials, brewed beer, farmed animals and vegetables and opened their houses to the public. Also, women and children undertook work as labourers, and women commonly made and sold goods door-to-door (Swanson, 1988). The age-old customs of commoners provided rights and perquisites from which they farmed, gleaned, hunted and collected firewood and building materials as economic additions to their day-to-day employments (Thompson, 1993). However, the restriction upon space accompanying urban living prevented families from growing food, gleaning and brewing, and, strict laws precluded them opening houses to the public. Furthermore, mass deforestation and the vast (practical and symbolic) distances to travel out of an urban area like London (see Rock, 1983) to rural areas where goods could be gleaned, squeezed out archaic forms of making a living (but not in rural areas, see Pahl, 1984). However, the continuing necessity of making a living in urban areas facilitated the development of new forms of informal economy. These forms were the ‘fiddle’, the ‘bargain’, informal trading, and wider forms of *prestation*. The continuation of archaic custom, inefficiency of legal technologies, the whip of the capitalist market, and because

back through bellicosity and sabotage. The event bore similar forms and processes to those that occur in workplaces (see chapter 6).

capitalism is composed of people doing things, the Builders' informal economy flourished almost unbounded, even in a period of intense modernity.

Perks and Fiddles

Working on various building sites in the past, I frequently observed fiddles that were accounted for by class-conscious vocabularies of motive. I also argued in chapter 6, that little conflict was extant at Keyworker House but, despite this, a plethora of fiddles occurred and which were not publicly accounted for at all. Fiddles and deviancies were accompanied by jokes, winks and smiles, or were taken-for-granted so much that they were not reflected upon at all; merely an expected and normal part of everyday life. Jokes, smiles, nudges and winks constituted a 'meta-language'; an ambiguous and marginal symbolism employed to accompany informal actions, its comprehension implicit and situated (see chapter 6). Necessarily, informal actions are not formalised, and consequently there was little form to their accompanying language. Meta-language was to some extent a non-modern symbolic system employed to dress non-modern activities, and because it was mostly non-verbal, it prevented reflection on the act (see Ditton, 1977a).

An example of the taken-for-granted, or what might be termed, the institutionalised, nature of work perks amongst the builders, was the existence of the 'totters'. I unfortunately never got to meet the totters, but discovered a clue to their work on my first day as a labourer. Two of the labourers, Pat and Patrick, were removing an old roof covering from one of the buildings. Most of the debris were cracked roof tiles, smashed-out concrete, rusty gutters and copious asphalt. Pat and Patrick sat perched on a scaffold with hammers, chisels and crowbars, and threw the debris down onto the floor below, which I then shovelled into a wheelbarrow and transported to a skip. Pat watched me shovel the waste materials and spotted that some was not waste at all. He bellowed at me not to put any lead into the barrow. I asked no questions and followed his orders.

Later in the fieldwork, Danny, the labour foreman, and I, were removing rubbish from another roof. We filled two 'bogies' (carts with 5 wheels) with the debris and, into one went copper pipes and lead, into the other, various bricks and concrete. Danny and I wheeled the bogie containing the metals down to a room situated in a dark and damp area of the basement at Keyworker House 1. Danny said,

with a wink and a smile, 'top-secret, this room yes, top-secret eh, eh'. The room contained the roof lead that Pat and Patrick warned me not to dump in the skip, and assorted other metal pipes, copper wires and lead weights removed from old sash windows. I did not want to arouse suspicion so I asked few questions. However, during future participation with the labourers, I asked Mickey T and Aidan where the metal went to, how much money they got for it, and who got the money. Mickey T told me the totters drove around many building sites in London and paid cash in exchange for scrap metal (and I presume anything else of value). He said they had not visited Keyworker House so regularly since most of the work moved inside but they were 'two old cockney blokes' who were probably richer than most builders because all their income was accrued informally (i.e. they paid no tax). Mickey knew them since he started 'working on the buildings' 50 years previous. I asked Aidan during a recorded interview if he had seen the totters:

I haven't seen them yet. I tell you what, they are one clever people they are. Oh, fuck me, I mean they can't even write their names some of them, but see some of them vehicles they drive, fuckin' proper. Good luck to them, you can't knock em, can ya?

The totters were organised and almost institutionalised fiddlers, and Aidan's comments illustrated moral support for their role. The profits earned from the totters were literally a 'perquisite': money was made from products that had served their use and were diligently searched for. Quite where the income received from the totters went, I never found out, certainly it was never shared with me. I once overheard the labourers talking about the whereabouts of the cash for 'the last lot of lead', which they concluded Danny had spent in the pub. It may have been a case of whoever was present when the totters arrived, received a share of the cash. I suspected the site management knew little about the totters or the 'top-secret' room in which the goods were stored (I obviously never asked them not wanting to be a 'grass') because the labourers kept the information within their work-group network. However, the managers were aware of other perks that went on, and actively colluded in some of them.

The communal kitchens in Keyworker House were refurbished and all the old cookers 'thrown out'. Some of them were originally expensive pieces of machinery and remained in good working order. Under orders from Danny, two particularly pristine and large cookers were put into the basement of Keyworker House 1. Possibly due to the difficulty of concealing such large objects, Danny told the site management

that they were ‘probably worth a few quid’, and one lunchtime everyone in the labourers’ tea-room talked about how they might sell them. Nobody wanted the cookers themselves and could not think of anyone else who would. Then Bristles made some telephone calls.

Bristles was always ‘ducking and diving’, in part to support his 11 children, and because the Child Support Agency was attempting to track him down and force him to pay maintenance money to his two ex-wives. Bristles was also an obsessive gambler who accrued many debts. The painters would tell stories about him losing his whole wage packet in a single Friday evening through playing cards in the pub. He would then continue to accumulate debt through borrowing money to carry on gambling through the night. Not surprisingly, Bristles had constant monetary pressures, made more salient by people ‘knocking on his front door’ in search of their cash. He was also a very friendly, funny and confident man, who was a popular picaresque character at Keyworker House. He was a ‘talker’ who knew many people, and he used his communication skills, and, as one who inhabited many social networks, to act as a ‘broker’ (Boissevain, 1974) in the informal economy. In the case of the cookers, Bristles found ‘a man’ who wanted to buy them, and for his networking services he was given ‘a drink’ (c.f. Mars, 1982) in the form of a £30 fee by the management, and, I suspect, also by the man who bought the cookers. Bristles profited financially from his brokerage services and in doing so also displayed his skills as a broker to the parties involved, and simultaneously strengthened his broker position as a man ‘worth knowing’.

I later asked the labourers where the profit from the sale of the cookers had gone. I assumed it would be shared out amongst them, but my question was met with blank looks and Danny commented: ‘very inquisitive, he’s very inquisitive ah, please’. I never asked again. The builders’ reactions to my asking such questions, prevented me from asking similar questions in interview situations. Informal activity was so taken-for-granted and normal at Keyworker House that I am quite certain that if I asked questions about their pilfering and fiddling, the builders’ main reaction would have been incredulity at my stupid question.

Pilferage

When we were labouring together, Mickey T would tell graphic stories about his life ‘back home’. He told me about the methods he and his siblings used to catch salmon

in the rivers of rural Ireland, and how they would sell them to local hotels. He talked about poaching as if it was both normal and highly necessary given his economic environment (see chapter 4). When the Irish migrated to urban Britain there were few poaching opportunities. However, pilfering work materials is an industrial form of poaching, and poaching a modern form of medieval rights.

The builders often talked about their pilfering exploits. Perry, one of the painters, liked to describe a frozen food warehouse that he painted where he and friends had never eaten so well. Pilfering activities accrued small extra incomes, or 'pocket money', earned for little effort. It is telling that builders feature frequently in studies of the informal economy (see Henry, 1978; Mars, 1982; Hobbs, 1988; Foster, 1990). Building sites are particularly ripe for pilferage, and builders possess all Mars' (1982) 'structural fiddle factors', that is, building work is highly facilitative of fiddling. This is because builders work back-stage and unmonitored where goods are stored, and they have freedom of movement around space. At Keyworker House for example, the labourers' tea-room contained one of Topbuild's materials storerooms. Many of the objects housed within it were easily transportable and of some value. It contained much of the new ironmongery, most of the boxes of screws, nails, hinges, brackets and glues that the carpenters used, and all the 'domestic equipment' including cleaning fluids, protective gloves, mops, brooms and brushes, light bulbs and fittings, vacuum and rubbish bags. These were materials that everyone has a use for and, because of this, the door to the storeroom was strictly kept locked. However, the labourers and carpenters frequently required materials from the storeroom, and rather than having continually to ask for the key, it was left in a drawer in the tea-room where everyone knew where it was. The builders would freely wander in and out to get the objects they required.

When I first began participant observation, the storeroom was literally overflowing with materials, but in a matter of weeks it looked almost empty. The managers realised that far more materials 'disappeared' than had been used on the job, and they began to store the more expensive and transportable objects in the site office where they could 'keep an eye on them'. I once asked Steve if pilfering was costed into a building job: he told me that it was not but should be.

Little social reaction accompanied pilferage. For example, Danny jocularly remarked he did not like the colours of emulsion paints that Ernie Coat had delivered, saying: 'The old lady don't like any of these colours. When's Ernie gonna bring some

nice ones in eh?' Everyone thought this funny, and Bristles told a story about one of his painter friends who pilfered so many materials that he would do a 'car-boot sale' every month to sell them. In another example of the taken-for-granted nature of pilferage, the painters were having tea and Frank was talking about the new flat he had just been moved to. He said it 'stunk' because the person who previously lived there kept 6 cats and never cleaned the flat. He wanted to buy some sugar-soap to scrub and disinfect his new dwelling, and with great incredulity, Bony and Jimmy said, 'what do you want to buy some for? Are you fuckin' mad or something, we've got loads of it in the store cupboard'. I promptly fetched him some from the store.

The examples above illustrate both the normality of pilfering, and what Ditton (1977a) terms the 'moral career' of a worker, whereby novices informally learn what is and is not acceptable within the moral parameters of the workgroup's informal activity. Moral boundaries were further reinforced by story-telling about past fiddles, thereby informing the new recruits that it was natural and normal to fiddle and pilfer. At Keyworker House almost any act of materials pilferage was ostensibly 'fair game', another term echoing past rights entwined in present sensibilities.

Not everyone on building sites fiddle and, certainly, some fiddle more than others. I became acutely aware of the powerful nature of dismissal in relation to pilfering when I first began my fieldwork. As mentioned above, the storeroom adjoining the labourers' tea-room was full of useful and easily transportable goods. It was very tempting, and quite usual, for me to take some of the goods. However, I stopped myself, thinking it was not worth jeopardising my research for a few pounds-worth of ironmongery and light-bulbs. The losses outweighed the benefits⁵. However, my reasoning altered as time went on because I realised management tended to indulge the workers in these actions. I also felt I was doing a full week's work for half a week's pay and could therefore justify to myself that it would be 'fair game' and a small risk to engage in pilferage. I had entered an intersubjective moral and calculative career, but I still however, calculated that the risk *could* be large, and consequently took many fewer goods than I usually would have if Keyworker House were a job and not a research project.

Individuals who feel they really need their job and are fearful of losing it may be less inclined to pilfer than long-term workers. Alternatively, those not so tied to

⁵ See Clarke and Cornish (1986) for what is a useful but rather crude theorisation of the rational nature of offending opportunities.

their jobs, such as the young and childless may be more inclined (c.f. Hirschi, 1969). Again, long-term employment whilst being cost effective through creating trust, can also be expensive through that very same trust and long-termism (see chapters 6 and 7).

White-collars

Managers actively engaged in their own job-specific fiddles. When observing the site office I overheard frequent discussions concerning various white-collar fiddles. For example, Kevin, the quantity surveyor, told a story about when he had been a junior surveyor, and his senior surveyor would coach him in how to exaggerate his expense account. Kevin said he had never even thought about this before (and neither, probably, had Bobby, the trainee quantity surveyor, until Kevin told the stories). Similarly, Steve spoke about how one of Topbuild's other contracts' managers earned £30-40 per week extra on his salary by fiddling his expense account. Both Kevin and Steve found this funny and said that whilst they occasionally exaggerated their expenses, they would not push it as far as some of their colleagues. They did however, pilfer. When walking out of Keyworker House with a small radiator under his arm, Steve felt a need to justify his actions:

Every other fucka' gets stuff off here. Rocky Weiler [a fellow contracts' manager], refurbished his whole fuckin' house with nicked gear from the Tottenham job. This is the first thing I've taken off this job, seriously, and I need it so I'm having it. (Fieldnotes)

Steve's account was predicated upon him having worked for Topbuild 'man and boy'. He was promoted into a well-paid and stable job and thus held a strong loyalty to the company. However, he required no such justification when he did a 'favour' for Jamin.

Jamin was removing the chimney breasts from his home, and old bricks and concrete were piling up in rubble bags (something else that was regularly pilfered) in his garage. He asked if Steve could organise a skip, hoping to get a cheaper price if Topbuild booked it. Steve promptly booked the skip but refused payment saying: 'Fuck that, let them pay for it. Don't tell Kevin for fuck's sake'. Steve, despite experiencing a need to justify his own fiddling, felt no dissonance in performing a favour for Jamin, a hard working, trusted and reliable general foreman. Steve was building and buying reciprocity with Jamin, which would save him time, money and effort in the long-term. Dalton (1959) documented similar actions by and between

managers. He described how the formal reward system in bureaucratic environments was too slow and rigid to recompense subordinates who 'go out of their way' for a manager. Managers therefore award instant informal perks to manufacture 'elastic incentive' (Dalton, 1959), and formal bureaucracies become characterised by informal action. Steve used exactly this tactic in the case above, and in the indulgency pattern in general (see chapter 6).

Collusion

I once commented to Mike Fixit that the 40-watt screw-in light bulbs used at Keyworker House were difficult to find in my local shops. He replied, 'you don't want to bloody buy them, we've got thousands of 'em, they're all behind reception at Keyworker House 1'. I said I could hardly go behind reception and take them, and the following day a box of 40-watt screw-in light bulbs was to be found on the windowsill in the labourers' tea-room. With no comment from Mike, he put them there, I presumed for my taking. I guessed I would be indebted to Mike if he ever needed something that I could get for him, and his favour somehow brought us into a tighter relationship. In addition, he performed this action whilst preventing any misdemeanour himself because he did not give me the light-bulbs, he merely moved them.

On occasion organised pilferage travelled across the trade group divisions. I have experienced this on almost every building site I worked on in the past. Painters would get paint and silicones for the electricians, electricians would get electrical sockets and smoke alarms for the painters; carpenters would get glue and nails for the labourers, and labourers would get cleaning materials for the carpenters. Many materials stored on building sites are both large and quite inexpensive; big piles of bricks or huge sheets of plywood are of little monetary value and it would take careful and co-ordinated planning to remove them. In this sense, tradesmen such as bricklayers may be excluded from site-based pilfering networks because they have little to offer in the way of exchange. It tended to be small, easily transportable materials that were pilfered, reflecting the facilitators of such acts being tied to situational opportunity (c.f. Felson, 1994).

Forced Informality

Some informal activities were directly imposed on the builders by the legal and normative structures of modernity. Mickey T for example told me that in the 1950s and 60s, building labouring (probably in association with being Irish) was not considered a stable enough occupation to secure a mortgage by banks or building societies. To buy his first house, Mickey was forced to manufacture false references and proof of income to buy a property and conform to capitalist normality. He also explained how having to bend the truth to make a living was presently affecting his peers. To migrate to England in the 1950s, the Irish had to be a minimum of 16 years old. Many wanted/needed to leave Ireland when they were younger than this, and therefore had lied about their age. These men were now of retirement age but could not receive a State pension until two or three years after they reached 65 years of age.

Many of the Irish labourers also worked 'off the cards' i.e. they did not pay tax on their earnings. I never got to the bottom of how the system worked. Certainly some worked on other people's CIS cards, which functioned to benefit all parties, and was embedded in the reciprocal-favour mechanism. When working on another's CIS card, the person who legally owned the card received a tax rebate every year and the user of the card received a job; both parties benefited⁶. Also, many were claiming a State pension, and to formally declare their worked income would reduce that income. In addition, many officially retired tradesmen tend to go on 'doing privates' (see below) or handy-man jobs, but because the labourers were only semi-skilled there was little option for them to do this, excluding the occasional jobs they found to build new patios or driveways for private clients. Again, informality fuelled informality. If a labourer 'went legit' and entered formal governance structures half-way through his life, suspicion might be aroused as to what he was doing for the first half.

The carpenters were also pushed to informality, but theirs was a slightly different story from that of the Irish because many smuggled cash out of East Africa during the 1960s and 70s. For their first 5 years living in Britain, they were refused social housing and, consequently set up their own informal and networked money and mortgage lenders - in fact, a whole 'internal' housing economy consisting of race-specific buyers, sellers, money lenders, solicitors and estate agents (Desai, 1963;

⁶ A possibly apocryphal story was circulated at Topbuild and in the building industry in general, that many Irish claim under false names to pay tax in Ireland and thus avoid the necessity for a CIS card, thereby saving themselves and their subcontractor from paying any tax at all.

Tambs-Lyche, 1980; Shaw, 1982). Contributing to the formation of ethnic enclaves, East African Asians would 'sponsor' newly-arrived family and friends by providing a home for them until they could afford buy their own. Desai (1963) describes how borrowing was informal and non-contractual in order to prevent attention from the Inland Revenue (and ostensibly enforced by dense trust networks [Granovetter, 1990] and possible violence [see chapter 9]). If a house is purchased informally, the occupants would be forced to also sell it informally to avoid detection. In this case informal actions feed upon themselves, forcing individuals increasingly down an informal path.

Blockages in formal structures provoked informal solutions, particularly by groups whose ethnicity and network position negated their ability to negotiate formal society. In response, ethnic groups utilised their informal network contacts to negotiate social life, and in this sense, the formal system facilitated (and defined) the development of an informal system. Migrant network groups thus operated like Merton's (1949) collective 'innovators', but their informal innovation fed upon itself and network members became increasingly bound up in informal action.

Informality and Opportunity

It was not only the labourers who worked on false, or no, CIS cards. Frank for example, wanted to avoid being registered for work and so paid no tax on his earnings. He explained how he did this fiddle, and his reasons why:

To get by, you just gotta look for different jobs, like off the cards. I can't afford to go on the cards now I got three kids and a wife, know what I mean? So as long as this [job] lasts, just keep it going... I don't sign-on [claim job-seekers' allowance] but I'm claiming for my two kids, the wife claims for my daughter and I claim for the others separate [i.e. they were 'officially' separated]. I don't mention that I live with her because the [Department of] Social [Security] thinks we've split up. I'm meant to be [living] at my mum's with the two kids... What it is, is that it's coming up to five years now that I've been trying to get a flat near the school, but I can't get one... So I claim for single parent benefit. It's not bad [money] but [my wife] she changes it [the cheque] for me and then she spends it. The money I get from Ernie just covers the surface. I have to borrow money off my mum, so I'm paying her back, then [my wife] she tells me 'we need this and we need that', so basically the wages don't even cover you.

DT: What's she spend it on then?

Nine out of ten of it is drugs anyway, but what can you do? I do them as well but £15 on a G [gram of amphetamine], it's as you know yourself, it's expensive. With me, at least when I get mine, it's mine. I might give her a bit now and then but apart from that, you know I can't afford it. She starts moaning if she don't get any [drugs], withdrawal symptoms you know what I mean, its no good man (laughs).

With his own addiction, an addicted wife, three children, and another on the way, little chance of being housed by his local authority, and just over £200 per week of self-employed casual wages, Frank felt forced to fiddle in order to continue the life to which he and his family had become accustomed. Frank was immersed in a world of illegal drugs and he had almost become one of the starving addicts he so despised (see chapter 8).

Bill was the highest earning tradesmen at Keyworker House but he too faced financial problems in the past spawned by fluctuations in the economy, and by having a very large family to support:

I don't know when it was, about 1980s, the big bang. I'd never been unemployed in me life, never. I've gone into work a couple of days after Christmas and the bloke [boss] phoned me up... and he said, 'we got no work, I think we're gonna fold up, it's all just gone tits up'. I said not to worry, I thought I got a good trade I'll get a job straightaway. But do ya know what? I couldn't get a fuckin' job! So, I went down the social [security office], I said, 'cos I had five kids at the time, I've got six now, I said I'm unemployed, I've got no money. And they looked at me and said 'oh well, you can only sign on income support' or whatever it was [rather than claim unemployment benefit] because I hadn't paid all me [National] Insurance stamps up. She said 'stay on it for 13 weeks, all your stamps will be brought up to date and you'll be okay'. I said, oh right thanks very much. I stayed on 13 weeks and I know it's wrong to say this but anyone who fucking works and signs on the dole should be fucking strung up. But then I done it! They were sending me milk tokens through for the kids and giving me all this money. I did a bit of work and kept on it for 13 weeks till all me [National Insurance] stamps were paid up.

The casual, informal and intermittent working lives of builders, coupled with supporting large families and a desire for the normality of having somewhere to live, formed contingencies motivating them to informal activity. Through being able to obtain more than one form of income it became difficult to relinquish that life-style especially when opportunities continued to arise. If entry to the building trade was highly and effectively regulated, Frank, for example, would only have been able to accrue a single source of income – building or benefits. However, his membership of particular network groups enabled him to do both. If informal building work opportunities were blocked, he may simply have entered another informal occupation, which he had done throughout his life in the form of cab driving. However, if all occupations were closed to him and, he and his wife's lifestyle remained the same, he may have been subjectively forced to make a living by more risky and morally reprehensible means.

Robbin' or Robin Hood?

I got so many tools and have to go so many places. We all do it, you get there and you ain't got the right spanner, you ain't got the right screwdriver, it's not gonna work I know. Well, you can't leave them lying around in all the different places, they're all gonna fucking disappear aren't they? They're all gonna get nicked or whatever because there's too many people about. (Trick, mechanical and electrical)

Whilst few moral boundaries surrounded pilferage of materials, there was a tacit morality concerning pilferage of objects in general. Keyworker House was a home and workplace to literally hundreds of people, and the builders were presented with multiple opportunities to pilfer when working unobserved in the other people's private spaces. At Keyworker House, pilferage did occur from the building itself. This generally consisted of labourers finding useful objects in disused store cupboards. For example, I saw Danny, with support from the site management, 'glean' some steps, a sack-barrow and more than one vacuum cleaner through this method. The management then issued him with paper stickers with Topbuild's logo printed on them that he rapidly attached to the newly 'found' objects to demarcate their new ownership. However, I never observed anything being taken from the private spaces of the key workers or administrative staff (c.f. Mars, 1974). I also never witnessed any moral censure towards such acts, seemingly because the acts were never committed. Moral boundaries had lost visibility, and it was simply taken for granted that to pilfer from an individual would be literally 'out of order'.

Paradoxically however, as I mentioned in chapter 8 in the case of the 'missing' wage-packet, moral censure towards personalised theft did not prevent actual theft all of the time. The wages story illuminated how common it was for things to be stolen from the worker's canteens, and Frank was considered foolish to leave the wages unattended. All the painters censured the wage theft subsequent to the act, which publicly denoted it as out of their normative order and unacceptable. However, Frank was not a popular character amongst the 'core' painting group because his lack of skill and slow work-pace threatened to expose their time deviance (see chapter 6). Consequently he was the everyday subject of unadorned vilification, and used as a scapegoat for almost everything. He was symbolically depersonalised by epithets such as 'useless cunt' and 'stupid arsehole' and thereby reduced to a persona analogous to inoperative sexual organs. Like the symbolic systems that facilitate difference, domination and ill-treatment of particular classes, races and genders (see chapter 8),

these epithets reduced Frank's humanity, and symbolically moved him outside of normative morality.

Aidan mentioned he had his phone stolen from the labourer's canteen. This provoked a similar social reaction to the above, although stealing a phone was not considered nearly so 'rough' as taking someone's wages. In Aidan's case, there was a strong suspicion that the person who took the phone was an 'outsider' who was present on the day it went missing. Of course, it may not have been the outsider who committed the infraction, but he became the secret subject of accusation. Aidan said he could not accuse the outsider because of the possibility it could have been anyone of us. However, he did say, 'He'll get his, don't you worry'. The phone theft could also have been related to depersonalisation, which was further related to continual transience where strangers came and went all the time. Transitory 'outsiders' had few ties to Topbuild's parochial networks, and were thus free from personal ties, network morality, and the social pressure of the 'core' work-groups.

In the wage theft, Frank had been depersonalised, which may have contributed to the misdemeanour. A related but converse example of personalisation, was the expensive plant that Topbuild owned (various drills, disc-cutters, power-boxes and electrical saws), which had, in the words of the management, 'got legs' and 'walked'. These expressions animated the objects and removed human action from the events, which was a consequence of the managers' ineptitude spawned by the impossibility of uncovering offender's identities. However, to counteract this, Steve implemented a strict accounting system whereby any builder who used the plant was to sign for it, from which time it became accounted as his property.

Doing Business

Privates

The bricklayer is always a handy man who can do a job for a neighbour, while the painter, if there were not so many of his craft, might hope to be constantly in request, since 'painting is a thing all houses want, the same as a man wants trousers'; and the 'carpenter's little bench in his back kitchen' is frequently found, and, put to other than domestic uses, it often becomes a source of income. (Booth, 1895:131)

In addition to working for Topbuild, most of the tradesmen worked for private clients at weekends and public holidays. This was a way of raising extra cash and to cushion

against possible future economic instabilities. Bill told me what he did with the fruits of his private work:

I got 6 kids, It's a fucking nut house. That's why I'm going to the pub tonight and why I get into work so early in the mornings. But they've never gone without, I always say to her the money's there if you want it... Anything I do, like private work, I always put it away for a rainy day or whatever, not always but I try to just in case we hit a hard time.

The rainy day literally has an effect on builders' earnings because much building work cannot be undertaken in the rain (see chapter 1). The instabilities of building employment provoked even the well-paid and high-skilled Bill to prepare for a 'hard time'.

'Doing privates' was part of the informal economy; unregistered but well known. It was untaxed income that benefited the builder and, also the private client, who would be awarded a cheaper price. Informalism in this sense was dyadic, and thus a social and not individual process. Furthermore, some of the builders told me they were often cajoled into doing privates at small profits by their network acquaintances. As Jamin mentioned:

I got my own place to do man but yeah, fuckin' family and mates and that, can you do this, can you do that, for peanuts you know what I mean? Or nothing even... I mean I don't mind sometimes, depends who it is you know.

Doing privates was not simply an economic action but was indirectly utilitarian in that it was framed by and, reinforced, social networks. The action of doing a cheap private as a favour, depending on 'who it is', accumulated indirect utilities because the builder became owed a favour/gift within the elastic mechanisms of network reciprocity. Pilferage of building materials intersected with this aspect of the informal economy because they were used to do privates, and this made privates more profitable for the builder where reduced cash prices might necessarily be charged. In these situations, the client is billed for the materials that the builder did not buy and the builder thereby claws-back profits on the work. I witnessed Bristles do this, and have done it myself in the past (see also Henry, 1978).

Fencing and Dealing

Steve once remarked, 'You've probably noticed this, but you get a lot of nicked gear coming across building sites'. Informal economy at Keyworker House was not only

characterised by fiddling, pilfering and privates, but some of the builders were petty entrepreneurs; distributors of stolen goods and contraband.

Illicit goods were sometimes distributed across trade boundaries. Every week or two Danny bought smuggled cigarettes for his wife from Bill. Smuggled cigarettes, tobacco and illegal drugs exchanged hands on a regular basis. One only had to ask someone who was smoking a cannabis cigarette on the scaffold where they could get some from and the names of those working on the site that sold it were reeled off. Some of the painters regularly exchanged different varieties of illegal drugs with one another, where, for example, one man could get 'good E's' and another 'good coke'.

In chapter 5, Stew talked about his street background and how he led a life of crime when he was younger. He had left this career, but he still possessed links with the illegal drug underworld of 'the Cally', and therefore, continued to 'sort out' his work mates with amphetamine, ecstasy and cannabis. In a sense, Stew had not really left his past because he fell back into it by doing favours for his work mates. Like Stew, many individuals do not grow out of crime as statistics appear to indicate. Informal economic actions merely become more secretive, less detectable, and less public as people grow older, and thus less likely to be registered in crime statistics (Foster, 1990).

It was not only Stew who had not quite left his illicit world behind. Will also had a street-based past, but was mostly removed from this world through his father's links into legitimate work. However, Will was also a semi-professional fence and volubly proud of it. He would buy a multitude of goods from his street acquaintances and store them in his lock-up (empty garage space) near to his home in South London. Will crosscut a number of different networks, and earned a wage for which he could afford to buy goods from the street, which, it can be assumed, were sold to him vastly under-price by offenders in search of quick cash (c.f. Jacobs *et al*, 2003). Everyone knew that Will was the man to see if one wanted a car stereo or mobile phone; he could almost get these to order. He also sold bicycles, video and digital cameras, and cannabis during my fieldwork. His main customers for electronic consumables were the site management who possessed a particular thirst for technological goods and the spare cash to buy them.

The informal economy at Keyworker House mirrored the formal economy (c.f. Hobbs, 1995). For example, at Christmas time, Bristles vended cheap boneless turkeys as a seasonal addition to his all-year-round line in pirate DVDs and

pornographic films. He also told me that 'privates' would come his way more frequently at Christmas because people wanted to 'spruce up their front rooms' (see chapter 5). Will was running a profitable line in stolen bicycles (he later told me he wished he kept them for the summer-time where he thought he could have obtained a higher price). Bristles offered to buy the whole cache at a reduced lump-sum price but Will continued to sell them individually at a slightly higher profit than through bulk-selling. Christmas was a profitable time for the entrepreneurial builders, and also presented 'bargains' for their customers (see below).

One of the painters bought an illicit laptop computer into work that Jamin was interested in buying for his children. Jamin decided he would rather purchase a desktop and Steve bought the laptop instead. Again, these goods could cross trade and ethnic divides, and the painter was approached by Bapu, who asked in whispered tones, if he could get a laptop for his daughter. Will got wind of this trade and he shared his business acumen:

I could shift those in hours. Laptops boy, they go like hotcakes. Don't believe you can't shift them quicker. If that was me I'd lose [sell] them all in day. If you hold onto stuff you're not making any money. Get it in and get it out quick, that's where the money is. No use hanging on to stuff, specially stuff like laptops. (Fieldnotes)

Despite Will's astute informal business acumen, he told me how he thought 'dodgy money' was of much less value than money earned from formal work. He described how he and his friends would in the past, steal credit cards to buy goods that they exchanged for cash. They would 'blow' the cash in a matter of hours, forcing them to go out and offend again so as to raise more 'quick cash' (c.f. Wright and Decker, 1994). His wages, he said, meant much more to him than the profits of crime.

Quick cash came and went at a fast rate, and exited the realm of making a living, to a realm of making risky excitement in terms of both accumulation and consumption. Conspicuous consumption follows morally vacuous quick-accumulation, and provides fast 'party money' (Shover and Honaker, 1991) and ready defence against detection by expelling physical evidence. The experiential seductions (Katz, 1988) of quick cash varied from the fiddle. Whilst fiddling can be a game, as something to think about when bored and, an informal reward for a long day, it is not a particularly exciting pursuit. Fiddles were embedded in archaic informal culture representing convention rather than deviation.

The presence of *overt* informal trading again illustrated the taken-for-granted nature of the informal economy. It was as if the building site emitted a distorted moral ambience that permitted such activity. I experienced this moral ambience on other building sites in the past, highlighted by ‘outsiders’ entering the sites to sell illicit goods. At Keyworker House this was illustrated by a confidence trick that I observed through piss-takes directed towards Danny. A group of ‘knackers’ (a derogatory term for Irish travellers) approached the labourers purporting to be selling stolen electrical goods. Danny bought a TV and video at a very cheap price but was to later discover that the goods were old and inoperative. The ‘knackers’ used the distorted moral ambience to obtain Danny’s confidence in the authenticity of the informal bargains, when in fact he got no bargain at all. Moral ambience also related to the receivers of illicit goods never asking where the goods originated. Asking where goods came from was secondary to the ‘bargain’ of obtaining them, and thus facilitated the circulation of illicit goods by providing a certain motivation for those that stole them in the first place. No one wants to know, and therefore, be psychologically linked with, the information that their bargain was/is another’s property. This process was analogous to no one in formal consumer society wanting to know their bargains are the result of exploited and sweated global labour on which the relative global affluence of British society is predicated. Morality in this sense is bracketed, or in Cohen’s (2001) terms, ‘denied’.

Social Position, Bargains and Urban Life

The question remains as to why some individuals traded more than others. One explanation lay simply in their network positioning. For example, Will and Stew dipped into past networks to obtain illicit goods; they were thus simply in a position to trade. Bristles, on the other hand, was a network manipulator, assisted by his cordial personality and motivated by an expensive vice. Once situated in a particular network position, low-risk opportunities to make pocket money arose. Being known to inhabit such a position produced a demand for services. People would ask Will for illicit mobile phones and Stew for illicit drugs. Demand from within a network can be difficult to refuse because of network elasticity, and the low risks of detection where networks keep things to themselves. Goods could be circulated freely within networks with ‘no questions asked’, and thus only a small risk that information concerning the activities would leak into formal channels where possible formal detection might

occur. As I argued in the last chapter, networks not only functioned to distribute information but also canalised that information.

Networks, figuratively speaking, are linked to an informally negotiated morality, based in archaic custom, and distributed by the extant social pressure of the network (see chapter 9). However, rather than network morality censuring fiddling, pilfering, or the circulation of stolen goods, it actually facilitated these activities. This was partly because of the demonisation of the grass, and also, I would argue, the omnipresence of violent threat. However, the builders' networks were set against the historical and present backdrop of economically and politically unpredictable lives, just as they had been for centuries. This was not to say that it was only builders that fiddle, as argued above, almost everyone does it. Yet, whilst everyone may fiddle, not everyone is involved in amateur trading using money as its medium, although everyone does trade in terms of gift exchange *prestations*, regardless of their social position (see chapter 9). Builders, and the working-classes in general, work in producing, fixing, vending, cleaning and transporting material goods. They have back-stage access to those goods, whereas the middle-classes do not. Gift exchange amongst the middle-classes takes different forms that are often more hidden because of their non-physical nature. As Dalton (1959), Granovetter (1974) and Boissevain (1974) show, rather than goods, the middle-classes exchange positions and influence, and also collude to fix their own social positions and profits (see Granovetter, 1992; Punch, 1996; and chapter 9).

The builders (and dockers and waiters [Mars, 1982]) were not employed on formal contracts, they worked 'off the fringe', and received zero formal fringe benefits. The illicit bargains coveted at Keyworker House were thus a kind of socially negotiated informal insurance and/or a contemporary method of extracting value from the parochial landscape. Most people enjoy 'a bargain', whether they 'need' the object or not. Advertisers and large multinational companies invest substantial sums of money to convince potential customers of the bargains obtained if they shop with them (Henry, 1978). The bargain smoothes economic life, rather like perquisites of the pre-industrial era. However, in urban modernity there is literally no space to accrue pre-industrial forms of insurance, and consequently new forms have been fashioned. Obtaining bargains, be it by pilfering, fiddling or informal trading, is, then, a

culturally archaic source of creative adaptation to intense urban capitalism, much like the informal adaptations to metronomic and tabled time discussed in chapter 7.

Theorising Economies

The antecedents of the bargain were wider than calculative utility and adaptive play. Circulation of goods, whether pilfered, robbed or fiddled, sustained the structure and linkages of informal networks, which were themselves a form of social insurance and making a living. Granovetter (1974) argues that network contacts can be worth an entire living, and I would add to this, a place to live in (see the example of the Kutchis above). Like jobs, it is probably not that housing *per se* is found through networks, but 'good' housing (c.f. Young and Willmott, 1957). However, it can be seen that networks were economically necessary to obtain jobs, goods, services and housing, and therefore, constituted significant ingredient of class, race and gender structures.

Network linkages were forged in part by the very circulation of goods and favours, be they licit, illicit, formal or informal. For example, the painter who circulated illicit laptop computers also took part in the trade of illegal narcotics within the painting group. I got to know him well and had quite certain knowledge that he made such a small profit from these transactions that it was, in a purely pecuniary sense, not really worth the risk of transporting them to the workplace. However, what his actions did utilise were the formation of alliances. They opened the flow of licit and illicit information because he became a trusted member of the network; trusted in the sense that he was part of a secret and thus could be trusted to hold a secret. This opened up the possibility that other bargains would come his way because useful information would be released to him. It also forged social ties with both the dealer, who he bought the drugs from, and those at work whom he passed them onto. The links maintained and created through trading were therefore of a broader utility than the actual trades themselves.

Even a seemingly isolated and individual act of work pilferage was far from isolated. Pilfering is a social action, undertaken in the shadow of network members and informal social insurance. 'Supportive interchange' (Hobbs, 1988) frames individuals' motivations to fiddle, and in Box's ([1971] 1981) terms, the network provides the vital situational ingredient of being 'willing' to deviate in association with being (morally) 'ready', and (opportunistically) 'able'. This places doubt upon aspects of Hirschi's (1969) 'control theory' of crime, in that he assumes commitment

to others prevents individuals from offending. In my judgement, it is commitment to others that motivates informal economy, and in relation, it is the informal economy that motivates commitment to others. Favours, bargains and networks are by their very nature informal, and as an extension of this, can often be illicit. Thus 'crime', rather than being the blighted product of a lack of community, actually forged communities through linking people into elastic reciprocal relations, thereby binding the community both subjectively and transactionally (c.f. Walklate, 1998).

Network reciprocity also involved duty and loyalty. This was reflected by the carpenters sending money back to their villages in Kutch, as Naz explained:

We [Kutchis] got together in London to build a massive school, massive. Seven rooms, big yard and everything. We've done a big hospital, cancer research, and everything in it, paid for by private donors, then later the government might give subsidies... I mean even the water supply in my village was done by individual donors you know. Then you pay like say 10 rupees a month or whatever for the water bills. Well, they don't come in bills, they just - you know it and you go and pay it.

The actions of Naz and the London Kutchis appeared altruistic. However, they held strong affective ties to their homeland. All of the first generation owned houses in Kutch and tried to visit them at least annually. It might be expected that their altruism were given a warm welcome, at least from their relatives that remained in Kutch. Furthermore, the carpenters' lives were historically guided by political and economic events largely out of their own control, which made for insecure lives (see chapter 5). Consequently, despite poverty, illness and fatal earthquakes, and despite the carpenters' increasing Anglicisation, the first generation held strong subjective attachments to Kutch. Naz explained why:

[With the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan] big, big arguments, court cases everything, I mean nobody wants to lose a land which belonged to the grandfather and the grandfather's father... So I bought my own land from a farm, you know, unwanted land so the farmer sells it as building blocks... it's just there for me. Now, if my daughter wish to go there, I say, okay, I got enough land so you can build your house...

It's like the Jewish. There was Israel, then they went away. Then there was no Israel. But when Hitler messed them up they wanted a base. So it's the same you know, we got a base. Nobody leaves that.

Affective-Utilitarianism

Amateur trading tends to accrue only small profits, and prices charged in the informal economy vary by how much the seller is attached to the buyer i.e. good friends get a cheaper price than not so good friends. Henry (1978) argues, that because informal trades make such small profits, the utility of the trade is purely affective, and not

economic at all; trading networks are a social mechanism that makes friends. Henry thus views the 'hidden economy' an affective system separate from the capitalist economy. In relation to this, he argues that the economic language that accompanies informal trading does not delineate the trading as economic, but that such language are the only frame in which participants can talk about informal trading. However, there are a number of problems with Henry's theory: firstly, not everything pilfered is traded, much of it is kept. Secondly, exchange is affective *but it is also* economic. Thirdly, much meta-language surrounding informal action is non-verbal and thus not economic at all.

Even small profit is profit, and 'pocket money' can make a substantial difference to an individual with little disposable income. Further, selling goods at a reduced price to close friends in a dense network has a utility in maintaining the network. So, whilst amateur trading may accumulate only very small profits, what it does do is *save money* and *make reciprocity*. Constructing alliances and ties through a gift exchange/trading mechanism can thus be viewed as utilitarian action, albeit an 'affective-utility' that cannot be mathematically calculated. As Adam Smith, doyen of free market economics, noticed in the 18th century:

If your friend lent you money in your distress, ought you lend him some in his? How much ought you lend him? When ought you lend him? Now, or tomorrow, or next month? And for how long a time? It is evident that no general rule can be laid down, by which a precise answer can, in all cases, be given to any of these questions. (From Pahl, 2000: 55)

The circulation of goods and favours was as a kind of heuristic-affective utilitarian insurance. Heuristic in that when performing a favour, one does not calculate exact returns; it is taken-for-granted that the favour will be reciprocated; and affective in that, favours, gifts and goods make friends, and friends make networks.

Types of Economy

Primitive societies drew no distinction between social, economic or political realms; the peoples possessed no symbolic system to demarcate the differences (Sahlins, [1972] 2003). Economic, political and social spheres are a modern construction, and within these, further subdivisions were created. In the economic sphere, a formal economy was constructed, and following this, informal, household and illicit sub-economies. These too are historical inventions. Far from modernity containing an increasingly distinct formal economic sphere, household/informal economies continue

to constitute a large part of that 'sphere' (Pahl, 1984). The categorisation of action or social spheres as economic, social or political, and within this, informal and formal, licit and illicit, is just that - a categorisation.

Formality and informality, licit and illicit, define and construct one another. The disciplines, in this case - economics and criminology, reinforce, create and power the constructions. For example, friendship is social (moral, emphatic and affective), but also economic (gifts, goods and services are exchanged), and political (status and power circulate). Friendship is utilitarian and beneficial, but it is also affective and emotive. Friendship could be viewed as economic because it provides jobs, homes, and goods, but economy could be viewed as predicated upon friendship in that markets are made and characterised by cliques, favours and personal relations. Friendship and the economy are thus not separate entities but, intimately interchangeable. Even in a highly structured and regulated economic arena such as the workplace, or the lucrative and highly competitive world of building contracting, actors' motives mix elements of social, political and economic action.

Illicit and licit economies cannot be separated. Economy is crime (Sutherland, 1949) and crime is economy (Hobbs, 1988 and 1995). Informal action was not a sub-economy existing within the construction marketplace; it was how that marketplace actually operated. The difference between capitalist economies and informal economies was levels of power that negated reciprocal equilibrium (see chapters 6, 8 and 9), and further, surplus production, reciprocation and gift exchange pre-date capitalism (Mauss, 1954; Sahlins, 1972; Godelier, 1999). Consequently I would like to re-order Ditton's phrase that the informal economy is the 'bastard son of the capitalist economy' (1977a: 168). Quite the contrary, the capitalist economy is the bastard of the informal economy.

Chapter 11

Conclusion

Characters make cities and markets. As Marx was at pains to explain, economies are not numbers and quantities but collections of people doing things. In a similar vein, cities are not made by trade, but by people trading, just as the city's landscape is made by builders making buildings. The builders in this story constructed, maintained and performed the economy and the city. They composed the world that composed them.

Throughout the story I emphasised the builders creative and collective adaptation to imposing social structures. I analysed the interrelations between history, economy, class, race and gender structures, as mediated through the builders' creative interaction with them. Social positions were partly ascribed and markets were collusive and cartelised. The feudal forms of ascription, nepotism, honour, duty, loyalty and strength, reigned into the present and, the present built on the past, rather than superseding it. The builders' archaic informal cultures smoothed the rougher edges of class, race and gender positions through which they attempted to make a living, make meaning, make status and security in an insecure and unpredictable world at the lower end of the national class structure. Insecurity necessitated that the builders contrived and constructed localised and informal social networks, yet, network patterns worked back upon them, generating further structures.

The Final Scene



In this thesis I took four main problematic areas: I provided an account of builders and building which was neglected in studies of the workplace to the detriment of labour-process theory. Secondly, I analysed formal methods of social control: formal economy (markets, jobs, and taxation), time structures, systems of governance and concomitant observation mechanisms (bureaucratic management procedures, management power, and formal law), and I described the accompanying informal cultural adaptations to those structures. I extended this analysis to the formation of informal social networks, and the impact of these as sources of information, normative rules, and framing life chances and trajectories. I also argued that a vital ingredient to the social order of the building site was predicated upon the threat of violence, and that this was associated with the masculinity enacted by the builders.

The Death of Class and Community?

Contemporary British society remains structured by social class. Through the screen of historical discourse, agents and structures interact, and class-cultures are recreated through the methods people employ to negotiate hierarchical society. Class existed in the minds and cultures of the builders, and class-culture had a continuing utility in their everyday lives. The working-class may shrink but people will always be required to make, clean, sell, transport, repair and build the physical infrastructure of post-industrial societies. These kinds of work can not be 'out-sourced' to other countries because the workers perform a 'service' within the geography of the host economy.

Increasingly the working-class are recent migrant groups and their offspring, who enter or grow up in the host economy at the bottom end of the 'network pile' within an embedded economy. Guided to the bottom end of the class structure, recent migrant groups adopt aspects of the host economy's class culture as a resource for living class life. The working-class will also consist of 'the lads' who grow up in the host economy and 'learn to labour'; those born at the bottom end of the class structure whose cultural mechanisms continue to be reproduced because of the structural exigencies of class life. Furthermore, whilst class relations have become intensively global, they remain paradoxically local. An illustration of this were chain migration and ethnic and trade enclaves.

The working classes in general, and builders, working-class women and city dwellers in particular, have historically lived risky, uncertain and transitory lives; continually on the move in search of work and, working in short-term unstable, often

non-formalised work environments. Mass nation-bound, long-term factory work was a short historical moment, representing only a small section of modern capitalism (Pahl, 1984), and, since their inception, the working-class were pushed around by forces beyond their control. Mayhew (1861) tirelessly documented the uncertainty of working-class lives in London in the 19th century, and Thompson (1963; 1975; 1993) describes how being pushed around was a defining feature of their formation; the enclosure movement literally made the working-class.

War, want, unemployment, accidents at work and social and political changes impinge upon the lives of the less affluent in unpredictable and unforeseeable ways. Their adaptation to unforeseeable risks was structured by limited choices, and further, by poor access to high capital information and high capital. However, the builder's narratives illustrated that uncertainty was expected and normal. They did not live in a world of fractured narratives, unbounded mobilities and 'weak ties', but were embedded in tight family and neighbourhood networks that not only subsumed their private lives but spread into their work lives. Far from living in a post-modern world, the builders' world was almost pre-modern.

Ephemerality, casualisation and uncertainty formed a structural backdrop for the creation of social ties as opposed to wearing them down. The builders drew meaning into their lives by reference to their network communities and, most saliently, to their families. The family was not only place of security, recuperation, and perhaps, power, but it had an important 'economic' and normative function. Families and communities were of vital necessity in relation to making a living, meaning and status. Families and communities were utilised for getting on in intense modernity as a source of work, housing, goods, services and favours (see also Bummer, 1986; Harris, 1990).

Revolution or Recreation?

In manoeuvring and utilising parochially structured benefits to make life more comfortable for themselves, the builders perpetuated class, gender and race structures, and the structures divided what could otherwise be a homogenous class. Builders as a section of the working-class were not resisting capitalism, quite the contrary, they lived from its fruit and took it for granted as a given, immutable aspect of life. In monetary-economic terms, they were a 'global middle-class', living affluent lives

relative to their global brothers and sisters. Resonant with their lives was Orwell's description of the English middle-class of the 1930's:

Did *they* know that they were only puppets dancing when the money pulled the strings? You bet they didn't. And if they did, would they care? They were too busy being born, being married, begetting, working, dying... The money-code as they interpreted it was not merely cynical and hoggish. They had their standards, their inviolable points of honour. They 'kept themselves respectable' – kept the aspidistra flying. Besides, they were *alive*. They were bound up in the bundle of life. They begot children, which is what the saints and the soul savers never by any chance do. ([1936] 1964: 255. Italics original)

Marx assumed the working-class would come together and become conscious of their social position. The builders were certainly conscious of their class (c.f. Cannadine, 1999), and collective within it, regardless of their racial origins or social mobility, yet they did not collectivise as a total class, but as localised, internally differentiated, gendered and racialised sections within it. Capitalism itself, whilst dividing people into competition, also, paradoxically, pulled them together. It was, as Durkheim ([1893] 1960) argued, that the division of labour forces necessary co-operation; people come to rely on one another (see also Pahl, 2000) and make the economy. The builders came together in communities and busied themselves with 'being born, being married, begetting, working, dying', and they helped one another to do this within capitalism, not to overthrow it.

Economy, Networks and Society

Marx also argued that the economy blankets nature, forming a backdrop to social life, and Durkheim and Mauss maintained that social life was social exchange. Social and productive exchange between people and their environmental infrastructure underpins culture. The builders lived within an intense capitalist marketplace dominated by hierarchical work organisation and an intense money economy, yet they also exchanged information, goods and services within networks of others in an informal economy where money and hierarchy played a lesser part. This economy framed their alliances, moralities, subjectivities and life-chances.

Mauss ([1954] 1970) described how primitive gift exchange was employed primarily to elicit friendly social relations and prevent violence. Gift exchange between the builders served a similar but attenuated function as a method and, constituent of, maintaining reciprocity. Reciprocity was the social adhesive by which communities were maintained because it manufactured social duty and loyalty,

limited egoism, prevented violence, and contributed to the formation of trust; a trust that supplied economic and ontological security. Duty was a form of reciprocity in that it implied the 'repayment' of 'debts' to those individuals or institutions adopting the symbolic position of provider, for example, gods, parents, bosses, patrons or patriarchs. However, these providers also *enforced* reciprocal duty through symbolised violent power, as, what they provided they could also remove. Symbolised violence manufactured false reciprocity, which when unquestionably consented to, was hegemonic. Power, in its final instance therefore, rested upon actual or symbolised violence, and, power and social distance skewed and distorted reciprocity, which, historically permitted exploitation.

Normative frameworks bind those tied into a network, and people manoeuvre within social networks for their own benefits. There is more to social life than norms (Boissevain, 1974). For example, if everybody had a moral character, there would be no such entity as trust because we simply would and could trust everybody (Dasgupta, 1988). Norms and morality simply guide action; they do not concretely impose it. Formal structures are organising guides to social action but, do not concretely delineate that action. The builders did not blindly follow formal injunctions, but at each stage they informally negotiated them; moving and manoeuvring around structures in continual reinterpretation (Giddens, 1984). The builders formed communities and cliques as aids to negotiate structural impositions, and they culturally and collectively colluded to make life more comfortable for themselves and their children. Informal action made their society.

Society can be viewed as a collection of many discrete network groups, and it is the history and competition between network groups that frame members' life chances. The builders' membership within specific networks formed the structural backdrop to class and race patterns that further structured their lives. Networks were related to jobs (Granovetter, 1974), migratory patterns (Portes, 1995), housing (Young and Willmott, 1957; Desai, 1963) and economic markets (Granovetter, 1985). Networks thereby underpinned life chances and trajectories, and consequently it was not simply culture that reproduced class and race structures; the men did not only learn to labour (Willis, 1977), they were directed to labour by the shape of their network groups. For example, where one is housed dictates where they go to school, the local culture adopted, and the local networks inhabited, which in turn dictate access to jobs, goods, services and housing. This may not be the case for those that

successfully negotiate formal society. Badges of ability, most prominently, formal educational qualifications, might negate the necessity of informal networks by permitting entry to other, more formal social milieu, but, the builders did not possess formal badges. Most had subjectively bypassed the formal education system, or for migrant groups, educational qualifications acquired in other countries were mostly worthless in Britain. To negotiate social life, then, the builders utilised what they had, and, like people have done for hundreds of years, they utilised their friends, families, and their bodily strength and skill. For these men, informal contacts and their bodies were their symbolic and social capital, and therefore, their lives were dependent on these.

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