Rational recreation in the age of affluence: the café and working-class youth in London, ca.1939-1965

Historians have located 'rational recreation' as a manifestation of the paternalist philanthropy of the nineteenth century, and attempts by elites to control and contain the working classes.[1] With the advent of paid holidays and a booming leisure industry from the later 1930s, which both offering greater opportunities for the increasingly affluent working classes after the Second World War, such paternalistic interventions would have appeared futile and outdated.[2] Yet, as this chapter will demonstrate, the desire to provide what was effectively 'rational recreation' continued well into the postwar period, driven by anxieties about what this affluent, modern world was bringing to contemporaries.

One particular site of contestation was the various cafés, coffee and milk bars that grew in popularity from the 1920s, particularly amongst young people. As David Fowler notes, young female workers in Central London developed a vibrant 'flapper' culture based around the Lyons Corner House on the Strand in the 1920s. This was in turn part of a wider youth culture which brought in suburban dance halls and cinemas, all readily affordable on a young worker's income.[3] Yet not all young people were able to participate as fully as they might wish within this world. Melanie Tebbutt provides an example of how the young un- or underemployed men of Northampton in the 1930s were welcome to while away the hours at a local café with a sympathetic owner.[4] Innovation in the catering industry grew in the mid-twentieth century, and in turn impacted on these youth cultures. The first milk bars opened in London in the mid-1930s, selling milk in a similar way to how a pub would sell alcohol, whilst snack bars brought

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[1] See James Walvin, *Leisure and Society 1830-1950* (London: Longman, 1978); Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control 1830-1885* (London: Methuen, 1987); F. M. L. Thompson, "Social Control in Victorian Britain," *Economic History Review* 34 (1981): 189–208.

[2] See Sandra Trudgen Dawson, *Holiday Camps in Twentieth-century Britain: Packaging Pleasure*, Studies in Popular Culture (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

[3] David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, C.1920-c.1970* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). pp.66-69

[4] Melanie Tebbutt, *Being Boys. Youth, Leisure and Identity in the Inter-war Years* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012). 238

in less formal, 'fast food'. Achille Gaggia's invention of a powerful and reliable espresso machine brought better coffee to the streets of Soho in the 1940s and 1950s, which helped in the creation of a vibrant subterranean world of jazz clubs and cafes in Central London, populated by young people from the suburbs.[5] The milk bars, coffee bars and cafés (the latter serving drinks and food) that young people increasingly frequented brought with them different connotations: Italian sophistication through the coffee, and, as Adrian Horn has demonstrated, a whiff of Americana through the juke boxes that were increasingly installed in them – if the young people made their own, very local cultures.[6] Cafés, coffee bars and the like were one particular space where the young congregated, which gave them a heterosocial public space to conduct their friendships, intimate relationships and rivalries, at the same time that it put them on display to adults. Some adults, like Richard Hoggart in his much-quoted account of a milk bar in *The Uses of Literacy*, focussed on the sense of a slavish, slack-jawed adherence to the new, 'feminine' and degenerate consumerism; others, like Martha Gellhorn, saw this world as an alien, foreign one they could no longer enter.[7] These new, supposedly affluent young people who seemed so adrift from the values and experiences of older generations were agonised over by academic and media commentators, and subjected to scrutiny through Labour's Youth Commission and the Albemarle Report.[8] These young people were also the subjects of action by a range of voluntary organisations, many of whom had roots in much longer traditions of 'rational recreation', as this chapter will demonstrate.

The café and similar spaces were part of both the mundane and spectacular ways in

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[5] Frank Mort, *Cultures of Consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 1996), 155; Peter Hennessey, *Having It So Good: Britain in the Fifties* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2007), 15.

[6] See Adrian Horn, *Juke Box Britain: Americanisation and Youth Culture, 1945-60* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), passim; Hennessey, *Having It So Good: Britain in the Fifties*, 14.

[7] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-class Life*, Orig. publication 1957 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2009); Catherine Ellis, "The Younger Generation: The Labour Party and the 1959 Youth Commission," *Journal of British Studies* 41, no. 2 (2002): 199.

[8] Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, C.1920-c.1970*; Ellis, "The Younger Generation: The Labour Party and the 1959 Youth Commission"; Contemporary reflections include: Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-class Life*; T. R. Fyvel, *The Insecure Offenders: Rebellious Youth in the Welfare State* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966).

which young people consumed, be that in their immediate locale or having made a journey to the centre of London or other major town or city. London is the focus of this chapter for a number of reasons. First, it was the epicentre of a number of well-publicised youth 'subcultures' in the period, such as the Teddy Boys and the Mods. London also served as a destination for young people from around the country, whether on a short trip to take in Carnaby Street, or escaping their home town, trying to find somewhere to fit in. Thirdly, London was also the location of a strong and experimental voluntary action tradition, dating from the mid-nineteenth century. When we look closer at young people's movements in London, whether they were out to listen to music in a Soho café or eking out a cup of tea locally, these were locations that young people deliberately chose to attend. These were not always the most desired option, as at certain points the use of the café reflected the young person's exclusion from other leisure spaces - being too young or too poor to go to the pub or fashionable night-time venues, living at home and not having space of their own, or being excluded from conventional youth clubs and organisations.[9] Some young people were also barred from specific cafés and cinemas in the neighbourhood, especially if the staff of those establishments thought they might be troublesome, so the young resorted to using whatever space would have them.[10]

Reformers' interest in the movements of the young around urban spaces was far from new, and had shifted in the course of the nineteenth century from tackling the problem of destitute children seemingly without parents to finding a means of 'constructively' entertaining young working-class people through clubs and uniformed organisations. London was by no means the only city to have this perceived problem, but the issue of the young on the streets was set within a bigger process of constructing space and movement within the city. The East End was 'opened' up to the middle and upper classes through the settlement movement and other voluntary activities that enabled the respectable to go the 'dangerous' parts of the city under the

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[9] Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, C.1920-c.1970*, 127.
[10] 'There's hope among the tea cups in the teen canteen', *Daily Mirror*, Tuesday 5 July 1955, 9

banner of social work and research.[11] The West End was constructed throughout the nineteenth

century as a place that the discerning middle and upper class woman needed to have an intimate

knowledge of, in order to find the most sophisticated leisure spots and purveyors of fine goods.[12]

The sense of Soho as a bohemian place emerged in the later nineteenth century, before coming to

be a centre for the homosexual community by the 1920s, the film industry in the 1930s, and

writers and edgy young people from the 1940s and 1950s.[13] It offered a different variety of

'danger' to the established order to that of the East End, but a disruption and a danger

nonetheless. Young working-class people were vulnerable within their own districts, some of

which bordered or formed part of this desirable centre, but also either vulnerable or matter out of

place if they were in these centres unsupervised or without a 'respectable' purpose to do with

paid employment.

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The first milk bar in Britain was opened in 1935 on Fleet Street, by Hugh D. McIntosh, a

British-Australian entrepreneur, whose inspiration allegedly came from wanting to provide a

temperance alternative to the public house. Indeed, Canon Dick Sheppard, a well-known

London cleric and temperance advocate, officially opened the bar. McIntosh developed a chain

of 'Black and White' Milk Bars from this original point in Fleet Street.[14] Competition came

from the Griffiths brothers' National Milk Bars and the hotelier Charles Fortes' Strand Milk Bars

and Meadow Milk Bars.[15] Independent milk bars were also common. All were regulated by the

Milk Marketing Board, for whom milk bars were a useful way of marketing a supposed child's

[11] See Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Jack London, *The People of the Abyss* (London: Pimlico, 2001); Seth Koven, "The Dangers of Castle Building - Surveying the Social Survey," in *The Social Survey in Historical Perspective*, ed. Martin Bulmer, Kevin Bales, and Kathryn Kish Sklar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 368–376; Henrietta Barnett, *Canon Barnett: His Life, Work and Friends*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1918); Asa Briggs and Anne Macartney, *Toynbee Hall: The First Hundred Years* (London: Routledge, 1984).

[12] Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton, N.J Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[13] Mort, *Cultures of Consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth-Century Britain*, 153–5.

[14] 'Will you come into my milk bar?' *Australian Women's Weekly,* Saturday 10 August 1935, p.4; 'Milk bar craze

[15] 'Milk bars march', *News Review,* 4 February 1937, p.43

drink to adults.[16] Despite the milk bar's history in Australia and the United States as a venue for encouraging the consumption of a non-alcoholic drink in a setting not unlike a bar, these venues challenged British habits in terms of eating out. A *Times* article of 1935 outlined the new way in which one would be served: 'The new way in Fleet Street is to go up to the open bar, order one of the drinks enumerated on a panel, receive it within a few seconds, pay 4d to the white uniformed "barmaid", enjoy the beverage, and walk out'. The article also drew attention to the new technologies that had enabled the crockery and equipment to be 'thoroughly washed and sterilized'.[17] The milk bars could appear threatening through their destabilisation of the sense of a 'traditional' café or restaurant, and the more transient, less supervised clientele.

In February 1948, the Lord Mayor of London's office received a letter from an irate resident of Battersea in South London, complaining about the policing of the milk bar on Fleet Street. Fleet Street was then home to the British newspaper industry, with paper head offices, print works and the like based on this street in the City of London. The writer spoke of how, before the Second World War, he had used a Lyons' tea shop close to his office which stayed open all night, but with that establishment moving to earlier closing, he was forced to use the milk bar in question or a 'small café of doubtful reputation'. The writer felt his breaks were disturbed by:

> the frequent scenes created by [the] motley rabble of men and women that drift into our boundaries from the West End every night, remaining until the Milk Bar closes at 4.50am and then moving on to a nearby place.

Two incidents prompted the letter to be written: first, the writer and a colleague being accosted at knifepoint for their money just outside the milk bar, and second, 'a gang of ruffians [fighting] in the middle of Fleet Street'. The writer appeared to take additional umbrage at the sight of print workers enjoying this spectacle whilst they took a break from work.[18]

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[16] London Metropolitan Archives EO/HFE/4/203 Extract from *The Dairyman*, February 1951
[17] 'London "Milk Bar"', *The Times*, Friday 2 August 1935, p.9
[18] LMA COL/MH/AD/03/11/12 Mansion House Papers 1931-51, Correspondence with Police, 1947-1957. Letter, Thursday 26 February 1948.

This letter reveals the tensions that could emerge when different age and social groups attempted to use the same facilities. Here, the letter-writer felt no option other than to stray into what criminologists have dubbed a 'night-time economy',[19] aimed at a more working-class audience, or, as the writer put it, the 'motley rabble'. The writer felt threatened, literally through the production of a knife, but also in the sense of entering into a world with different rules and mores to the more 'cultured' one he inhabited. His response to this world was a highly classed one, and he felt anxious at being within what felt to him like the disordered world of the working classes. Sir Hugh Turnbull, the Police Commissioner for the City of London, responded to the Lord Mayor the following month, emphasising the café's customer base as being that of manual workers employed in the print trade and local markets, both of which were more nocturnal in their routines, and also that it was:

> common, particularly at week-ends, to find young people of both sexes from East London calling there for a snack on their way home from Dance Halls and such places in the West End. These customers are, at times, inclined to be noisy and perhaps rough in manner but not more than is to be expected at cafés catering for the working class.[20]

Turnbull's response was intended to put the original letter into context and to affirm that anarchy was not breaking out on Fleet Street in the early hours, but it equally pointed to a classed world of places, spaces and times. The letter-writer, deprived of access to a workplace canteen or a 'respectable' place to go for a snack, was classed matter out of place in this night-time world.

Although milk bars had originally been seen as a place for the consumption of 'healthy' drinks, by the 1950s they were increasingly associated with the more subtle processes of social and cultural change, again drawing upon the new, faster way of consuming they encouraged. Much of this debate centred on the introduction of juke boxes into cafés and other

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[19] See Dick Hobbs et al., *Bouncers: Violence and Governance in the Night-Time Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Hobbs et al use 'night-time economy' to refer to the youth-oriented, alcohol-driven economy created by changing licensing laws in the 1990s, but there is something of this use in the night-time world of central London from the mid-twentieth century

[20] LMA COL/MH/AD/03/11/12 Mansion House Papers 1931-52, Correspondence with Police, 1947-1957, Letter 17 March 1948

establishments, and what this was doing to British society. An article in the *Daily Mirror* in 1956 on the 'juke box invasion' reported on the supply of silent records that could be put into juke boxes in order to provide a break in the programme. It used the language of epidemics and warfare to suggest that enjoying such traditional British refreshments as a pint or fish and chips in silence or to the sound of conversation were becoming a thing of the past, as Elvis Presley and Frank Sinatra were blasted out of the juke box. A West End café owner was quoted as saying, '"Psychologically it is interesting. People do not seem to be able to sit around a silent machine. They feel compelled to keep it going."' The sense was of an assault on a supposedly traditional British way of life, and of an accelerating blind acceptance of juke boxes.[21] As commercial ventures, milk bars needed to attract customers in, and these provisions were what their younger clients wanted - a chance to socialise outside of the parental home, where food and drink could be obtained, whilst also listening to the latest pop records.[22] The milk bar model of rapid counter service - the American 'fast food' ethos - began to change the shape of the more formal and 'traditional' tea and coffee houses. The Lyons Coffeehouse chain offered a combination of sit-down restaurant for meals or tea and coffee, and in 1954 it experimented with a new model for providing burgers and other 'American'-style fare through a 'fast-food' style ethos at its Coventry Street branch near Piccadilly in London. This experiment was successful, and was promptly developed into the Wimpy chain of cafés/restaurants.[23] Certainly the food on offer in Wimpy bars, milk bars, cafés and the like appealed to the young - but so did the more relaxed and informal atmosphere. Again, whilst customers enjoyed these new types of café, the popular press bemoaned its impact on the 'traditional' providers, often in terms of them having to innovate in order to appeal to youngsters' desire for modern and hygienic fish and chips.[24] Cafés and restaurants that embraced this new style were popular, but not beyond suspicion or criticism.

The analysis here, however, begins during the Second World War, when all aspects of

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[21] Miles, Tony. 'Play me some silence! It's the newest move in the juke box invasion', *Daily Mirror*, 26 June 1956, p.11

[22] Horn, *Juke Box Britain: Americanisation and Youth Culture, 1945-60*: 162, 69.

[23] See Wimpy, 'Our History', http://www.wimpy.uk.com/history.asp, correct at 18 July 2012

[24] Jack Stoneley and John Edwards, 'Look what's frying tonight!' *Daily Mirror*, Thursday 28 April 1960, p.12

family, social and working lives were disrupted. Those young people who were too young to be called into the services yet too old to be evacuated were one source of concern. Their parents were engaged in war work or serving in the armed forces; their schooling was disrupted, whilst youth clubs and organisations were shut down or running a skeleton service as a result of the conscription of their leaders, as well as the displacement of their membership through public and private evacuation.[25] As the war progressed, concerns about the growing appeal of 'American' ways of consumption grew, as US-based servicemen introduced the young to chewing gum, comics, different brands of cigarettes and a sense of an exotic Americana.[26] Thus concerned adults began to look for solutions to the 'problem' of young people wandering around without adult supervision - or exposure to 'inappropriate' adults.

Eating habits also shifted, in terms of rationing as well as fitting in meals around war work. The exigencies of war provided space for a particular section of reformist voluntary action to expand. As James Vernon has shown, from the early twentieth century the canteen was seen as a hygienic and effective means of feeding a large number of people at any one time, ensuring the best nutrition as well as encouraging better table manners. The 'British Restaurants' were set up at the start of the Second World War to provide canteen-style catering for the public, with some run by local authorities and others by volunteers.[27] Such provision enabled charities and voluntary groups to provide an alternative to private home cooking or buying food from commercial providers, to try and pass on their message about better food choices. The aim was to provide nutritious food in an environment which imparted 'better' values to its users, be that in terms of encouraging healthier eating or more genteel behaviour, in contrast to the 'valueless' or weaker values in commercial offerings available.

The British Restaurants continued to run after the war, with further experimentation as to their roles, as part of finding a new role for these volunteers and their services in the postwar

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[25] For a more general survey of evacuation and concerns about it, see Jon Welshman, "Evacuation and Social Policy During the Second World War: Myth and Reality," *Twentieth Century British History* 9, no. 1 (1998).

[26] See, for example, Barker, *A Haunt of Fears: the Strange History of the British Horror Comics Campaign*. Further discussion in Bradley, "Becoming delinquent in the post-war welfare state: England and Wales, 1945-1965."

[27] James Vernon, *Hunger. A Modern History*. Cambridge MA: Belknap, 2007, pp.166-80, 187-90

world. Restaurants across the country altered their opening hours to enable use by young people in the evenings, with varying degrees of perceived success. In Brighton, young people went in after a trip to the cinema and 'would settle down with cups of tea, sandwiches and magazines', whilst the Bath organisers saw their provision as appealing to somewhat unruly young people, many of whom avoided spending any money on food whilst they were there. The Pinner version used a British Restaurant space, bringing in bands to entertain the young people - who proved to be more interested in having conversations with each other, rather than listening attentively to the entertainment.[28] The variations in 'success' - which we might define as the regular use of the centres by young people, without too much contestation by adults - clearly depended on the quality of the local set-up. The British Restaurants had been set up at the directive of the Ministry of Food, but were run by local committees of volunteers, and thus were shaped by the local context and agenda, the availability of appropriate and available volunteers. Sometimes the volunteers brought expertise in working with the young; in other situations, they were better at effectively providing rationed food and drink. Others were dismayed by the young people using the café for what looked like purposeless chatter and general 'hanging about', as might normally be learned on street corners, rather than participating in more 'improving' activities. This assumed that the informal, unstructured chatter had no function, or only a deleterious one.

At the end of the war, the London County Council (LCC) Youth Committee, which consisted of youth workers (some from the charities sector) and representatives from local government agencies, was increasingly interested in developing a facility which would provide the pleasures of sitting in a café with suitable adult supervision. Concerns were raised over the exposure of young people who lived in the Holborn and Kings Cross districts of Central London. Young people in Holborn were within easy walking distance of the West End, the location of many public houses, nightclubs and general decadence; Kings Cross was then a centre for prostitution. Social workers were concerned that, by hanging around in the same cafés as

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[28] LMA ACC 1888/91 LCSS Youth Cafe Club, Report on Evening Refreshment Centres, 16 April 1946.

prostitutes, pimps, gamblers, the intoxicated and other dubious types, the young were vulnerable

to aping their behaviour or being recruited into sex work and the like. Proximity to these cafés

of 'doubtful reputation' was exacerbated by a lack of youth clubs or other facilities for the

young. The proposed café club, to be funded by the council's education and youth budgets,

would be run by someone who had training or experience in youth work, and 'an interest in

young people, together with an ability to win their confidence'.[29] What was to be offered was

benevolent, supervised consumption, with discreet steerage away from the pleasures of other

forms of consumption, a form of moral rescue. This would not necessarily be aimed at the mass

of young people, but those who were not otherwise involved in youth work or making their own,

constructive, leisure activities.

This desire to police young people's informal use of these commercial social spaces

continued through the 1950s and 1960s. This was fuelled in the 1950s and 1960s by university-

trained social and youth workers, who were keen to move away from more traditional methods

of youth work – the formal, organised club or the uniformed organisation – to try to appeal to

those young people who were excluded from or who excluded themselves from these groups.

These youngsters were known as 'unclubbables' or later 'unattached youth', and outreach with

them came to be known as 'detached' youth work.[30] In late 1947, a discussion group on the

needs of such young people was established in East London, led by a probation officer and two

voluntary youth workers, all of whom had come together through the networks provided by the

university settlement movement, which had been involved in youth work since the 1880s.[31] The

group's discussions about what to do with these young people 'at risk' led to various outreach

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[29] LMA ACC 1888/91 Youth Cafe Club, 1946. Cafe Clubs. Report of the Joint Sub-Committee of the Borough Youth Committees of Holborn and St. Pancras, 18 June 1946

[30] Accounts of such work includes: Barbara Ward, "The Role of a Detached Youth Worker," in *Debate. A Collection of Professional Papers on the Future of Youth and Community Work in the 1970s*, ed. Youth Service Information Centre (Leicester: Youth Service Information Centre, 1969); Mary Blandy, *Harvest from Rotten Apples. An account of experimental work with detached youth* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1971); Alistair Cox and Gabrielle Cox, *Borderlines. A partial view of detached youth work with homeless young people* (Leicester: National Youth Bureau, 1977); Mark K. Smith, "Detached, street-based and project work with young people," in *The Encyclopedia of Informal Education* (London: YMCA George Williams College, 2005).

[31] M. Lloyd Turner, *Ship Without Sails: An Account of the Barge Boys' Club* (London: University of London Press, 1953). 13.

experiments that began from thinking about the spaces where these 'unclubbables' were congregating in the place of a more traditional youth club environment. Having seen a number of young men spending their time at a coffee stall, the voluntary youth workers started to befriend them, and went as far as buying their own coffee stall – if they were later refused a licence for it by the local council.[32] Other members of this group were, however, able to develop this idea of using the spaces and places young people used in order to reach them, as was seen in the Paddington YWCA London Coffee Stall Project in the later 1950s and early 1960s.[33] Again, these projects were trying to tackle the more marginal youth, rather than influence the mass of youngsters.

The Dulwich College Mission, based in Elephant and Castle in South London after its foundation in the 1880s, experimented with setting up their own 'teen canteen' in 1955. This canteen took its inspiration from the United States, where the Rotary Clubs of America, amongst others, had set up their own 'teen canteens' to set up an alternative to the commercial milk bars.[34] The teen canteen was reliant upon grants from the London Parochial Charities foundation, as it was not financially self-sustaining.[35] This canteen had more appeal to young people in general. It was, however, predominantly used by boys, who usually came along in large groups. Generally, canteen openings passed without incident, if the manager remarked upon the potential for violence to erupt, as evidenced in the youngsters often bringing bicycle chains and knives with them.[36] A survey undertaken by the manager found that only ten percent of the canteen users earned more than £7 per week: for most, their leisure pursuits revolved around the canteen, going to the cinema a couple of times a week, walking around the streets and perhaps dancing.[37]

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[32] Peter Kuenstler, *Learning from Community: Oxford House in Bethnal Green, 1940-48* (London: Oxford House and the Settlements Social Action Research Group, 2004). 40-41.

[33] See Mark K. Smith, 'M. Joan Tash, youth work, and the development of professional supervision,' in *the encyclopedia of informal education*, http://www.infed.org/thinkers/tash.htm, London 2007 Correct at 24 January 2012

[34] For example: Photographs, *The Rotarian*, 66:4, April 1945, p.39; 'From barracks to Youth Center', *The Rotarian*, 73:1, July 1948, pp.39-41; 'Teen Canteen', *The Rotarian*, 97:2, August 1960, p.45

[35] LMA ACC 1888/102 LCSS Dulwich College Mission Canteen, 'Relations with LCSS', 30 June 1958

[36] LMA ACC 1888/102 LCSS Dulwich College Mission Canteen, Memo 8 May 1958

[37] LMA ACC 1888/102 LCSS Dulwich College Mission Canteen, Memo 10 April 1958

A *Daily Mirror* feature on the canteen uncovered the boys' exclusion from local cafés and cinemas, and the sense that, before the canteen opened, they expected to be unwanted and therefore bored.[38] These were working-class teenagers, but they were very far from the affluent, 'teenage consumers' of Abrams' imagination. The teen canteen provided a sympathetic space for them to express themselves, without the strictures of youth club activity programmes or a harsh set of rules.[39]

Café experiments continued throughout the 1960s. In Bethnal Green, a London Youth Committee worker and the Warden of Eastbourne House, a community centre, used the local cafés to make connections with young people, again, in this case, the smaller group of young people who were not deemed to be making good use of their time. They did this subtly, taking their time to build up a relationship, allowing the young people to initiate conversations.[40] Here, the young people who associated in the cafés and on the street corners of Bethnal Green were seen to be dangerous, and to require careful handling, with the building up of trust. In due course, the social workers were able to ascertain that these young people wanted a non-commercial space to use – at least some of the time – and that they felt excluded from the existing services.[41] The social workers took over a disused church hall, enlisted the help of the young men in doing it up, and gave encouragement to some of them to start using local youth clubs, whilst working to spark the interest of those they described as the 'hardcore'. This was funded in part with grants from the LCC and the local borough council. With some of these more recalcitrant youths, the means of doing this came through an appeal to their interests – motorcycles and scooters. After checking the legitimacy of ownership and the licences for the vehicles, the social workers took the group to a racing track at Cricklewood, on the outskirts of London. The youths then set up their own garage for working on their scooters, as well as for

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[38] Miles, 'There's hope among the teacups'.

[39] On the rules in youth clubs, see discussion in Bradley, *Poverty, Philanthropy and the State: Charities and the Working Classes in London, 1918 - 1979*: 110-1.

[40] LMA ACC/1888/091 London Youth Committee minutes 1957-1963. Monday 1 July 1963. Agenda item 5, Appendix A, G.H. Jones, Experiment in Bethnal Green 1961 to December 1962, p.1

[41] LMA ACC/1888/091 London Youth Committee minutes 1957-1963. Monday 1 July 1963. Agenda item 5, Appendix A, G.H. Jones, Experiment in Bethnal Green 1961 to December 1962, p.1

socialising.[42] Again, this was a small-scale project aimed at those deemed to be in greatest need of support, rather than attempting to change the social lives of young people on the whole.

The Bethnal Green experiment outlined here was clearly about diverting young people from their 'problematic' use of commercial leisure spaces into more congenial non-commercial spaces. Other projects, such as the YWCA Coffee Stall in Paddington, used a commercial space to befriend young people, and then as a means of supporting the young, particularly in terms of helping them to access the welfare services they needed. The coffee stall opened in June 1959, and the young people gradually came to accept the team running it as people who were genuinely interested in helping them rather than a 'police front' – if some of them thought it was a tax dodge instead. The stall workers soon found that it was not just 'unattached' young people who wanted to connect with them, as they faced a stream of lonely adults from nearby bedsits, who 'returned night after night for coffee and a pie, a shilling for the meter, or change for a telephone call, and often found it difficult to stop pouring out their life stories'.[43] For the stall workers, this was in conflict with the requirements of their project funding, but it illuminates the point that personal consumption is primarily a social act. Buying a cup of coffee requires social interaction on both parts, and the congeniality of the exchange plays an important role in encouraging the customer to return. To go to a café to buy something to eat or drink is to force a social interaction – and generally a respectful one – and those adults who saw young people's patronage of cafés as being corrupting and/or disruptive was overly narrow.

The Hoxton Café Project was likewise an attempt to try and engage with those teenagers who were excluded from youth clubs and either hanging around on the streets or using commercial cafés. The café grew out of previous efforts in this regard, which included a club based on a barge on the Thames at Wapping and a club in Hoxton, and was supported by leading figures in the East London voluntary work scene, namely Lady Cynthia Colville and Basil

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[42] Ibid., 2-3

[43] LMA ACC 1888/100 LCSS Youth Coffee Stall Project. Coffee Stall Project Report, 1960-63, pp.1-3

Henriques, both of whom had served as magistrates at the East London Juvenile Court.[44] The

capital outlay for the project had come from the Gulbenkian Foundation, the London Parochial

Charities and the LCC grants fund, whilst the workers' salaries were paid through an Inner

London Education Authority grant.[45] The café opened every evening, and provided the usual

café fare – if its intended audience was the young people of the area, rather than adults.[46] Yet

this was not the critical difference between this café and the others in the area. Rather, it was the

way in which the young people's behaviour was not controlled in the café. Although the

manager would intervene to stop the most anti-social behaviour, on the whole, the young people

were allowed to do what they wanted in that space. The principle was not to be judgemental

about bad behaviour, or to require the young people to follow a strictly regimented programme

(as would happen in one of the clubs in the local area), but rather to let the young people make

decisions about their behaviour and impact on others, and by modelling respectful behaviour. By

treating them in this 'adult' way, the young people's behaviour improved.[47] The Hoxton café,

much like the Teen Canteen in south London, created a safe and empathetic space in which the

young could act out, and like the Coffee Stall project, gain access to the public services they

needed. It was also a project that needed to be supported by charitable or local government

funding, as there was no way it could otherwise be financially viable. By this point in the 1960s,

the emphasis in youth work in London was less on keeping young people away from bad

influences, but more on encouraging those on the margins to build up their confidence in dealing

with the mainstream.

The café was a space in which young working-class people's presence was contested, and

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[44] See Turner, *Ship Without Sails: An Account of the Barge Boys' Club*. [44] *The Hoxton Café Project, Report No.1* (London: Hoxton Café Project, c.1963)

[45] *The Hoxton Café Project, Report No.1* (London: Hoxton Café Project, c.1963) p.3; H.M. Holden, *Hoxton Café Project: Report on Seven* Years (Leicester: Youth Services Information Centre, 1972), p.6

[46] Barrie M. Biven and Hyla M. Holden, "Hoxton: Informal Youth Work in a Cafe Setting," in *True Pretences. Psychodynamic work with the lost, the angry and the depressed*, ed. Barrie M. Biven (Leicester: Matador, 2005), 249.

[47] Ibid., 250-1; 58-9.

in this way, became a site for the politics of youth and identity. Where young people and their interests were embraced, some adults could find fault with the playing of juke boxes or changes in the ways in which food was prepared and served, a signal of a 'England' that was changing. Young people's café culture – and indeed street cultures – could feel to adults of different social backgrounds like a frightening, anarchic world. This spoke to concerns about 'Americanisation' on one hand, but also a generational fear of an unspecified decline. Café culture amongst the young could be as much about actively choosing to spend time in cafés in order to have a more free-form 'adult' form of sociality as much as it could be about being rejected from other venues, commercial or otherwise. When the least affluent teenagers participated in this world, and eschewed more formal and established youth clubs and movements, then the need to provide 'rational recreation' for these young people was articulated by youth workers. Those in need were the least affluent working class teenagers, typically boys, who were more likely to be excluded from the fullest range of entertainments and more likely to be hanging around without suitable adult supervision. Girls were somewhat peripheral to this, if not absent; unlike the boys, there were fewer fears about their propensity to violence and youthful energies. Where the London experiments gain their piquancy for us as historians is the way in which these experiments were very much rooted in the longer traditions of voluntary work that had been undertaken in the capital from the late nineteenth century, through the support they were given from philanthropic foundations as well as oversight from established figures in the voluntary social work field. The contrast between deprived youth in the working class areas of the inner cities and the affluence and bright lights of the centre of London was sharp. As for the young people, what evidence we have suggests that they enjoyed these services, and found them to enrich their social lives, particularly where the 'moral' social work was kept in the background. Where this was the case, it was more about providing an alternative script for those who were excluded from mainstream activities, and an awareness that trying to reach the lonely or the isolated required exploring the spaces in which they moved and engaging with them on their terms, an awareness fuelled by different ways of thinking about how community could be

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constructed. Milk bars and cafés were not merely the places where young people went to dress up and show off; they were also spaces where many had the opportunity to 'do nothing', but casually build up their social skills and become confident outside of the parental home or away from school. If reformers were concerned about the exclusion of young people from the mainstream, then the solution was to try to reach out to them in the spaces in which they felt – at least temporarily – confident in social interactions with others.

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