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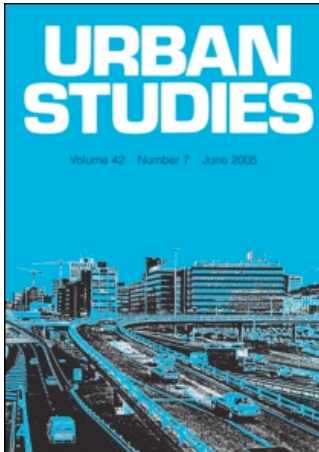
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# ‘Unruly Places’: Inner-city Comprehensives, Middle-class Imaginaries and Working-class Children

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**Summary.** The White Paper on Education (2006) re-emphasises the importance of parents within education policy and, in particular, the key role of parental choice. However, this article argues that parental choice is an inequitable process in which privileged parents are far more likely to have and exercise choice than their less privileged counterparts. The consequences are geographies of schooling which are highly class differentiated. Compounding these inequitable geographies of schooling are invidious representations of inner-city comprehensives as unruly places, characterised by poor performance and bad behaviour. Drawing on Rob Shield’s conceptualisation of ‘places on the margin’ and the voices of working-class students, this paper attempts to present a different perspective on inner-city comprehensives from those represented in dominant middle-class imaginaries.

## Introduction

While there has been a strong geographical literature on the politics of place (Harvey, 1973; Massey, 1991; May, 1996; Shields, 1999), the geographies of schooling are a newly emerging field (Butler with Robson, 2003; Gibson and Asthana, 2000; Warrington, 2005). This paper examines the heavily politicised space of educational choice and London secondary schooling from the perspectives of the working-class students who have to go to the inner-city comprehensive schools that the White middle classes increasingly reject (Alagiah, 2003). Thus, in a key sense it both complements and talks back to Butler and Robson’s important study on the exclusivity of London’s White middle classes. Butler and Robson found

despite the important difference that space makes to the distribution and disposition

of inner London’s middle classes, that they share a common relationship to each other that is largely exclusive of everyone else (Butler and Robson, 2003, pp. 1–2).

They also sketch out the fear and anxiety in relation to education underlying middle-class habitus in inner London

Threat is perceived at every level: the failings of the state educational system, the interaction with non middle-class children at school, on the journey to school, and in the increasingly brand-dominated youth monoculture (Butler and Robson, 2003, p. 4).

De Certeau (1984) writes about the difference between the strategies of the powerful in society, those practices that are capable of producing the outcomes desired and the less

efficacious tactics of the disadvantaged. While the main focus of this paper are the tactics of the less powerful, working-class children (de Certeau 1984), the educational strategies of middle-class families remain central to the analysis. Relational aspects of social class are foregrounded as Black and White working-class children deal with the punitive consequences of being positioned within middle-class imaginaries as 'the other' to a middle-class norm (Reay *et al.*, 2007). So, for example, in the quote below, we can see starkly the positioning of inner-city comprehensives and their predominantly working-class and minority ethnic students within middle-class imaginaries of demonisation:

If you are a canny *Guardian* reader, your children are tucked away in a clean and friendly place of learning, quite possibly at your expense, because you'll want to give the mites a proper start in life. Or else they're huddled in a rotting hulk heaving with demented supply teachers and overseen by a psychotic management team with a mission statement, broken PCs and diplomas in constructive dismissal (Kennedy, 2005, p. 21).

In an earlier work co-authored with Lucey (Reay and Lucey, 2000a), we wrote about processes of psychic distancing and differentiation within the working classes, focusing in particular on the production and organisation of defence mechanisms such as 'keeping to yourself and others like you'. David Sibley argues that object relations theory may provide a useful tool for understanding

the ways in which boundaries emerge, separating the 'good' and the 'bad', the stereotypical representations of others which inform social practices of inclusion and exclusion but which, at the same time, define the self (Sibley, 1995, p. 5).

Certainly, we can see in middle-class feelings of threat (Butler and Robson, 2003) and processes of pathologising the working-class 'other', the construction of powerful emotional defences and boundaries (Hoggett, 1992). In Kleinian terms

internal fear is externalised and security is gained through associating fear with external threat. The 'threat' comes from an array of 'others' which provides protection for the self (Sibley, 1995, p. 6).

In inner London, where the middle classes often live 'cheek by jowl' with some of the poorest sections of the working classes, one of the main strategies by which they maintain and protect their material and cultural distance from these 'others' is through education (Ball, 2003). Beverley Skeggs, writing of class relationships, argues that

the middle class comes to 'know' its inner-city other through an imposed system of infinitely repeatable substitutions and proxies: census tracts, crime statistics, tabloid newspapers and television programmes (Skeggs, 2005, p. 65).

I would suggest that they also come to 'know' the working classes through 'place-images' (Shields, 1991) of inner-city schools as unruly places.

While the middle classes are erecting psychic barriers that also build educational boundaries around themselves and people like them, what is happening to the working classes? Will Hutton argues that the middle classes

work the system to give our children every advantage we can and to keep as far away from the benefit claimant's unruly children as possible (Hutton, 2005, p. 30).

How do such supposedly 'unruly' working-class students understand these processes of avoidance, stigmatisation and exclusion? In particular, how do poor, working-class children in inner London deal with the burden of middle-class representations of working-class lives and the representation of their schools as pathologised spaces? This paper attempts to illustrate, through the children's words, how some children are able to develop counter-spaces of representation that challenge dominant representations of inner-city comprehensives and present more sophisticated, nuanced accounts.

Rob Shields (1991, p. 31) writes about social spatialisation, "the on-going social construction of the spatial at the level of the social imaginary". He argues that social spatialisation is an often-overlooked part of hegemonic systems of thought which in its incorporation of spatial divisions and distinctions

provides part of the necessary social co-ordination of perceptions to ground hegemonic systems of ideology and practice (Shields, 1991, p. 46).

While the social spatialisations of the 19th century focused on the inner city as a pathologised place, today we also have a specific emphasis on inner-city schools as 'places on the margins' (Shields, 1991). And both constructions are highly imbued with class. Beverley Skeggs (2004) argues that representations of the working class are always spatialised. And we can see historical processes of class spatialisation in depictions of the slums in the 19th century and sink estates in the 20th. Currently, both the inner city and inner-city comprehensives are seen to be irredeemably working-class within wider social imaginaries.

As Bourdieu cogently argues:

The vision of the dominated is doubly distorted: first because the categories of perception that they use are imposed upon them by the objective structures of the world, and hence tend to foster a form of doxic acceptance of its given order; second because the dominant strive to impose their own vision and to develop representations which offer a 'theodicy' of their privilege (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 16)

This paper attempts to open up alternative spaces of representation, that challenge dominant constructions of 'the way things are' in our contemporary educational world of choice and markets. The aim is to work against 'doxic acceptance' and the 'theodicy of privilege'. As David Sibley (1995) reminds us, power is expressed in the monopolisation of space, both educational and geographical, relegating weaker groups in society to less desirable places. We can extend the questions Sibley asks in relation to geographical places

and apply them to the educational context. For whom are particular educational places? Whom do they exclude? And how are these particular prohibitions maintained? The intention is also to understand what sense the subjects, the children themselves, make of these inequitable distributions? How do children, and in particular the working-class losers in the educational game, experience and articulate the social spatial exclusions that operate in the sphere of secondary schooling? And what creative responses are they able to generate?

### The Research Study

The study was carried out in collaboration with Helen Lucey. The fieldwork was conducted in 8 primary schools across 2 London education authorities, and the 19 secondary schools to which their pupils moved. We conducted focus groups with 454 10–11-year-old children in which we discussed, amongst other things, their impressions of local secondary schools, how they found out about and chose a secondary school, how they felt about those choices and how some of them coped with not getting a place in their preferred choice of school (Lucey and Reay, 2000; Reay and Lucey, 2000b). We explored with them their fears and fantasies in relation to this key transition in their lives and observed the kinds of practical and emotional strategies they employed to make sense of and lessen the anxieties this move provoked (Lucey and Reay, 2002a). We then selected a smaller sample of 45 children whom we interviewed individually in their last year of primary school and followed across into their respective secondary schools. These children were all interviewed at least twice in their first year at secondary school, as were their parents and teachers. The social class of the children was determined through parental occupation, although in the case of our core group of 45 children we were also able to collect information on parents' educational levels and housing tenure from our interviews with their parents.

Castells (1977, p. 169) writes about the ways in which the contradictions of class

society are expressed concretely in the inner city through the formation of residential spaces and housing zones. These contradictions also find expression in geographies of schooling as schools in relative close proximity serve very different class and ethnic populations and generate very different success and failure profiles (Grace, 2006). The power of these invidious hierarchical geographies of schooling was evident in all the focus group transcripts. All 77 focus groups brought up the issue of demonised schools, using a wide range of derogatory terminology to describe them; terms that conjured up images of excreta; of 'crap', 'rubbish' and 'shit'. Processes of what we have called demoralisation and idealisation (Lucey and Reay, 2002a) were endemic across all the focus group interviews and played a key part in children's understandings of and relationship to secondary school markets. These processes need to be understood as operating at interconnecting levels: structural and social as well emotional and individual. Social class, patterns of immigration, racism, geographical location and exclusivity connected powerfully with individual and group defensive psychological processes such as splitting and projection in the construction of good and bad schools (Lucey and Reay, 2002b). Profoundly implicated here were assessments of the self and the construction of collectivities and communities and this had difficult consequences for children who went on to attend demonised schools (Reay and Lucey, 2003). There were six comprehensive schools (three in each borough) that were routinely demonised by children: Chiltern, Reecebrook and Sutton Boys in Ashbury and Deerpark, Saxon Road and All Saints in Eastcote.

Location within the borough was key in determining who ended up in a demonised school. Beckwith primary school in Ashbury and Greenfield primary school in Eastcote were particularly invidiously located in this respect. Fifty per cent of the pupils at Greenfield and 45 per cent of those at Beckwith ended up in one of the six demonised schools in the two boroughs. And of the 98 children across the whole sample who went

to demonised schools, 95 per cent were working-class. Middle-class children rarely end up in demonised schools and in nearly all of the cases when they did, they moved on when a place became available at a school with a 'good' reputation.

Processes of social spatialisation are reinforced through "place-images" which come about through "oversimplification, stereotyping and labelling" (Shields, 1991, p. 47). Oversimplification, stereotyping and labelling were all evident in the vast majority of the interviews we carried out with middle-class parents and children, for example

You get lots of muggers in the schools in this area (Simon, White English middle-class boy).

Chiltern is like a rubbish dump school all the girls who go there are slags (Emma, White, English, middle-class girl).

All the kids that go to Sutton Boys smell, they're all tramps (Marcus, White, English, middle-class boy).

My mum said if I go to Chiltern I'll turn bad cos all the kids there are bad (Matthew, White English, middle-class boy).

If Hamlyn doesn't take me, my dad's going to appeal and if they still don't take me I have to move to Oxford because he said all the schools here are rubbish (Arabella, White, English, middle class girl).

There are brilliant schools but they are miles away. The schools around here are crap (Roxanne, White, English, middle-class girl).

Evident in the quotations are the ways in which the middle-class children construct non-empirical, *gestalt* constellations of good and bad places. As Shields points out

Real places are hypostatized into the symbolic realm of imaginary space relations in which places are infinitely shaded with connotative characteristics and emotive associations (Shields, 1991, p. 264).

There are similarities here with van Zanten's (2003) findings in relation to White middle class living in close proximity to socially and ethnically mixed schools in Paris. They too expressed high levels of anxiety and fear about places populated by class and ethnic 'others'.

Similar non-empirical, *gestalt* constellations of good and bad places were also evident in what working-class children said about the schools to which they were going. However, for them, the power of social spatialisation and place-images in constituting feelings and understandings about these schools and their students centrally implicated the self rather than 'others'. While the White middle-class children quoted earlier moved out of the local area to attend more distant schools that were seen to be good, or according to Roxanne 'brilliant', the vast majority of the working-class children were left to attend schools that in the pupil peer-group consensus were deemed to be 'rubbish'.

We've only got rubbish school around here. The kids that go there are well bad (Marcia, Black British, working-class girl).

The further the school the better the results, but the nearer the school the worse (Darren, Black British, working-class boy).

There's not many good schools in this area, hardly any, far away schools they are better (Fahima, Bangladeshi, working-class girl).

Contained within all three quotes is the implication that the locality in which these children live and the schools within it are 'not good enough'. These three children and the five who are the later focus of the article, all lived on inner-city council estates. Inner-city areas, and particularly local authority estates, just as much as inner-city comprehensives, are constituted as 'unruly places'. There are evident parallels between the places where these working-class children live and the schools they attend; both are represented within middle-class and wider social imaginaries as demonised repositories for social waste (Reay and Lucey, 2000b; Watt and Jacobs, 2000). As Wacquant (1993) found in

relation to both the French and American ethnic poor in the inner city, the area these children live in is experienced as a shame; both shaming and shameful. Yet, once the children in our study had moved on to the schools they had earlier deemed to be "not good enough" or even "total rubbish", they invariably engaged in a complex psychic and spatial recoding of 'demonised' educational places. Most striking was their constant struggle to preserve a sense of themselves and their schools as "good enough". Lefebvre (1991) differentiates between representations of space, those dominant understandings that are central to forms of knowledge and truth claims, and spaces of representation, discursive spaces offering "complex re-coded and even de-coded versions of lived spatialisations and veiled criticisms of dominant social orders" (Shields, 1991, p. 54). We can glimpse such spaces of representation in all the interviews conducted with working-class children who had moved on to demonised secondary schools but such recoding emerges most strongly in what the five working-class children, introduced below, say about their secondary schools.

#### *Re-representing 'Unruly Places'*

I am going to concentrate on the secondary school experience of five students I interviewed who had all been in the same class at Beckwith primary school. Mustafa, Kirsty, Jordan, Shaun and Lindsey all went on to one of the six demonised secondary schools in our study (Reay, 2004). Lindsey went to Phoenix, Shaun to Sutton Boys and Mustafa, Kirsty and Jordan to Chiltern. For all these children, apart from Lindsey, these schools represented second choices and, in two cases, their third choice. Kirsty burst into tears on finding she had failed to get a place in her first-choice school and had been allocated a place in Chiltern. Her mother recalled that "she ran up the stairs, slammed the bedroom door and screamed 'I'd rather die than go to that school'". Shaun was Irish working-class (see Reay, 2002), Lindsey was White English working-class and Mustafa

was an African refugee from a middle-class background. Both Kirsty and Jordan were mixed race and working-class. (Kirsty has a Black British father and a White English mother, while Jordan's mother is Trinidadian and his father Irish). Lindsey, Shaun and Jordan lived in lone-mother families, while Kirsty and Mustafa lived with both parents. Shaun, Lindsey and Mustafa and their families were reliant on state benefits. All these children were interviewed three times over the course of their first year at secondary school. Shaun and Lindsey were also interviewed in the first term of their second year. Parents (all mothers) were interviewed once, as were the year tutors in the three schools. Shaun, Lindsey and Mustafa all lived on the same large, 'sink' council estate. Kirsty and Jordan both lived on a smaller, low-rise council estate that was viewed as slightly less 'rough' than the sprawling high-rise estate the other three children occupied. I have already discussed the interesting parallels between the places that these children live in and the schools that they attend. Both are represented as unruly places. Children and young people living on inner-city council estates are constructed both as 'at risk' and a potential risk to others (Reay and Lucey, 2000a; Watt and Stenson, 1998). The places where they live are perceived to be failing socially (SEU, 1998), just as the schools they attend are seen to be failing educationally.

I want to examine now how these five children, with their range of very different responses to the prospect of moving on to secondary school, deal with such invidious social spatialisations. All five went to schools that were at or near the bottom of LEA league tables. All three schools were also undersubscribed; one was in special measures, while a second had recently been closed down and opened under a new name. So how do these five young people variously manage schooling that their pupil peer group had condemned as "total rubbish", "full of tramps", "really rough" and "one of the worst schools in the world". Shaun went to the school condemned for being "full of tramps". In the fifth

interview I carried out with him at the end of year 8, he conjures up a very different place-image from those prevalent in middle-class imaginaries:

Sutton Boys isn't the best school in the area but it ain't the worst. I'd say it's like in the middle. Yeah, not good or bad, like medium, well sometimes a bit bad but not always. We have some very good teachers and you can get on with your work if you try ... Other kids diss it, but they don't really know what it's like.

Here we can see a complex, at times contradictory, interweaving of ambivalence, defensiveness and pride. Shaun's words are powerfully reminiscent of Savage *et al.*'s (2001) northern sample who just wanted to be ordinary and much of this last interview with Shaun is permeated with his desire to claim ordinariness for his school and its pupils.

Similar impulses were also evident in what the other children said. When I asked Kirsty, after she had spent a year in her comprehensive school, to describe the average child at Chiltern she said "kind of ordinary". Lindsey had a slightly different response that attempts to reclaim her school and its students from the stigmatising associations of roughness

*Author:* So how would you describe the average child in your school?

*Lindsey:* A mixture of a lot of things, a bit loud but sometimes a bit quiet and successful, maybe, I hope.

*Author:* Do you remember Jordan saying it had lots of rough kids?

*Lindsey:* Yes, but I don't think that's right because I'm not from a very good background because around my area there's always police up there and there's lots of violence and drugs but we've got a nice flat. We live in a block of flats that's very unhygienic and scruffy but inside we've got a nice flat so you can't say rough just from the outside.

Here, we have a repositioning and opening up of spaces of representation (Lefebvre, 1991). Lindsey expresses a reflexive, nuanced

understanding that disrupts dominant representations of inner-city comprehensive schools and the predominantly multiethnic working-class children who attend them. What Lindsey reveals is the partiality of dominant representations of 'place-images' (Shields, 1991) that work to conceal the complex heterogeneity that characterises schools in areas with a multiplicity of ethnicities and myriad gradations of poverty and affluence jostling side by side. As Lindsey—and also Shaun—makes clear, the result are complex differences and differentiations, not schools populated with 'smelly tramps', 'slags' and 'muggers'.

Jordan, Kirsty and Mustafa all went to the same inner-city comprehensive; one described in the national tabloid press shortly before they started as a 'drug dealers' paradise' and 'riven with gang warfare'. This, and in particular, a similar article in the local free newspaper that all three children had read, was very anxiety-inducing for them and they talked about the 'threat' of drugs and drug dealers extensively in the earlier interviews. As Jordan agonised

It's well bad, all the kids say that it's full of druggies and loads of kids deal and stuff and what if they force me cos you can get beat up if you don't do what they say.

Mustapha picks up the same theme, drawing on the example of a boy he knows who already attends the school

I was asking my dad about it cos say one of my friends who goes to Chiltern with me and then when we become teenagers he decides to sell drugs what shall I do? And he said we'll talk about it if it happens but it worries me and I really wanted to know because I do have a big friend and he's my best friend at Chiltern and he might be older than me but I play with him and he protects me but then say he starts drugs then who will I go to.

There is both a poignancy and an attempt to grapple with complex moral dilemmas in both boys' texts, but underpinning the two quotations is also an overriding sense of

Chiltern as a risky, unsafe place to be. It is extremely difficult for children like Jordan and Mustafa to challenge place-images (Shields, 1991) of inner-city schooling and step outside the dominant representations of schools like Chiltern. Yet, after a year at Chiltern that is what all three children had begun to do through constructing a complex, nuanced picture of their school that included good as well as bad aspects

*Author:* So how do you feel about Chiltern now you've been here for a year?

*Kirsty:* I feel quite alright now and it's not too bad. Like the kids we all get along nice and the teachers are quite friendly.

*Author:* You said before you came it was full of bad kids.

*Kirsty:* (laughing) No there's quite a few good kids and lots in between. I don't want to move school anymore.

*Mustafa:* the most important thing for me for year 8 is to get a good reputation.

*Author:* Great and what about your school because before you came here you told me it had a bad reputation?

*Mustafa:* I don't think that's right any more because it's not all bad. It's got good things as well as bad things.

*Jordan:* My mum told me it was a bad school.

*Author:* And what do you think now you've been here for a year?

*Jordan:* I think it's a good school most of the time. It's a bad school when there's a fight because everyone goes—'run for it'. And everyone goes running to the fight. But the good thing about it is the education. The education is good.

All five children expressed ambivalence and equivocation about their schools. They were engaged in a tactical rehabilitation of places the middle classes avoided. Yet, there was a strong recognition of the stigma associated with going to a sink school and, at times, an abhorrence mingled with fascination at the deviant behaviours of a small minority. This is evident both in what Jordan says above and Shaun's words below:



Some boys, yeah, in English yeah, some of the kids never shut up, never, ever shut up. Like, today, we were supposed to get out for lunch at ten past one, because all the bigger kids push in front of us, but because everyone was shouting and everything and I am the one that always goes—shut up, behave. So whenever I tell them to shut up they are scared of me and they shut up, but then this boy Ryan he always comes back and says something, so we have to stay in. He always pushes it. They all show off. Because Jay, yeah, this year, I think he's had more fights than he did out of all the time at Beckwith, so far, because like, today, yeah, that boy Ryan picked up a chair and Jay stood on the table and flying kicked the chair into the kid's face and then punched him and he fell back on the floor. And like David is encouraging him. He was going—go on Jay, go over there and punch him in his face. And when they were fighting and everyone was going—go on Jay, go on Jay. They can't just sit down and ignore it or try and break it up. And I just got sick of it cos I'm the only one trying to get on with my work.

Particularly vivid here is the pain and difficulty of bringing together working classness with educational success in inner-city working-class schooling (Reay, 2002). Combining the two generates psychic costs, involving individuals not only in a considerable amount of academic labour but also a degree of psychic reparative work if they are to avoid what Bourdieu terms “the duality of the self” (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 511). For Bourdieu, the combination of working-class background and educational success often generates a habitus divided against itself, both deeply ambivalent and consigned to successive allegiances and multiple identities. And both ambivalence and a confused sense of self are evident in Shaun's words.

From what these children say, it is apparent that experiences of going to demonised schools are messy and complicated rather than monolithic. However, we can also see

clearly the processes of reframing, recalibrating and refocusing that Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) identify in relation to domestic cleaners. The children are reframing their schools in order to transform their stigmatised properties, they are recalibrating in order to magnify the schools' redeeming qualities and refocusing in order to overlook any remaining stigmatised properties (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999, p. 423). As Shields (1991, p. 277) asserts, “margins can also be positions of critique” and all five children are engaged in an attempt to open up the dominant social imaginary to new visions. They are challenging hegemonic representations of educational space through their own localised spaces of representation. At the same time, there is no getting away from the consequences, both psychic and material, of being positioned at the bottom of the secondary school market. There are similarities with the Black ghetto-dwellers in Chicago about whom Wacquant and Wilson (2005) write. They too are evolving and striving against formidable odds to survive and to improve. And we can see in their narratives a compelling drive towards a useful integration, connection and reparation. Yet, while they attempt to make good what is invariably depicted as bad they still remain losers in the educational game.

## Conclusion

Geographies of urban education have increasingly become political geographies of polarisation and blame. Recent research has found that English secondary schools are now as socially divided as those in the US and that new policy proposals, which give schools increased power over which pupils they admit, will increase social segregation even further (Jenkins *et al.*, 2006). As Webber and Butler (2005) argue, introducing further freedoms for schools runs the risk of “allowing middle-class parents and schools to choose each other, leaving those from poorer backgrounds stranded in an increasingly segregated system” (quoted in Taylor, 2006, p. 2; see also Webber and Butler, 2007, in

this Issue). As Shields argues, margins such as the 'sink' comprehensive schools that are the focus of this article, become signifiers of everything 'centres' deny or repress. In these centres "self-absorbed and entrenched groups inflate their opinions to ostensibly universal proportions" (Shields, 1991, p. 276). One consequence is that middle-class imaginaries, shaped by government and national and local media, conjure up inner-city comprehensives as places of ill-discipline and disrepute; certainly not suitable for 'children like ours'. Yet

places do not possess singular but multiple contested identities. Place-making is shaped by conflict, difference, and social negotiation among differently situated and at times antagonistically related social actors, some of whose networks are locally bound, others whose social relations and understandings span entire regions and transcend national boundaries (Smith, 2001, p. 107).

Too often the working classes, those with 'locally bound networks', are silenced in dominant discourses of urban schooling (Reay, 2006). To counter "the itinerary of silencing rather than retrieval" (Rose, 1993, p. 5), I would suggest that there is a crucial need for an exploration of the place-images held by those excluded in dominant accounts of places and spaces (May, 1996; Rose, 1994). If we will only listen hard enough, there is a grounded, yet nuanced and sophisticated reflexivity to be found in working-class understandings of the inner city. We also find challenges to dominant representations of space and place-images. The working-class children in the research study have a very different metropolitan habitus from the one that Robson and Butler (2001) elaborate in relation to their middle-class, inner-city gentrifiers, but one that has an equally important, and less divisive, part to play in the making of the urban in the 21st century. As Lucey and I have argued in earlier work (Reay and Lucey, 2000a; see also Warrington, 2005), space needs to be made for working-class understandings of locality and place

within academic accounts in order to counter the hegemony of middle-class versions. Otherwise, we will continue rarely to move beyond representations of deficit and pathology in relation to the urban poor. Relatedly, there is a pressing need to enact a far more radical version of social justice than those currently available through dominant discourses. Chris Haylett argues that

A politics of social justice needs to address more than structural or even distributional issues of inequality. In particular, it needs to accord positive meanings and value to working classness on the basis of something more than labour market utility, in order that welfare might be remade as a site of cultural dignity and economic justice (Haylett, 2003, p. 69).

If we are to move to a position where positive meaning and value are accorded to working classness, we first need to counter the invidious representations of the urban poor and the places they inhabit as 'unruly people in unruly places'. This requires positive processes of social reclamation and repositioning, and above all an engagement with rather than an avoiding of the classed and racialised 'other'. Stereotypes are generated through social distance. As Shields asserts, social spatialisations have

a degree of robustness, despite internal schisms and margins of opposition, which allows them to be treated as social facts. They have empirical impacts by being enacted—becoming the prejudices of people making decisions (Shields, 1991, p. 261).

That is why it is important to listen to what the children and young people who are consigned to such schools have to say about them and to bring their views and experiences to the attention of those with the power to make decisions. The children's accounts reveal the ways in which the margins can also be positions of critique, spaces of representation capable of exposing "the relativity of the entrenched universalizing values of the centre" (Shields, 1991, p. 277).

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