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The Palaces of Comfort, Consolation and Distraction - The Pie and Mash shop as a performative space of a contested London working class memory

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The Palaces of Comfort and Consolation -

The Pie and Mash shop as a performative space of a contested
London working class memory.

Stuart Freedman

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of
Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to interrogate and clarify the history and culture of London's traditional but fading and largely forgotten eel, pie and mash shops. In doing so the work examines their cultural conduit, the adjacent and evolving identity of the cockney whose contested memoryscapes have, I suggest, great contemporary political and cultural relevance in an age of populism and Brexit.

The work excavates a tracing around the shops' absences in historical literature. It situates their establishment within the dying breath of an older, popular street culture and the birth of a new London working class, centred around unofficial street markets and in a synchronous dance with the ideological accession of the bourgeoisie.

The thesis employs the biological notion of a *taxon* to illustrate the shops' evolution largely defined by the class-demotion of their clientele that mirrored the changing cartography of the city. By the late nineteenth century, this work argues, the eel and pie shops had become a pillar of a respectable London working class culture whose hyper-local solidarities revolved around micro-class divisions of work and negotiated bourgeois codes of propriety as part of a 'culture of consolation' that has remained largely impenetrable to outsiders.

The study explores this concomitant cockney identity which became, partly through bourgeois theatrical ventriloquising, a figure of imperial incorporation. This eventually came to represent a particular type of 'ordinariness', subsequently reconfigured around the gains of a Welfare State and a national economy that continues to be periodically valorised according its usefulness to capital at times of political stress.

Utilising sensory ethnography and memory studies the work explores the landscape and territoriality of the contemporary eel, pie and mash shop. It interrogates the rituals and complex, often competing and polyphonic memory inscriptions which memorialise a largely post-colonial nostalgic melancholia around the loss of fantasy

of a British omnipotence. The thesis argues that the shops and their simulacra-like reincarnations amongst the cockney diaspora in the Essex new towns offer an insight into the changing notions of taste and class within the convivialities of a unique but broadly closed heritage of proletarian culture as a zone of resistance in the neoliberal city.

Contents

Contents	iii
Acknowledgements	vi
Author Declaration	vii
Definitions	viii
Methodology	x
Introduction	1
Overview	1
1.1 A walk down the Broadway	2
1.2 (uncharted) History from below	4
1.3 Co-ordinates	8
1.3.1 History	8
1.3.2 Identity	10
1.3.3 Food Culture	13
1.3.4 Memory	15
1.4 Chapters	17
Chapter 1. Origins	22
Introduction	22
1.1 Monstrous Wen	24
1.2 “What has become of the pieman?”	26
1.3 Through a plate glass window of respectability	33
1.4 Food as cipher	41
1.5 Hunger and the ‘Great Unwashed’	44
1.6 Eating out and translatable spaces	49

1.7 Defeat and the culture of consolation	54
1.8 Cat's meat and glue for the gravy	56
1.9 Modernity, space and identity	59
Conclusion	62
Chapter 2. The Theatre of the Cockney	65
Introduction	65
2.1 The cockney in history	67
2.2 Dickens and the descent of the cockney	73
2.3 The Music Hall as distorting mirror	76
2.4 The coster confusion	79
2.5 The character refined	82
2.6 The character reflected back	84
2.7 The Pearlies	87
2.8 Modernity, ordinariness and the first decline of the cockney	90
2.9 The cockney keeps calm and carries on	97
2.10 Disillusionment and the spoils of war	100
Conclusion	105
Chapter 3 The Defensive Trench of Empire	108
Introduction	108
3.1 The 'whitening' of the London working classes	110
3.2 From the terrace to the tower block	119
3.3 The kids are alright	129
3.4 The unmodern	138
Conclusion	146
Chapter 4 Tastes and Space of Resistance	149
Introduction	149
4.1 Resistances from a stubborn past	150
4.2 No mate, this is a pie shop...	156
4.3 Too heavy to steal	162
4.4 The lower classes smell	164
4.5 The eel and the East Ender	169

4.6 A Regime of Disgust	174
4.7 A Working Class Taste and Space	178
Conclusion	184
Chapter 5 The Cockney Saudade	187
Introduction	187
5.1 “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are”	189
5.2 “Nothing tastes as good as the past”	202
5.3 Don’t mention the War...	210
5.4 We’ve had our jellied eels and our glass of beer	217
5.5 The pie shop archipelago	224
Conclusion	235
Conclusion	237
6.1 Overview	237
6.2 Summary by chapter	237
6.3 The unseen	242
6.4 The palaces of comfort and consolation	243
Bibliography	246
Appendix	309

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Thanks to Joe and Kim Cooke and all the shop owners and customers who generously allowed me to interview them and record their thoughts and memories here.

I hereby declare that all of the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Stuart Freedman, 11 April, 2023

Definitions

This thesis contains some problematic terms which I will briefly define.

White Working Class

I use this particular descriptor because I can find no suitable alternative. This simple designation in physical terms on the one hand refers to the historical constituency of the eel and pie shops that I write about. On the other however, I realise that it has become a very loaded term. It is increasingly a code for a 'forgotten white tribe' (Collins, 2014) that concentrates on race rather than class position and plays to the latest narrative that multiculturalism has 'failed'. More it seeks to erase those members of the British working class that are non-white, falsely pitting them against those who are. This ignores the overwhelming evidence that inequality is a complex matrix of simultaneous social, economic and structural disadvantages and that ultimately, as my thesis recounts, the British working class were 'made' white to reframe the nation as a racial singularity (Bonnett, 1998, Virdee, 2014). In all of this is the resurgent nostalgia for empire and at its heart the fear of miscegenation and loss of identity.

Bourgeois/Middle Class

I use these terms interchangeably throughout the thesis and follow Raymond Williams' (1983: 45-49) difficulty in employing the notion of 'bourgeois' in a British context of 'upper', 'middle' and 'working class'. However, my usage coincides with his in pointing to the idea that bourgeois is a cultural distillation of an ideological hegemonic ruling class that came to dominate Britain in the nineteenth century.

Popular Modernity

This derives from Mark Fisher's (2014: 23) work on culture. It refers to a dialectic that sits between the current and the experimental. Although Fisher usually employed

this critically in terms of popular music, I use it more widely to capture the cultural moment from the 1960s until its defeat by the forces of neoliberalism in the 1980s, that saw elements of the British working class emboldened by post-war educational gains to make culture and to valorise that culture as 'ordinary'.

Saudade

This Portuguese word signals to a nostalgic longing for something that is lost. I use it to partly describe the contemporary memory script of the cockney, always I suggest a nostalgic creature in its late nineteenth century music hall iteration. There seems to be no English word that captures this kind of longing, but many other cultures have this concept, notably the Welsh with their notion of *hiraeth*.

Methodology

Given the almost complete absence of historical and sociological work concerned with London's fading eel, pie and mash shops, I decided early on to employ what might be called a panoptical approach. This was an attempt to address the subject matter from several simultaneous disciplinary angles in order to identify and clarify the significance of the shops, both in terms of their origins but also their contemporary meanings. My compass points were largely but not exclusively historical, sociological and (sensorially) ethnographic utilising extensive field work and a core of semi-structured interviews from different shops and customer communities that reflected the geographic spread of the enterprises.

The first objective in my research plan was to excavate the historical processes that led to the emergence of the shops and placing them in wider cultural and social contexts. I used existing scholarship (Thompson, 2013 *et al*) to trace the process of change in class structure, emanating from transitions in clientage, to delineate an interstitial class of London traders revealed in the role of pastry cooks that catered to a changing city.

I used numerous contemporary accounts of the city from this period (Heine in Stigand, 1875; Pückler-Muskau, 1832; Smith, 1857; Sala, 1859 *et al*) and contemporary scholarship (Bailey, 1997; Spang, 2001; Mennell, 2003; Tames, 2003; Winter, 2013; Assael, 2018) to contextualise and chart the evolving culture of the city.

However, at the same time I wanted to address the accepted and conventional narrative of the beginnings of the shops in the popular imagination. All of the meagre, contemporary, 'populist' writings on the shops (Clunn, 1995; Smith, 1995; Hawkins, 2002) seemed to (incorrectly) suggest that a venture owned by Henry Blanchard at 101 Union Street in Southwark and opened in 1844 was the primogenitor of all the current enterprises in an unbroken gustatory tradition.

My primary source work utilised *Kelly's Post Office Directories* and *Pigot's Trades Directories* at the London Metropolitan Archives which merely ascertained that this was indeed the first shop 'recorded' as an eel and pie house. The vagaries of the listings of eating places in the directories have been well documented (Assael, 2018) and indeed an image in the London Metropolitan Archives main print collection (see Fig.1 in appendix) clearly showed a Blanchard's pie house in the more salubrious location of Fleet Street in a watercolour that dated from 1835.

I made extensive use of the British Newspaper Archive at the British Library to examine newspaper texts and crucially, advertisements that predated the Kelly's entry by several years. I used these figures to suggest the rents referred to, suggested a capital investment achievable only by a strata of the lower middle classes. I utilised this resource to exhaustively chart mentions of pie shops and their concomitant identity within emergent cockney culture until the early twenty-first century.

I further used census material (both via London Metropolitan Archives and Ancestry online) to excavate Henry Blanchard's family records and additionally retrieved similar records for the Cooke, Antinks and Manzi families via resources from British History Online, part of the Institute of Historical Research at the University of London. Booth's Poverty maps were accessed via the LSE digital library.

In terms of food history and adulteration I researched, via the British Library, contemporary journals (amongst many others, *The Caterer and Hotel Proprietor's Gazette*, *The Hotel Review and Catering & Food Trades Gazette*, *The Coffee Tavern Gazette*, *The Journal of Food Thrift* and *The Anti-Adulteration Review, Food and Sanitation*). I utilised several modern PhDs (via the LSE, the University of East London and Essex Libraries) to chart the city's gustatory and linguistic histories and interrogated the Bishopsgate Institute and The Hackney Archives for fragmentary references to the shops.

I utilised period literature (especially Dickens) and modern scholarship (Stedman Jones, 1971, 1974 and 1989) to chart the city's changing identities, interrogating the historical cockney as well as its relationship to the music hall.

I focussed especially on two periods of literature: that of the Cockney Novelists and the post-war London novel to chart a cockney modernity as well as the more recent writing of Sinclair and Moorcock. I drew on a wide variety of filmic cultural products (from cockney 'kitchen sink' dramas to documentary) for which I extensively utilised the British Film Institute Library. For artworks, I utilised London Picture Archive, the London Metropolitan Archives and the Réunion des Musées Nationaux (Paris).

My experiences during the course of this research were crystallised within a sensory ethnography contained within the F. Cooke shop on Hoxton Street over numerous and extended visits. The work has been additionally informed by my own personal memorialisations around the culture from which I come and my own past memorialisations of several (now largely closed) shops. Additionally, I drew on one my own previous books about the shops (*The Englishman and the Eel*, 2017).

I have extensively used social media, especially Facebook (especially groups that centre around London memory communities including Bethnal Green and pie and mash), Twitter and Instagram to interrogate contemporary memorialisations of the culture that surrounds the shops and the evolving identity of cockney.

Finally, the cornerstone of this thesis has been interrogations of personal history and memoryscapes that capture real, working class voices for the first time in relation to the shops and their culture. I conducted field visits and semi-structured interviews with more than thirty contemporary eel, pie and mash shops and their owners who generously shared genealogies, reminiscences and historical artefacts from their pasts. I interviewed dozens of customers from a diverse age range and from both London and Essex. From this I drew from a core of twenty six comprehensive interviews.

I additionally interviewed the photographer Chris Clunn and the film maker David Furnham.

Because of Covid-19 many of these interviews were conducted using internet telephony.

Introduction

Overview

Militant nostalgia is on the rise across Britain.

For London's traditional working class communities this trend is synchronous with the closing of the city's once populous eel, pie and mash shops.

These spaces, largely forgotten and often seen by outsiders as anachronous, are however vital repositories of largely undocumented but increasingly contested communal memories whose physical buildings, food and rituals speak of identity and authenticity.

In this thesis, I examine and attempt to clarify the largely unwritten history of these, London's first working class restaurants. I attempt to situate the shops as temporary private spaces within the neoliberal city and examine them as sensory repositories of historical and contemporary significance, contextualising them within ideas of food culture, gastro-nationalism and a post-colonial melancholic haunting.

In doing so I examine the communities that use the shops (and eel eating) as theatres, temporal anchorages and totems of authenticity in a constructed, performative but increasingly retrograde ritual culture, largely closed to outsiders.

In this way I interrogate an evolving working class London identity and examine the changing notion of the idea of 'Cockney'.

1.1 A walk down the Broadway

In January 2020 the Cooke's eel, pie and mash shop in Broadway Market closed its doors for the last time.

Opened in 1900 by Robert Cooke, it had been one of East London's most iconic pie shops. Double-fronted in glass and marble (renewed after the Second World War due to the Luftwaffe's close attentions) its interior tiling was a delicate yellow picked out with sky blue detailing. Up until its closure its floors had always been freshly covered in sawdust, its large distinctive mirrors regularly polished and behind the long marble serving counter on the right, a poster still advertised the John H. Stracey fight at the Royal Albert Hall in 1972. The shop retained a gas mantle on its wall. Now shuttered and empty, it looked sad and desolate surrounded by fashionable coffee shops, artisanal bakeries and an organic supermarket. Cooke's was a place out of time.

Standing outside the shop on that freezing morning brought me back to my own Hackney past of the 1970s, where the streets were still navigated by corrugated iron hoardings, rough pubs and the fading technicolours of greasy spoon 'caffs'. In those days, I'd sometimes walk past the shop after school. I remember it as always busy. Steamed windows. Warmth. My family weren't customers but over the years with friends, I'd visited this and the Cooke's family's other shop in Dalston - a grand, cavernous cathedral of a working class eatery opened in 1910. The spaces of these shops felt Victorian. Safe but staid and strict; a place where everybody knew the rules and each other.

The Broadway and London Fields, the area that it served, was at this time an almost forgotten part of the capital. Once a thriving working class street market it was now a shadow of its former self. Most of the shops were closed and boarded and only a handful of stalls sold fresh vegetables or tinned food at reduced prices. Vandalised cars littered the streets. Its desolation seemed to represent a wider landscape of urban working class London at the time. Cockney London. Jelled eel London (Sinclair, 2004: 95).

Squeezed between the enduring semi-criminal poverty of Bethnal Green and the unreachable wealth of the City, Hackney had been the site first of steady Jewish migration out of the Whitechapel *shtetl* and then wholesale Caribbean settling from the 1960s onwards. During the 1970s Hackney was a culturally contested zone full of vandalised Brutalist tower blocks but also decaying Victorian terraces. A space caught between the National Front and the Angry Brigade.

David Furnham's neglected documentary film, *Noted Eel and Pie Houses* (1975), captures the devastation of the market during this period. The Broadway, desolate, broken, but clinging to life. Yet inside the Cooke's shop, it's lively and full of people chatting and eating: the space a portal to a previous generation, its memories and its rituals and customs.

The large light industrial base of the city and its concomitant working class population of the inner city areas had, by the early 1970s, been mostly lost and along with it the certainties of the post-war paradigm of job security and the promise of decent housing for all. In 1972 The Housing Finance Act introduced by Heath's Conservative government replaced the requirement for councils to charge tenants 'fair rents' with those of 'reasonable' rents linked to the private sector (McCulloch, 1982). Pandering to the "myth of the over-subsidised council tenant" (Sklair, 1975) this legislation required local authorities to make a profit from their properties and reduced government subsidies. In practice it meant that poor inner-London boroughs like Hackney could no longer afford the considerable upkeep of its (largely ancient and substandard) housing stock and this fell into further disrepair. Hackney, like much of inner London, was a post-industrial zone divided between blue collar workers, a precarious self-employed workforce with a "relaxed attitude to convention and legality" (Medhurst, 2023: 181) and an increasing proportion of its labour force "working in financial and business services" (Hammett, 2004: 2).

In this interstitial period between the end of what became known as the *trente glorieuses* and the neoliberal ascendancy, Hackney had become an arena for earnest, middle class gentrifiers (Raban, 1974) and the squatting movement (Proll, 2010). The Broadway and its surrounding streets became home to some of these newcomers, legal or otherwise. Locals looked on aghast at some members of this

strange tribe walking around barefoot through the market. Beads. Tie-dye. Odd-shaped French cars. Co-ops and vegetarian food. These squatters, these 'do-gooders', wanted to live amongst the working classes as an act of solidarity rejecting "consumerism... the suburb or luxury flat" (White, 2008: 65).

As part of a 'long march through the institutions' (Dutschke) some of these newcomers became teachers, some social workers, others, artists. They brought with them notions of a different kind of community and one not solely built around the iconography and memories of Empire and the last war that still loomed large in popular culture.

The presence of these newcomers and their new convivialities (Gilroy, 2004) as part of an emergent culture were simultaneous (Koselleck, 2004) to the temporalities of a residual, older proletarian culture and were a portent of the changes and challenges that Hackney and indeed much of working class London would evidence in the coming years. Their residence coincided with a longer-term process that came to be known (colloquially but problematically) as 'white flight' and between the censuses of 1971 and 1981 nearly 10% of the total population of Greater London had decamped to the Essex new towns or the Kent coast (Champion and Congdon, 1987, Medhurst, 2023: 160). Those that hadn't or couldn't move away made the dwindling number of pie and mash shops like Cooke's increasingly defensive spaces that would eventually become code for a certain type of working class Londoner: white, generally poor, and increasingly out of time with the coming neoliberal order and its modernity.

1.2 (uncharted) History from below

I came to this thesis because London's eel, pie and mash shops are seemingly invisible. Until very recently the shops seemed to have disappeared almost entirely from London's cultural texture and its high streets. Forgotten, ignored or avoided. Mentioned only when one of their dwindling number permanently closed; a local newspaper would invariably write an article bemoaning the loss of another part of London's great 'heritage' and repeat the same half-truths and hearsay about the shops' opaque origins and fare.

Yet this *unseenness* is not new. These working class spaces once ubiquitous at the *fin de siècle* and the start of the twentieth century, like the culture they contained, were, my research evidences, hardly ever cited, explored or critically examined. Virtually unknown outside of the capital, they were part of a *common* knowledge of working class Londoners, but they were only ever fleetingly seen or referred to tangentially in cultural texts. Although there have been several notable documentary pieces like Norman Cohen's psychedelic *The London That Nobody Knows* (1967), and Furnham's already mentioned *Noted Eel and Pie Houses* (1975) that feature them, all centre on the shops' *pastness*, always asynchronous with the present.

During my research, I have been unable to locate more than a handful of references to the shops in post-war literature or on film. Only Franc Rodham's *Quadrophenia* (1979) lingers at any length in the (inevitably now closed) A. Cooke's shop in Shepherd's Bush. The scene regards the pie shop where Jimmy meets his 'greaser' friend Kevin as an ordinary, unremarkable space within a contemporary working class temporality as part of a 1960s popular modernity. This treatment contrasts to myriad proletarian spaces reclaimed as 'cross-class' like cafés, fish and chip shops, public houses or bingo halls. These are sites of 'pleasure and leisure' (Langhamer, 2007) retrieved and celebrated by bourgeois interest and academia in the name of 'resurrectionism', 'retro-chic' (Samuel, [1996] 2012) or simply 'heritage' (Wright [1985] 2009). Even football, that most working class of London's sporting life, became the site of widespread bourgeois cultural colonisation in the 1990s.

A central question that this work addresses, then, is why have London's eel pie and mash shops remained largely unexplored? The thesis suggests several intersecting conclusions that stem directly from issues of hegemony and Bourdieusian class 'distinction'. However, one enveloping explanation lies at least partly within historiography: the way that the lives of those that are owners and customers of the shops have been recounted (or ignored). And crucially, by whom.

Until perhaps the second half of the twentieth century in Britain, history and its telling was charged with the description of great men, monarchs and governments oblivious to the encounters of Marx, Durkheim or Weber. Although Lucien Febvre, the founder of the French *Annales* School along with Marc Bloch, used the notion of 'history from

below' in the 1930s it wasn't until the Communist Party Historians Group of amongst others, Eric Hobsbawm, Edward Thompson, Christopher Hill and Raphael Samuel sought to uncover the revolutionary tradition of a 'people's history' in post-war London that British historiography turned to examine in detail the lives of the ordinary and the everyday. Enjoined by the Society for the Study of Labour History (1960) and then The History Workshop later in that decade, the British working class entered contemporary historiography through what became known as 'social history' at roughly the same time that its post-war victories and popular modernity began to be undone by the forces of late capital.

From the 1970s onwards, in line with wider questions about the changing social landscape, postmodern and post-structural concerns, and the identity of oppressed groups especially in terms of race and ethnicity, historians increasingly wrote about the British working class not as 'revolutionary agents' but as objects of study on their own terms. Many were seemingly disappointed that the British proletariat had not fulfilled its radical role. Class, as Ellen Meiksins-Wood (1986) suggested, became 'de-centred'.

Although the 'cultural turn' in history opened the door to some working class historians, the pie shops appear to have remained liminal spaces. Seemingly untranslatable, they have I suggest been guarded by a "dense, inward-looking" (Stedman Jones, 1974: 499) defensive habitus born of an historical cultural repression. However, these are zones that through their insularity and partly perhaps because of London's specific artisanal working class heritage, have in some measure, resisted the delegitimising attempts of bourgeois culture.

Neither Gareth Stedman Jones nor Raphael Samuel, whose historical investigations into East End life are central to my work, include any systematic interrogation of these spaces that were a loci for the communities that used them.¹

¹ There are several brief but inconsequential mentions of eel stalls in Samuel [1981] 2016.

The pie and mash shops were, and in some senses remain, markers of an historically significant but closed territoriality and culture that at one time thrived in hyper-local street markets and loyal, tight-knit (but now largely romantically mythologised) communities. The shops, encased in neighbourhood ritual and lore, made more mysterious I suggest through the process of wholesale demographic change, have become additionally concealed in plain sight. They are however I propose, a partial gateway, somewhat obscured by contested memorialisation, that allow us to view a largely lost and marginalised culture and, in that way, pose significant questions around class and identity.

This work is the first rigorous academic research into the history, culture and significance of London's eel, pie and mash shops and seeks to explain and contextualise the popular conjecture, assumptions and myths that surround them. The thesis seeks to provide a comprehensive history of the spaces, the food served, and the etiquette and rituals held within. It additionally attempts to sketch the contours of that music hall caricature of the London working classes, the cockney that is so central to the story of the shops.

The thesis further seeks to examine both the contemporary and historical eel, pie and mash shops at the turn of the twenty-first century and in doing so to discover not only their uncertain origins but also their recently renewed political, social and cultural significance. It does so through the interrogation of dozens of shops between London and Essex and by way of their spaces, their sights and their smells. It does so by archival research and numerous semi-structured interviews with patrons and customers that interrogate memory as well as a sensory ethnography informed by my own past.

The approach of this thesis is then an intersection of the personal and the political. My own upbringing and now interstitial class position offers, I believe, a unique insight into the textures of the pie and mash shops and the changing culture that envelops them.

1.3 Co-ordinates

This thesis charts the eel, pie and mash shops around four compass points. I utilise the locations of history, identity, food culture and memory in a panoptical approach to excavate the subject.

1.3.1 History

Because of the paucity of historical literature around the eel, pie and mash shops and the working class culture which they contain, it was necessary to find co-ordinates that would lead me into their absence. In this way I have synthesised existing scholarship, with my original research to extend our understanding of the circumstances of their origins.

My work is bounded by a largely Marxian analysis and delimited by the broad contours of the Nairn Anderson thesis (1962). This argument, honed throughout the 1960s and 1970s offers that British capitalism's development was rendered incomplete by its precocity and the continuing presence at its core of elements of the *ancien regime*.

Rather than initially link the emergence of the shops to the efforts of one particular nineteenth century family in isolation as custom has it, I place their evolution concomitant with a much earlier contestation within England's proto-industrial landscape. In this I largely use E.P. Thompson's scaffolding which charts the contestations of cultures between those of the elites and the poor that emerged during the eighteenth century. Here, economic rationalisations engendered by a rising mercantile middle order challenged the paternalist bonds of the 'old corruption'. Wage labour became freer, more mobile and "concentric rings of clientship" (Thompson [1980] 1991: 39) began to break away from the orbit of the great houses. Significant amongst these for this thesis were pastry cooks many of whom in time would themselves become small masters in London's pie trade. This in itself, although beyond the immediate bounds of this study, is a noteworthy and

under researched arena of the capital's food history that was simultaneous with the growth of the city and increasing urbanity.

I link this development to the new and self-conscious urban identity (Olsen, 1976) that was beginning to emerge in the dying days of Georgian London. This identity was concomitant with the accession, ideologically and culturally, of a middle class whose rise I chart as a synchronous dance with an emergent London proletariat. It is the latter's demonisation that I suggest is a significant factor in the defensive culture of the contemporary eel and pie shops. In this I use Pierce Egan's writings to explore the ending an older popular culture that was a dwindling asymmetry (Burke, 1978) between the elites and the poor.

Henry Mayhew's mid-century navigation of the capital's fluid, poverty-stricken street communities records the final traces of this culture amongst the penniless roving street pie man whose livelihood had by now been decimated against a backdrop of unemployment and continuing (mostly Irish) immigration. I link the pie man's changing customer base with an emergent bourgeois culture of *laissez faire* that equated poverty and morality but also with rigid attitudes to outdoor eating.

In that vein, the thesis links for the first time, work on the contestations around the early Victorian street that I contend encouraged the emergence of settled pie shops. This complicated process connects Stedman Jones' (1971) work on casual labour, James Winter's (2013) work on street culture with recent scholarship (Kelley, 2019) on London's traditional markets around the idea of modernity and nascent consumerism. I suggest that the process of the 'clearing' of London's streets and the subsequent attempts to force the city's myriad trades to 'move inside' was a simultaneous moral crusade against the 'old, popular culture' (Golby and Purdue, 1984) and a negotiation around a new rational planning directive that had its roots in a Lockean ideology based on cementing property rights for rentiers. I offer that this 'internal' urban enclosure was linked to, and was the culmination of, a process started much earlier in the English countryside. Further, my thesis proposes via Stedman Jones ([1971] 2014) that these attempts to control the crowd (Rudé, 1964) evidenced a developing working class culture influenced by those forced to leave the street trades (Jankiewicz, 2012) and exhibited, emergent class solidarities (Brodie,

2001). These populations would I conclude, form the customer base of the new eel and pie shops that were suffering a problematic class descent as the bourgeoisie retreated from the city's centre.

My thesis reconfigures the history of the eel and pie shops and proves that the accepted notion of the first recorded pie shop is erroneous. My research, by interrogation of sources, establishes a much earlier date to these enterprises and refutes the earliest formulation of the shops' fare held within the traditional lore of one the oldest pie shop families. Further, this work casts doubt upon the accepted notion that the shops exhibited an unbroken gustatory tradition and suggests that this is an echo of the invented conventions (Hobsbawn and Ranger, [1983] 2017) of the *fin de siècle*.

My thesis further significantly utilises the biological notion of a *taxon* to describe the myriad of London eating places, that would eventually contribute to the final, classic late nineteenth century eel, pie and mash shop. I employ Rebecca Spang's (2001) work on the restaurant and utilise Brenda Assael's (2018) writing on London's culinary specificity to examine eating for the city's working classes based initially around the new temporalities of capitalism. Eventually I advance that this emergent proletarian culture became based around street market hyper-locality, and synchronous with entertainment and the opportunity to demonstrate and perform respectability. This aligns with David Harvey's (2004) notion of "pacification by spectacle" and Stedman Jones' (1974, 1982) notion of consolation within the 're-making' of the working classes.

1.3.2 Identity

Underpinning much of this thesis was a realisation that an excavation of the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops would be incomplete without examination of the historical identity of the cockney. This figure was simultaneous to the development of the shops and ultimately formative in their 'classic' late Victorian incarnation. It is a version of this cockney that is valorised within the contemporary spaces of the shops.

Because it became increasingly clear that the cockney of the pie shop was a constructed creature born of a palimpsestic identity coterminous with London's urbanity, I sought firstly to historically contextualise its origins within early emergent tensions between forces of capital in towns and older feudal forms of rural power. In this way I again use Thompson's ([1980] 1991) wider framework of eighteenth century class negotiations between the 'patrician and the plebian' and, along with the cockney's particular and direct spatiality traced the evolution of its specific 'cant'. Stedman Jones' (1989) delineation of this emergent identity of modernity as an interstitial (specifically London) class of trade and commerce was central. Cockney at this point I argue was a lived and geographic pivot that evidenced the coexistent struggle between the bourgeoisie and those beneath them: between those with authority and those without. I use Gregory Dart's (2012) work to audit the literary cockney of the late Georgian period and Charles Dickens' reportage (and fiction) to clarify the cockney's subsequent class demotion. This was parallel to the simultaneous rise of the lower middle class consumerist dandy of the 1867 franchise extension and the youthful 'counter-jumper' - at this time some of the likely eel and pie shops customers.

My thesis examines the demonisation of the informal street economy in this period as part of a complex cultural shift in which the landscape of the costermonger, who would inherit the sinking cockney moniker, became subversive and largely tarred with the notion of the residuum.

In doing so I explore the dual bourgeois fascination and revulsion for a London proletariat more and more defined by a cartography that circumscribed a zone of exclusion - the 'abyss' of the East End. This was increasingly delineated by a moral formulation surrounding the subversive (cultural and political) potential of dirt and disease.

My narrative argues the cockney was ingested into a national project during the New Imperialism to constrain potentially explosive domestic social forces and this was done largely through coding transmitted by behavioural forms of popular song in the music hall (Scott, 2002), public houses and the eel and pie shops that draws upon Stedman Jones' 'culture of consolation' (1974). To examine the process, I utilise

Hall's (1973) work on the dissemination of hegemonic messaging as a guide to the 'encoding' of patriotism in the creation of a sanitised, sentimental cockney plastered on top of previous layered incarnations.

This thesis argues that the cockney henceforth became periodically useful to its hegemonic creators as a motif and a warning siren that a certain type of Englishness was under threat. Crucially I suggest that the co-option of the cockney's alleged stoicism in the face of the Blitz is the basis for a contemporary memoryscape and the haunting of the present day austerity nostalgia.

Once I have established the historical co-ordinates of the cockney identity, my thesis returns to the late nineteenth century to contextualise the 'whitening' of the Victorian working class (Bonnett, 1998) as a defensive trench of empire (Cohen, Qureshi and Toon, 1994, Schwarz, 1996) which underscores the character from this point forward. I locate the contemporary identity within the contentious frame of a new ethnic group (Jones, 2011).

I argue that the cockney did not die during the immediate post-war period with the Mrs Mop character as Stedman Jones (1986) suggests but was responsive to and simultaneous with an ongoing popular modernity and national economy birthed within the Welfare State. In this I suggest that the cockney, rather than simply fade away, continued its role as a nostalgic conduit to capital but evolved multiple valences that spoke to an increasing emphasis on popular culture, age, choice and especially individuality consistent with an historical 'proletarian entrepreneurialism' (Hobbs, 1998). In this, and synchronous with multiculturalism and an 'ordinary cosmopolitanism' (Gilroy, 2000), a new parallel multi-racial cockney has emerged around a 'structure of feeling' (Williams, 1961) that is a looser group identification of numerous cultural signifiers.

Finally, I argue that the contemporary reimagining of the cockney via a decamped East End in Essex has narrated the 'slow cancelation of the future' (Beradi, 2011) that is the neoliberal ascendancy through forces of the popular Right by appealing to race and their alleged cultural abandonment. The contemporary reimagining of the

eel and pie shops as a totem of a lost, white working class London is, I argue, anchored within this nostalgic haunting.

1.3.3 Food Culture

Although this thesis has food at its core it is not about food *per se*. Rather it quantifies food both as a signpost to a historically specific working class culture and cuisine and as an element that is “central to a sense of identity” (Fischler, 1988).

That said, historical surveys of London’s food within the period of study have been invaluable. Heal (1990) contextualises food and the rituals that surrounded it in early modern England and I have drawn heavily on Henry Mayhew (1851), George Dodd (1856) and George Sala’s (1859) work from the mid nineteenth century. In addition to primary magazine and newspaper sources, George Sim’s reportage (1889, 1902) was excellent background.

The unpublished work of D.J. Oddy (1970) and Katy Pettit’s (2009) thesis was crucial in mapping the working class diet and food landscape in the late nineteenth century as was Maud Pember Reeves’ (1913) early feminist work amongst the Lambeth poor. Olive Malvery’s *fin de siècle* journalism (1906, 1908) that contains her memoirs of working in an (unnamed) eel and pie shop were priceless finds that incidentally interrogated the cuisine and interior spaces of working class eateries. John Burnett’s work (1979, 2004) has been essential in delineating the hierarchies and type of eating places that Londoners used as have Stephen Mennell (1995) and Richard Tames (2003). James Vernon’s (2007) work on hunger was significant as was Lesa Scholl (2017) on Gaskell’s writing.

Scholarship around the specific constituent parts of the fare of the pie shop was less common but Peter Gurney’s (2009) work on potato consumption during the Famine of the 1840s was particularly useful. Additionally, Janet Clarkson’s (2009) very general history of the pie was helpful but Tom Fort’s (2002) work on the eel was essential in general, especially on its historic links to the diet of Londoners.

There is a certain amount of scholarship on what might be called the foods of multiculturalism and in this Panikos Panayi (2008) on foods of origins was useful as was Tony Kushner (2003) on the food of Jew and gentile in the East End. These however, like much from the academy, barely mention eels, pie and mash and so, this thesis is an attempt to address to that absence.

I chose to examine the lived textures of the contemporary pie shops for the uninitiated through a series of semi-structured interviews and a sensory ethnography. This methodology allowed me to relate intimate aural, olfactory and visual sensory experiences and correlate them to historical and cultural coordinates. My starting point was the anthropological vocabulary of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955) and Mary Douglas (1975) that described the classifications of food, much of whose 'rules' the pie shop meal ironically 'breaks'.

I used the sociology of Erving Goffman (1949), Ray Oldenburg (1999) and Anna Marie Steigemann (2017) to define these largely unexplored spaces within the performative register of retail and the restaurant but my main co-ordinate was the work of Michel DeCerteau (1988) in relating the obscure rhythms, rituals and rules of the shops.

In terms of sensory ethnography, a major coordinate was Sarah Pink's (2015) anthology of the discipline as was the work of Alex Rhys-Taylor (2017, 2020) that utilised Teichmüller's notion of the 'democracy of the senses'. I used the sense of smell to map a working class aroma and in doing so excavated several early to mid-twentieth century novels that described *taxons* of proletarian eating places and their dubious perfume. I use the sense of taste to examine the notion of disgust and the gustatory de-centering of the eel via Douglas (1966) and Deborah Lupton, (1996)

I use Daniel Miller's (2008) formulation that food is an object-bridge between ourselves and the people we love. In that way I use food as a link between personal and political identities (Radstone, 2010).

Pierre Bourdieu (1986, 2011) and his notion of classed taste and *distinction* was a crucial signpost in determining a working class taste and space. This I explored

largely through the work of Beverley Skeggs (2004, 2016) to loosely outline a working class arena that is the pie and mash shop. Here, class is defined through fluid and symbolic matrices that negotiate the limits of bourgeois meaning and accountability in the form of microresistances in manners and humour, limited in its field of exchange value.

Finally, I use the field of memory to interrogate the food of the pie shops utilising it chronologically in conjunction with New Labour's hysteria around working class eating and corporality during the early Blair years. This I cite as a trigger for political and cultural anger. In this I utilise the food-memory coordinates of Sutton (2001, 2005) but especially the work of Nadia C. Serematakis (1996) on sensory interiority and the dialogical and reciprocal processes of the socio-material field outside of the body. I interrogate childhood food memories in conjunction with matrilineity to show why a simple dish like pie and mash has such a profound sensual pleasure and link this with Paul Connerton's (1989) work on the bodily inscription of memory. Lastly, I utilise ideas of gastronationalism (DeSoucey, 2010) to link the *terroir* of pie and mash to what Yi-Fu Tuan (1974) refers to as 'local patriotism'.

1.3.4 Memory

Central to this thesis, in the relative absence of historical and cultural texts, is how the eel pie and mash shops have been memorialised, for what purpose and by whom.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, at the foundation of this theorising is Peter Bromley's (1998) notion that memory is an historical construction, subject to constant revision. This is echoed by Aleida Assmann's (2010: 97) conception that each generation stands on the shoulders of its predecessors whose "... knowledge they can reuse and reinterpret".

I categorise the myriad memoryscapes that coalesce within both the remaining few traditional eel and pie shops in London and their newer counterparts in Essex as polyphonic. I suggest that the shops in divergent locations hold simultaneous

memories that are distinct but synchronous and carry memories of several groups which use them as temporal anchorages (Huysen, 1995) within late capital.

I utilise Jan Assmann's idea of a 'cultural' memory of rites and rituals enshrined in performance within the eel and pie shops along with the idea of a 'communicative' memory, one that is based on the temporal dimensions of lived experience. I suggest that for the shops, the contestations around what they are and subsequently will be, are held between these two points in a 'floating gap' (Vansina, 1985) that moves with the passage of time and additionally between generations. Change within memorialisations is likely evidenced by the outlines of fissures within this gap (Olick, 2003). Appropriate to the contemporary contestations around the identities held within the shops, Duncan Bell's (2003) theorising around hegemonic memory groups invading and capturing the memory landscape by re-narrativizing the past has been particularly useful.

The shops act to stabilise a 'geography of belonging' (Hodgkin and Radstone, 2003) to a largely white, monocultural and inevitably 'better' past and combine with this a notable sense of loss. It is this deficit that was apparent to Pierre Nora (1989) in his notion of *lieux de mémoire*. In the absence of *milieux de mémoire* within modernity these are symbolic sites that are apposite simultaneously to the fading pie shops of cockney London and their simulacra created in the New Towns of Essex and beyond. They capture in shorthand places where "memory crystallises and secretes itself". Crucially as Astrid Erll (2011) offers, these sites can reach forward and backwards to the past and present in memorialisations which are the result of collective reconstructions in the here-and-now (Rigney, 2008). These reconstructions I contend are further evidenced in the spate of problematic and romantic 'recollections' from a post-war generation in autobiography and memoir that signal to palimpsestic, personal memory epochs largely valorising a lost landscape of Empire, post-war gain and national sovereignty. These are partly I believe as Andreas Huysen (1995) suggests, an attempt to "claim some space" within a confusing and increasingly accelerated temporality of modernity.

The shops and the territories that they once represented are in this way arenas of cultural defensive against globalisation, gentrification and historically, multicultural.

They act as sites of memory “as practice - as opposed to memory as fact or essence - history” (Malcolm, 2014). They become self-perpetuating vortices of “symbolic investment” (Rigney, 2008) inscribing and re-inscribing memories that pertain to a political reconstruction of ‘ordinariness’ revealing the contestations between working class memory groups divided between a precariat and those who partially benefitted from the Thatcherite project. However, the shops as sites of memory are unable to heal a rupture between the past and the present and into this void rushes the spirit of nostalgia. This, as Stuart Tannock (1995) suggests, acts as a search for continuity.

I use Svetlana Boym’s (2001) notions of both a restorative nostalgia that seeks recreation of the past within the present and a reflective nostalgia which whimsically lingers over the patina of the time to reflect on the cockney identity within the shops. Here I focus on the cockney diaspora which valorises hyper locality and the “magical recovery of community” (Clarke, 1976) evidenced through pilgrimage to the shops (Fawbert, 2011) linked to the other great working class consolation, football. These sporting allegiances largely mirror the hyper locality of the historical pie and mash shops delineating food-culture boundaries in opposition to the dominant hegemony (Palmer, 1988).

I suggest that these have become arenas of a gastronationalism (DeSoucey, 2010) allied to the reinvigoration of a populist, political ‘common sense’ Right which in some cases uses pie and mash as a symbol of a ‘forgotten white tribe’ (Collins, 2004). I link these memory concretions to a growing public distrust of a political class recruited increasingly from a professional, managerial background, an ‘austerity nostalgia’ (Hatherley, 2016), a partial re-racialisation (Schwarz, 1996) of British politics, the so-called ‘culture wars’ and Brexit.

1.4 Chapters

My first chapter addresses the absence of a satisfactory history of the enterprises that would become the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops.

I contextualise the shops' distant origins within the class exodus of small masters, especially bakers and pastry cooks who served the great houses, to the expanding and new urbanity of Georgian London. Here, some as roving pie men and others as settled shopkeepers participated in the last throes of an 'old' popular culture - the asymmetry of the 'great' and 'little' traditions of the elites and the common people.

I trace the shops' development adjacent to the ideological and political ascent of the urban bourgeoisie and the concomitant contestations over the capital's physical streets and markets. Here, London's working classes acceded to some elements of the new hegemony whilst creating a nascent culture based partly on earlier proto-industrial customs and responses to the new temporal discipline of capital.

I argue that the new pie shops adapted to the middle classes withdrawal from the city's centre by negotiating with modernity and consumerism and eventually becoming eating places for the city's 'respectable' poor within a penumbra of informal markets. These areas were dominated by the costermonger communities whose identity would become intertwined with and essential to the cockney culture that the shops would represent by the start of the twentieth century.

My second chapter recognises the centrality of this identity, eventually adjacent to the eel and pie shops, tracing its historical progression from early modernity to the Blitz. In this I argue that cockney became integral in not only defining the spatiality of a new kind of Londoner but one that exemplified an interstitial class tension largely as a label delineating those without authority. I argue that this was initially between older rural power and emergent urban capitalist forces but eventually delineated a grouping of the petit bourgeoisie in relation to the elites.

Largely through the works of Dickens, I trace the class demotion of the term cockney that came to define a section of the urban poor and in doing so chart its reproduction as a ventriloquised reflection of proletarian culture within the music hall by bourgeois performers. Here, the working class cockney was reified simultaneously as a figure both of good humour, honesty and criminality: between the respectable poor and the worthless 'other'.

The music hall I assert, as an effective hegemonic device (in tandem with popular fiction in late Victoriana) inculcated within London's working classes, bourgeois notions of racial and national superiority. The increasingly palimpsestic cockney identity was further conscripted into the imperial state through franchise extension and, along with popular song, public houses and the eel and pie shops formed a culture of 'consolation' that would become part of the English 'ordinary culture'.

My third chapter contextualises the cockney identity within the notions of whiteness and empire. I excavate how the middle classes classified the 'dark and dirt' of the London poor as part of a moral coding and extended the designation of whiteness to inhibit potentially explosive social forces so as to reframe the nation as a racial singularity. In this way, I argue that henceforth the cockney was periodically used by capital as a largely reactionary and patriotic force and that the eel and pie shops became a loci for this culture. I suggest that the Blitz cockney as a motif became central to the subsequent memoryscape and further into the twentieth century I trace how this was channelled, initially as opposition to American consumerism and an expanding EEC and then, in defence of its post-war welfarist gains, how the cockney was used to bolster the internal colonial frontier.

In the second half of the chapter, I explore the destruction of traditional cockney territoriality and trace, largely through a changing age demographic how the cockney, rather than dying out, developed multiple internal valances around the expanding horizons of choice and individuality via an expanding popular modernity. In this way I argue that by the 1970s the cockney began to simultaneously embody a vigorous low-cultured populism and an upwardly mobile conservative element receptive to and used by an emergent neoliberal right. An increasing internal instability within the identity allied to spatial and demographic uncertainties led to an exodus to the Essex and Kent hinterlands. Here, a simulacra culture had been incubating and it is within this culture that the pie and mash shops would evidence a new political and cultural significance.

My fourth chapter investigates a significant London pie shop primarily using a 'sensory ethnography' to chart the sights, smells, sounds and rituals found within. In this way I interrogate the coded sedimentation of gestures and largely unspoken

rules that link hospitality, conviviality and memory within and upon the bodies of the owners and customers. I explore the cuisine in reference to other British working class foods using archival reportage and contemporary theory. I place the ingredients of the meal within historical and cultural contexts and examine them especially within the parameters of distinction and contemporary notions of disgust.

In the second part of the chapter, I situate the shops and their fare within a nostalgically memorialised habitus of a changed London working class identity. I examine the culture of a performative working class respectability and the particular 'classness' of the shops. I argue that this reflects both a subtle deviation from the refinements of bourgeois dining as microresistances to neoliberal modernity but also inter-class contestations. I suggest that the pie shops might uniquely evidence inter-class differences and how a contemporary London working class might view itself. In this way I challenge the argument that class tastes have wholly declined with modernity.

My final chapter addresses the central role of memory within the shops and the cockney culture they contain. I argue that the memories inscribed upon the contemporary, palimpsestic cockney identity are largely tangled and hybridised, linked to historical hyper-locality and past class solidarities. I refer to these, the results of social dislocation and inter-class competition, as polyphonic. I argue that although cockney memories were largely mediated by each generation apposite to the contemporary hegemony, this process began to break down during the 1990s under a New Labour government that embraced globalisation and accelerated concomitant neoliberal reforms. I argue that the contemporary memory scripts of cockney, performed and reinscribed by a post-war generation, are a melancholia for the gains of the post-war period, an empire nostalgia and the loss of the fantasy of a British omnipotence. These nostalgias I argue are performed through a 'local' patriotism of which the pie and mash shops are a key symbol. I trace the course of this political/personal memorialisation to the under-theorised arena of food and the demonisation of working class corporeality assailed by a culture of distinction within an aspirational managerialism in the context of 'cartel' parties and concomitant to a Third Way and the End of History. Finally, I explore these largely constructed nostalgias adjacent to a 'geography of belonging', the reinvigorated politics of

whiteness and the 'new' cultural minority, the white working class in context of 'class non-voting', 'post-factual' politics, populism and the campaign for Brexit.

1. Origins

Introduction

In this chapter, I will chart and analyse the birth of London's iconic eel, pie and mash shops (as they would become) by placing their development firmly within London's emergent identity during its extraordinary nineteenth century expansion and in relation to its nascent, distinct but compromised working class culture.

Because of the relative paucity of primary material surrounding the evolution of the shops, I attempt to trace the contours of this absence so as to define the cultural, and political space into which they appeared.

The maturation of the shops was entirely concomitant with larger societal changes and was simultaneous to the negotiations with, and then attacks upon, remnants of what has been called the 'old' popular culture (Golby and Purdue, 1984) by an urban bourgeois hegemony. I use Mayhew's roving pieman to illustrate this initial contestation. The pieman's livelihood was just about contemporaneous with the dying breath of what Peter Burke (1978: 28) has called the asymmetry of the 'great' and 'little' traditions of the elites and the common people. Here the former often partook in the performity of the latter but not vice-versa. The pieman's decline mirrored a gradual withdrawal of the urban middle classes from areas delineated by the lives of the new industrial poor.

A major site of this contestation was the physical and ideological control of the capital's streets (Bailey, 1978). The 'clearing' of these streets and the subsequent (physical and metaphorical) 'coming inside' of London's working classes were framed by the elites in terms of modernity, morality and political necessity. They were, I suggest, simultaneous to the demonisation (and simultaneous) valorisation of an increasingly impoverished coster class by the twin nodes of Victorian liberalism, itself part of a longer effort to 'civilise the crowd' (Golby and Purdue, 1984).

These efforts I argue were partly successful negotiations with an emergent proletariat that acceded to some elements of hegemonic control whilst creating their own culture on the remnants of a largely pre- and early- industrial way of life. This was based on notions of access to natural rights, conviviality, hospitality and communality, that had been broken by 'time, work-discipline and Industrial Capitalism' (Thompson, 1967). This new culture, held within dual notions of freedom and respectability, centred largely around unofficial markets (Kelley, 2019) and desperate resistances to economic hardship. These populations became integral to the customer base of the emergent eel pie shops.

My thesis suggest that the original owners of the early nineteenth century pie shops were largely the product of the breaking of the concentric rings of "economic clientship" (Thompson, [1980] 1991) that had radiated out from the great houses during the previous century. The evolving genius of the early pie shops was I argue by mid-century, a recognition and response to a new class of customer that synthesised an entrepreneurial reimagining of the capital's changing consumer culture against a backdrop of shortage and deprivation. This was coterminous during the next decades with the growth of places to eat outside the home for all Londoners, both out of necessity and choice.

I chart the shops' development throughout the nineteenth century as a taxonic evolution that encompassed different food choices, décor and service, part of a systematic commercialisation of the catering business (Tames, 2003) within an eventual accommodation of a partially successful *embourgeoisement* of nascent working class cultures. The evolution of the culture of the eel pie shops this thesis argues was synchronous with the class descent of its client base finally coming to rest in the notion of the 'respectable' working classes. In doing so, the shops eventually created a unique but defensive counter-public constructed around the evolution of a conservative working class community, taste and consciousness.

The evolution of the pie shops into the twentieth century mark an emergent definition and cartography of the social fabric of the capital informed by the forces of modernity and divergent class cultures.

1.1 Monstrous Wen²

In 1827 Heinrich Heine, the German writer and critic, wrote of his sojourn in London. “Everywhere wealth and quality stare at you... [but] ...poverty, pushed away in remote alleys and dark, damp passages, dwells there with its rags and tears” (Stigand, 1875, 1: 290).

Visitors remarked on London’s seemingly limitless docks, the bustle of its people, but also its dinginess, its fogs and its gloom. The German nobleman Hermann Ludwig Heinrich von Pückler-Muskau (in Fox, 1992: 13) found in 1826 that the “...whole City, ha(s) a repulsive sinister aspect, which almost reminds one of the restless and comfortless throng of the spirits of the damned.” He wrote to his wife the following year complaining that fog covered everything, and it was necessary to breakfast with lit candles.

London, now the world’s largest city, was a hard-edged place of commerce. It contrasted in stark terms with the culture of ‘Pantomime and Pageantry’ of the Regency then coronation of George IV (Cumming, 1992). Here was the very caricature of a profligate peacock of the *ancien regime* increasingly out of time with an emergent industrial, entrepreneurial capitalist age. In the first decades of the century, the city was still a mosaic of what had been and what was yet to come; a mixture of Tudor, Stuart and Georgian buildings, rambling dark alleyways and terrible slums competing with speculators’ haphazard attempts at a patchwork of solutions to overcrowding and squalor. It was noisy, with a “universal hubbub; a sort of uniform grinding and shaking, like that experienced in a great mill with fifty pairs of stones...” (Gray, 2015: 322). It was dark, without proper sewerage and its streets were dangerous.

London was an intriguing jumble of the refined and the inelegant, perfectly illustrated in the aging Gillray’s imaging of the bawdiness of the street and Pückler-Muskau’s disdain for the “coarseness and brutality” of the English theatre audience (Pückler-Muskau, 1832, 3: 126).

² Thomas Carlyle to Alexander Carlyle; 14 December 1824; DOI 10.1215/lt-18241214-TC-AC-01.

The 1820s in particular had seen the birth of a new and distinctive London character partly centred around George IV's 'picturesque' reordering of streets but also a literary landscape that "promoted a self-conscious urban identity" (Olsen, 1976: 38). These were the years of patriotic 'euphoria' between Waterloo and the Reform Bill (Olson, 1976). These were also the years when the West End was transformed: the Regent's and St James' Parks were created and monuments such as Trafalgar Square and the Hyde Park arch *et al* were established. The poor were removed but they were not yet objects of hysterical Victorian fear or sickly pity. In this fluid, transitional period, London was still a place where the wealthy might conspicuously attend working class dives in the East End. In Pierce Egan's monthly *Life in London*, Jerry the country gent is accompanied by his sophisticated cousin Tom around the poorer districts of London 'to see a bit of life'. They go to the working class *All-Max* in the East End and report that:

Every cove that put in an appearance was quite welcome, colour or country considered no obstacle ... The group was motley indeed - Lascars, blacks, jack-tars, coal-heavers, dustmen, women of colour, old and young, and a sprinkling of the remnants of once fine girls, and all jiggling together (Egan [1821] 2019: 263).³

They see ageing prostitutes and poor children in gin shops; they enter bawdy coffee houses before retiring to the more class-suitable Almacks. Crucially, they move freely between both worlds before the carefully delineated moral and cultural margins of a later Victoriana.

This kind of urban chronicle, still largely within an eighteenth century literary tradition, finds home in the burgeoning number of satirical magazines and scandal journals that begin to appear, whose readership were an audience of "... apprentices, shop assistants, clerks and other young men who were coming of age in the first Victorian

³ This appears to be one of the earliest uses of 'East End' - contrary to both Peter Ackroyd and W.J. Fishman, who place the place the term much later in the 1880s. See - Newland, 2008: 47.

decade of manifest political and social changes to ride them to new social identities” (Gray, 1982 in Nord, 1995: 30).

It is men like these, of similar class and background that will discover themselves in the mirror of the new publications. They identified with a London life that was alive to the modern and full of opportunity: a formulation of a new strata of the self-made who were both participants in, and beneficiaries of, a reconfigured coal and steam driven metropolis. This class, spectators to the privilege of the wealthy *by proxy*, was beginning to develop its own consciousness and gaining at least a partially invested possession of London’s streets. It is these men, part of the lower-middle classes and the upper working classes with access to employment and at least some meagre capital, who will be the customers and indeed owners of the eel and pie shops as the century progresses.

1.2 “What has become of the pieman?” (Smith, 1857: 201)

The Victorian painter and author J.D. Harding (1851,1:129) had suggested that “The Only true Republic / Is a crowded city street.” This space had always been a sphere for working class life, an open-air theatre of necessity for sustenance, romance and trade, but increasingly by the early Victorian period the street was becoming a contested arena of class privilege and preferential access. The emergent hegemony of the ‘industrious’ middle classes saddled work and productivity to an increasingly Christian probity and the street became a moral battleground. Prefigured by Wordsworth in his *Prelude* and Blake’s *London*, the city’s streets had started to be linked to a defiled physical and moral pollution: a loss of innocence, the horror of female sexuality, prostitution and venereal disease. This linked bourgeois men and proletarian women in an unspoken, secretive, hypocritical and decidedly unequal dance, the very word modified by the contamination of ‘street-walker’ and the notion of ‘woman of the street’ (Nord, 1995).

The Regency thoroughfare had been none too carefully calibrated between pedestrians and traffic, but by the 1830s convention seems to have it that the less salubrious pedestrians like beggars, prostitutes and touts would be literally ‘in the gutter’ whilst on the threshold of that murky realm - between the gutter and the

pavement - would be the 'almost respectable'. These would be the travelling self-employed, the so-called 'penny capitalists', the men selling from carts: the costermongers.

The 1832 Reform Bill had led to increased middle class influence over local government spending. By the 1840s a more utilitarian polity born of a dislike of the chaos and ostentation of the Regency city, a bourgeois fear of disease, the threat of Chartism and eventually Evangelicalism (Green, 1982: 143), sought to implement bylaws which guaranteed pavements as spaces for 'respectable' pedestrians. Symptomatic of divergent class cultures, those in the 'in-between world' were viewed simultaneously as dangerous yet useful; enviably free yet chained to their poverty.

Henry Mayhew's documentation of the emergent, fluid culture of the "urban nomads" who inhabited this realm foreshadows Booth's cartography by decades and his concentration on morality through fascination and fear in pseudo-racial terms is instructive. He carefully characterises the differences between "... the vagabond and the citizen... the nomadic and the civilised..." (Mayhew, 1851: 1). For him, the streets are populated by "wandering tribes" who prey on England's "settled tribes" and are far from the light of civilisation. The worst are distinguished by group physiognomy evidenced by "high cheekbones and protruding jaws", "a slang language" and "lax ideas of property" with an eagerness to "rebel at authority". For Mayhew and his class, despite some evident sympathy for their conditions, these working people are uncivilised and carry no "positive cultural connotations" (Stedman Jones, 1974: 463). The 'street folk', those who roam to sell their wares in this inter-zone and who have these traits in an exaggerated form are almost a "distinct race" in themselves that Mayhew suggests are potentially of "Irish extraction" (Mayhew, 1851: 2). The street is a dangerous arena and is a site ripe for control.

Among these tribes are the wandering piemen. Mayhew does us an enormous service by describing their number, trade and equipment. He calls them "one of the most ancient of street callings of London" (Mayhew, 1851: 195). We learn that they usually make the pies themselves in various guises of meat, eel and fruit and that they work the streets and public houses from mid-afternoon until late at night. Significantly, they are mostly unemployed bakers and they "number about forty in

summer and twice that number in winter” (Mayhew, 1851: 195). They are in steep decline, emblematic of the wider cultural and physical distances between the city’s middle classes and those they employ. After the Great Reform Bill and the New Poor Law (1834), the bourgeoisie increasingly started to abandon the city, its industrial areas and with it their street eating habits. The new Metropolitan Police now patrolled London and a recent class of aspirational, professional clerks increasingly availed themselves of more settled, interior eating places.

By the 1850s the piemen are little more than adjuncts of street gambling: they allow punters to toss a coin to see if they can win a pie or pay a penny forfeit and this seems almost their sole route to income.⁴ Mayhew reports a poor pieman relaying to him that, “Gentlemen ‘out on the spree’ at the late public houses will frequently toss when they don’t want the pies, and when they win, they will amuse themselves by throwing the pies at one another, or at me” (Mayhew, 1851: 196).

One of Mayhew’s interviewees reports an eight-and-a-half-hour day tramping the streets for “1s. 6d., ... and out of that I have to pay 1d for charcoal” (Mayhew, 1851: 196). It’s a far cry from the character portrayed in Hogarth’s 1750 print “March to Finchley” as recounted by *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* (3,15 August, 1851) almost exactly a century later. The writer of the piece describes how the historical pieman was:

... a prominent character in the highways and byways of London. He was generally a merry dog... (who) stands in the very centre of the crowd, grinning with delight at the adroitness of one robbery, while he is himself the victim of another.”

By now, he is a figure of scorn, taunted wherever he goes by animal noises repeating an old but entirely significant trope that his pie-fillings are likely to include old, rotten food - or cat (Mayhew, 1851: 196).

London, now a world city, was a magnet for immigration from Irish famine and from European revolutions. Street hawking was the only option for many of these new

⁴ Dickens regularly uses the tossing for a pie as part of street language - “‘Heads’ as the pieman says” - see Dickens [1836] 2020: 351 and again, Montague Tigg spins a coin “in the air after the manner of a pieman” - see Dickens [1842] 2014: 447.

arrivals, who swelled the ranks of the native urban poor even further during the periods of cyclical unemployment that dominated the British economy from 1843-1911. In this economic climate many piemen had fallen further down the social scale having “merged [with] a dealer in foreign nuts, fruits, and other edibles which barred the suspicion of sophistication” (*Harper’s New Magazine*, 3, 15 August, 1851).

By the mid-century, the itinerant pie-man’s days were largely done. As Meiksins Wood (2017: 67) has it, “... capitalist imperatives were imposed on traditional forms of work ... on artisans still engaged in pre-industrial production no less than on factory hands.” Those processes, that synchronously changed the nature of the street itself, meant that their business had been almost completely usurped by settled pie-shops. “These shops have now got mostly all the custom, as they make their pies much larger for the money than those sold on the streets” (Mayhew, 1851: 214).

The wandering pieman however was a dying subset of a much larger constituency of costermongers who, in turn, were part of a vast army of ‘casual’ labour. Their identity, location and trade would eventually become central to the establishment of the eel and pie shops.

The context of the costers was integral to understanding a London in transition and theirs, at this stage, was a “dwindling subsistence economy trapped within the expanding capitalist system” (Richards, 1990 in Jankiewicz, 2012: 394). Their precarity was structural (an advantage for capital as a residual, ever-present reserve army) and an “alien presence in the midst of mid-Victorian plenty” (Stedman Jones [1971] 2013: 14). Significantly for this thesis, bakers were also part of this precarious pool of labour and “surplus bakers could count on Friday night employment to meet the extra demand for bread” (Stedman Jones, [1971] 2013: 60).

During the first half of the Victorian century, the number of London’s street sellers rose faster than the general population of the city due to immigrants finding nothing other than casual work (Lummel, 2016: 33). Indeed, “[F]or most of the population flooding London streets, selling was a euphemism for begging” (Thomas, 1990: 41). Stephen Inwood (1998: 504 in Jankiewicz, 2012: 395) suggests that during this period perhaps a tenth of London’s labour was ‘casual’.

Some coster occupations were hereditary however, what Mayhew (1851: 3) calls “costermongers proper” and were further distinguished from both itinerant street sellers and the regular tradesmen by the fact that while the shopkeeper served even the humble bourgeois, the street seller almost exclusively provided regular services to the poor.

George Dodd (1856) reports that by the 1850s, largely the result of appalling hygiene and the disorder of busy streets, both the flower, fruit and vegetable market at Covent Garden and the fish market at Billingsgate were redeveloped (Smithfield’s cattle holding and abattoirs were transferred to Islington between the 1860s and 1880s). As the city expanded the poor found themselves located further from these markets which additionally had turned increasingly to the more profitable and efficient wholesale. The coster families had always bought their wares in bulk at these markets and had historically sold them on the move from barrows. Increasingly, they now came together in convenient locations to create local, unofficial markets. The London County Council (LCC) lists perhaps thirty such unofficial markets in the 1840s and Mayhew suggests thirty-seven in 1851 (Kelley, 2019: 1). By the later 1850s the LCC area has more than forty-two and sixty or more by the 1860s (Kelley, 2019: 24). These informal street markets were penumbras of expanding working class districts and the lists of street markets given by Mayhew would inevitably match the later “roll call of slum clearances” (Yelling, 2007: 120).

Vital to the poor, and in turn to the wealthy they served, they were further impediments to municipal attempts to modernise London’s food supplies with new market halls disrupting the “Liberal master-narrative of urban development” (Jones, 2016: 64). They remained a perceived threat to civic authority embodying a stubborn fragment of medieval carnival and performativity; their legal and spatial marginality entwined. As such they were the target of often brutal police enforcement actions (Jones, 2016). The Commissioner of Police, Richard Mayne (1796-1868) was accused of “waging a war on the costermongers” which possessed “all the malignancy of personal dislike” (*The Era*, 1 November 1863: 9). However, the necessity of some class interdependency and the belief in evangelism as a civilising influence likely meant that unlike the brutal, military demolitions of Hausmann’s

Paris, London's modernity was progressed largely "equivocal and piecemeal... based on a conjunction of the old and the new" (Nead, 2000: 6).

Even so, as the physical distance between the bourgeois and the poor increased concomitantly with fear and suspicion, so did the influence of arms-length benevolence with funding of missionary societies. This linked the enforced 'moving inside' (both physical and metaphorical) of the trades and life on London's streets with a simultaneous moral crusade against popular pastimes and amusements. By mid-century, gone were the tea gardens, cock fighting, apprentice rituals and street gambling of a previous age. The sanctions by the Common Council in the City, "under the prompting of its Methodist contingent" (Bailey, 2014: 32) against the famous Bartholomew Fair, dating from 1183, meant that it, along with other fairs closed by private bills, was dead by 1854.

This attempt to 'clear the streets' also constituted a culmination of a kind of internal, urban enclosure cementing property rights for rentiers on the basis of a Lockean ideological project started much earlier in the English countryside.⁵ The failure to 'improve' so-called 'wasted' land (or its commercial value) in this sense meant forfeiting the right to age-old liberties to live, graze, or as here, trade. Especially true of those that sold the watercress, chickweed, flowers or indeed sometimes eels that they sourced from age-old common land in London's greener extremities, these "challenges to their livelihood... [was also] a disruption of their social networks and a challenge to their dignity" (Jankiewicz, 2012: 404). Interestingly, the costermongers whose livelihoods were threatened were in many cases Irish immigrants, the victims of a related 'internal colonialism' practised by English landlords in Ireland.

The conventional view that street trading declined through this process is, however, untrue. The walking (or carrying) street traders like Mayhew's pea-soup seller and the hot-eel man, both of whose fare would, in one way or another be absorbed into the offerings of the nascent eel-pie shops, did eventually, by the later century largely

⁵ Locke follows the writings of Thomas More in his *Utopia* (1516) in expounding his theory of 'improvement' as the basis of property rights against communal, customary rights that interfered with capitalist accumulation. Locke's contention that if property (or land) was being used by 'indigenous' peoples, it could be legitimately colonially expropriated to 'improve' it is entirely concomitant with the reappropriation of market spaces by capital.

go the way of the roving pie seller.⁶ Street markets however, inevitably home to many eel and pie shops as their customer base became entirely working class, continued to grow into the twentieth century. Along with permanent shops these markets absorbed some of this former ambulatory retail business. In 1932, The London School of Economics' *New Survey of London Life and Labour* (an attempted 'update' to Mayhew) reported that stall numbers had grown by fifty percent since the turn of the century and Victoria Kelley (2019: 1, 6) suggests that markets had "reinvented themselves within a consumer modernity."

What appears to have occurred was a negotiation around what Kelley (2019) suggests was the notion of 'informality'. Although street selling remained a thorn in the side of the authorities and large sections of an outraged bourgeoisie, their utility was beyond doubt, and they were largely tolerated. I suggest that these negotiations were in no small part advanced by the costermongers themselves, initially aided (sometimes) by Mayhew's ventriloquising of their struggles (Herdman, 2021). Indeed, although beyond the scope of this study, costermongers, despite their later *fin de siècle* conservative associations appear in this period to have been active around wider issues of suffrage and Irish nationalism (Jankiewicz, 2012: 402). Certainly Marc Brodie (2001: 49) cites coster unions with governing committees that may have been absorbed within the New Unionism of the 1880s and suggests that they "quite consciously identified themselves and their causes with the working class... that was clearly recognised by politicians of the period, but which has been largely ignored since."

By sheer strength of numbers costermongers, as part of a developing working class culture, forced an accommodation with the forces of modernity and capitalism. This accommodation was not linear nor was it simply about how and where trade occurred but was more profound. Distinctive not only through their unique (and London-centric) economic formation but additionally subversive through what both Gertrude Himmelfarb (1995) and Stedman Jones ([1971] 2013) have suggested was a cultural and moral separateness, the costers, as part of a wider London working

⁶ John Thompson's camera captures much of the fading of these street trades in the late 1870s. See - Thomson and Smith [1877] 1994.

class, constituted a radical alternative to the strictures of bourgeois society “which probably owed something to the tradition of workers entering and leaving the street trades” (Jankiewicz, 2012: 405).

This culture perhaps additionally contained something of the solidarities and charity that Mayhew had noticed amongst the ‘Street Irish’ (Mayhew, 1851: 104) and also encapsulated the essence of the independence and individuality of what would become the late Victorian cockney. This complicated identity, a culture partly defined by precarity, nascent entrepreneurialism, early Victorian moral zoning and the largely failed hegemonic effort to create a working class in the image of the bourgeois, would be reconstituted as the customer base of the eel, pie and mash shops later in the century.

1.3 Through plate glass windows of respectability

Although *The Post Office Directory* appears to list the first Eel Pie House as a *shop* that belongs to Henry Blanchard at 101 Union Street in Southwark in 1844, it’s clear that there existed much older, taxonic institutions.⁷ In the mid-eighteenth century, eel pies were served in a public house (The Eel Pie House) on a small island south-west of Twickenham Ayt(e). Mentioned by Dickens, it became notorious for dog fights and duels.⁸ So popular did this become that the area subsequently became known as Eel-Pie Island. In addition, another public house, also known as The Eel Pie House, by the New River in Highbury (then) north of London, was cited by John Nelson in an 1811 book where:

So great is the resort of the lower order of people from the metropolis to the Eel Pie House, on Palm Sunday... that the host and servants are obliged to be on the alert at two o’clock in the morning to receive their numerous guests, who are none of the most gentle sort... (Nelson, 1811: 153).

In 1830, *The Morning Advertiser* (24 August 1830: 1) mentions another public house with the name Eel Pie House in an advertisement for coal barges. A pie shop in

⁷ Blanchard, Henry, *eel pie house*, 101 Union St. Boro’ High st. *Post Office London Directory for 1844*, Commercial Directory, *Post Office London Directory for 1844*: 574.

⁸ In the third Dickens novel, *Nicholas Nickleby*, (1838-9) Miss Morleena Kenwiggs goes to Eel Pie Island for a picnic.

Wardour Street that certainly sells eel pies is referred to in an article in *The Champion* in 1837 (16 April 1837: 24) whilst describing, with rather obvious glee, a fight between the shop owner and “four young shopmen” who are passing customers. The dialogue of the subsequent trial, reproduced as a patronising colloquialism, is instructive. One of the young defendants is quoted as saying “Heel-pies are only fit for snobs, give me a mince 'un.” The presiding magistrate gives an opportunity for the unnamed pie-shop owner to speak.

Heel pies, yer Lorship, as is chalked up a penny, is made of fish with their heads, and tails, and hinsides, and all in it, chopped up together. But sitch' pies as I sells aint only made with the werry best sand or silver eels, cleaned in three vorters...

The speech is cut short by the judge, but clearly the tradesman is making a distinction between cheap penny pies sold on the streets and his better fare. Also interesting is the idea of the pie as a food for the common man, whose voice is ventriloquised for comic effect. We might also note that the eel as an ingredient is held in traditionally higher esteem than simple fish and that is partly due to its heritage as a staple of Londoners diet for more than a thousand years (Fort, 2002).

In terms of these early taxonic pie shops, a painting by Frederick Napoleon Shepherd however conclusively proves that the listed Blanchard shop was not even the owner’s first. Painted in 1835, the image clearly shows a Blanchard’s eel-pie shop on the more central Fleet Street.⁹

We might conclude then that the pie *shop* was more common than the largely unreliable and erratic recordings of *The Post Office Directory*. We have, unfortunately, no documentary evidence of exactly how Blanchard sold his wares and whether for instance, he sold live eels as later pie shops would, or whether there were potatoes, soup or anything else on the menu. Blanchard’s is not then, despite commonly held views the progenitor of the contemporary eel, pie and mash shop, merely a distant ancestor.

⁹ Shepherd, Frederick Napoleon. “View of building in Fleet Street, with Blanchard's premises and figures on pavement”, Watercolour, 1835, London Metropolitan Archives, Main Print Collection, Cat., No., q4029905. See Fig. 1 in appendix.

The listing of a business by its trading name is, up until this point, usually (although not exclusively) reserved for public houses. Assuming that the directory relies on the owner to define their own business, it seems likely that Henry Blanchard, who makes a great and expanding success of his venture through the coming century, may be the entrepreneurial author of his own commercial debut.

The waters are further muddied by two advertisements in the *Morning Advertiser* in 1846:

To be let - an Eel Pie House - low rent made by lodgers. For cards of address apply to Mr Clayton, Hairdresser, 2, Borough Road, near St George's Circus (*Morning Advertiser*, 11 April 1846)

And:

To be Let an Eel Pie House, *established six years* [my italics], in a crowded thoroughfare, doing a snug business - rent 30/. - let off for 24/. For further particulars enquire Mr Wellard's, 8 St George's-place, Walworth road (*Morning Advertiser*, 24 October 1846)

My research indicates that these are the first mentions of eel pie houses in the press not specifically referring to ventures in public houses, and the ordinariness and casual mention of the description certainly indicates a type of shop that was reasonably common.

In the 1841 Census, a Henry Blanchard in Union Street (although the street number is illegible or missing) is listed as pastry cook.¹⁰ He is also listed in tandem with his new shop in the same way in *The Post Office Directory* of 1844.¹¹ The following year, a second Eel Pie House is recorded this time in Lisson Grove in west London. The owner is John Fletcher. There is a listing for a baker called John Fletcher in the

¹⁰ Blanchard, Henry, *1841 Census for England*, Surrey, St Saviour, District 16: 13.

¹¹ Blanchard, Henry, *Post Office London Directory for 1844*; Confectioners and Pastry Cooks: 1003.

1844 directory who is also working as a pastry cook in Soho.¹² We can't be entirely sure that, as it would seem, these are one and the same man but given perhaps the success of Blanchard's venture, Fletcher might have taken his future and his trade skills into his own hands.

That both of these men were pastry cooks is entirely significant. During the progress of the eighteenth century, the ideology of rationalism, individualism and the free market came into direct conflict with the profiteering, patrician state (the 'Old Corruption'). With the increasingly vital role of manufacturing, the unequal relationships between the elites and the commercial and professional sections of society who served them, started to break apart. In tandem, the scale of manufacture began to erode paternal control over the life of workers, challenging class relations and evidenced "the growth of a newly won psychology of the free labourer" (Thompson, [1980] 1991: 37-38).

The bonds between the gentry, small masters and labourers (emboldened by an advancing radical ideology) weakened significantly. Among the casualties of this breakage was a "further concentric ring of economic clientship" radiating out from the great houses" (Thompson, [1980] 1991: 39). These were workers like dressmakers, coach makers, innkeepers, vintners and pastry cooks. It was this class, profiting from "the sweat of their own brow" (Thompson, [1963] 2013: 710) that took their skills to London, to serve the needs of a growing metropolis commercially dominated by the bourgeoisie. They were joined by those that the gentry had come to see as both idle and disorderly and who had withdrawn from social control: clothing workers, urban artisans and labourers (Williams, 1969). Both groups brought with them at least some vestiges of customs and rituals of a proto-industrial culture.

It is my contention that both of these groups would form a commercial relationship in the city as respectively owner and customer of the emergent Eel Pie Houses. With this synthesis of groups, late eighteenth and early nineteenth century London begins to facilitate a cultural negotiation around its own earlier, urban culture. This was one

¹² Fletcher, John, *Baker*, 12 Nassau St, Soho. *Post Office London Directory for 1844*; Confectioners and Pastry Cooks: 682.

in which “people took their pleasures in great gulps and were addicted to excitement and spectacle” like riots and cruel animal sports (Golby, 1984, 65). It was a culture that the Victorian bourgeoisie, unlike their Regency cousins Tom and Jerry, increasingly feared and associated with a danger to the new embryonically hegemonic social order. The association of work with respectability and its converse, idleness and leisure with chaos, was linked “in a self-conscious cultivation of respectability on the part of those of all classes who wished to emphasise their social superiority” (Golby, 1984, 65).

The control of the London street and the subsequent rise of the eel pie shop must be seen in this light. According to Winter (2013: 4), “neither common law or statute bestowed the right to set up a stall or put down a basket on the public way... [and] vestries received explicit powers to remove barrows and stalls from street markets in the Regency period”. Subsequently, the 1839 Police Act gave the new Metropolitan force powers, open to the discretion of the officer, to confiscate goods, barrows or stalls if they impeded traffic on the pavement or road. What this meant in practice was that the sellers had to keep moving and not, apart from within the act of making a sale, put their baskets down. This process of ‘improving’ the city was not linear however and was conditional on compromises between local government, private interests and tradition (Nead, 2000:5). Indeed, further legislation in 1869, (formally, *The Metropolitan Streets Act, Amendment Act, 1867*) provoked an enormous backlash from the coster community who had by now formed what amounted to a union around their evolving identity and culture (Ellis, 1923: 284).¹³ At a time of an essential appeal to a ‘one nation Toryism’, Disraeli’s government subsequently manoeuvred to amend the act by exempting all costermongers (defining them as traditionally those that traded in foods including fish and fruit and goods manufactured at home that had been exempted from previous licensing), itinerants and hawkers (licensed traders who, crucially, had their own street cries).

The commercial opportunity of the ‘coming inside’ for those able to avail themselves of it would be considerable. It did however require capital and business acumen. If

¹³ For the *Metropolitan Streets Act, Amendment Act, 1867* - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/31-32/5/contents>.

we take Blanchard's as a starting point for what we know will be a successful empire and contrast it with Fletcher's (which will not) we can see immediately that their physical locations are different. We might conjecture whether at this stage his shop in a prime location like Fleet Street is his only premises, but he opens a new concern in a Union Street that already has five Coffee Rooms.¹⁴ In Lisson Grove near Fletcher's shop, we find only one Coffee Room but two Dining Rooms in close proximity.¹⁵ Modern retail parlance would call this 'clustering' - a geographic concentration of interconnected businesses whose aggregation is said to increase productivity.

Yet Blanchard's new shop is in a solidly working class district whilst Fletcher's location is more mixed. Southwark, historically outside the jurisdiction of the City of London, had been seen as an area of license, entertainment and criminality for hundreds of years. By the time Blanchard opens, it is a mix of artisans, warehouse workers servicing the river and the very poor with one of the worst slums in the capital, known as 'The Mint' (Yelling, 2007: 21). Blanchard's is also very close to a street market and this juncture of shopping, work and refreshment would become crucial in the shops' mid-century iteration, enticing as it did a clientele increasingly defined by speed, necessity and an emergent consumer culture.

We might deduce that eels and pie and the businesses that sell them are now more commonly associated with the working classes as a food of convenience housed in a shop that has all the hallmarks of bourgeois respectability.

Because of the inconsistencies of City Directories and their categorisation of eating establishments it's difficult to accurately pinpoint the number of these new ventures but it seems that from Blanchard's opening in 1844, there are almost twenty similar establishments by 1865 and they clearly mirror the decline in street sales.¹⁶ If

¹⁴ Census and listings in the Post Office journal reveal that the Blanchard family subsequently owned a string of eel and pie houses in South and central London.

See listings for Coffee Rooms in *Post Office London Directory for 1844: 1099-1100*.

¹⁵ Burcham, Robert, 5 Lisson grove north. *Post Office London Directory for 1844; Coffee Rooms; 1099*, Rutland, Chas, 4 Up. Lisson st. Lisson gro. *Post Office London Directory for 1844; Coffee Rooms: 1117 & Matthers, William, 41 Lisson gro. Post Office London Directory for 1844; Coffee Rooms: 1117*.

¹⁶ Confusingly, Kelly's Post Office Directories initially only carried the categories of 'Dining Rooms' to refer to places that people ate away from home, but by 1850 the category of 'Coffee Rooms' changes to include a subcategory 'and also Dining Rooms'. During this period, *Eel Pie Houses* remain unlisted

Blanchard and Fletcher were outliers, however, this change in eating patterns was exacerbated by increasing industrialisation. With the Great Exhibition of 1851, London especially would witness the birth of an age of commercial entertainment and consequentially “a significant trend towards the systematic commercialisation of the catering business” (Tames, 2003: 31).

Again, a lack of exact historical record means that it’s difficult to conclude what these enterprises might have looked like or how they operated but an account in Charles Manby Smith’s *Curiosities of London Life* (1857) describes one of these mid-century pie shops. They are found “...especially in the immediate neighbourhood of omnibus and cab stations, and very much in the thoroughfares and shortcuts most frequented by the middle and lower classes” (Smith, 1857: 203).

The appearance of propriety is essential:

...but though the window may be of plate-glass, behind which piles of the finest fruit, joints, and quarters of the best meat, a large dish of silver heels, and a portly china bowl charged with a liberal heap of minced-meat, with here and there are a few pies, lie temptingly arranged upon napkins of snowy whiteness, yet there is not a chair, stool, or seat of any kind to be found within. No dallying is looked for, nor would it probably be allowed.

Yet the shops are certainly gendered spaces and working women a likely draw:

The customer of the pie shop is a man (if he is not a boy) with whom the penny is a penny, and a pie is a pie...Look at him as he stands in the centre of the floor, Direct as grenadier, turning his busy mouthful upon the living tide that rushes along Holborn... The assistants are women ... three or four good looking lasses, the very incarnations of good temper and cleanly tidiness, who

as a category in their own right. The ‘restaurant’ is a class-loaded term in this period, and it is for this reason I believe that they deserve a taxonomic qualification of their own. My statistical research is based on counting individual entries, keyword listed by ‘eel and pie house’ in the business title although it is clear from cross referencing mentions in newspaper and magazine articles of the period, this is not necessarily accurate.

For similar establishments, see - London Metropolitan Archives; London, England; *London, England, City Directories, 1736-1943* [database on-line] Commercial Directory.

from morn to night was busy as bees in extricating the pies from their metallic moulds, as they are demanded by the customers... they are without exception plain and healthy looking ... (Smith, 1857: 204-205).

Indeed, these descriptions echo in some ways the modish role of barmaids in the city's new public houses and gin palaces that were taking over from traditional taverns. The pie shops of this era were, it appears, analogously gas-lit and mirrored. Peter Bailey (1997) suggests that these kind of illuminated spaces provided a theatrical atmosphere which eventually accommodated a flirtatious 'knowingness' especially with a counter that heightened the allure of the unobtainable. This emergent 'managed' early Victorian sexuality, whilst beyond the scope of this work, signals to a customer base that understood the illicit potency of the "maid-manservant relationship" (Bailey, 1997: 168).

The shops are however not yet recognisable as the contemporary or even later nineteenth century Eel and Pie shop. They have no seating; they are not spaces to linger, and food seems served not on a plate but by hand. They appear a synthesis of an eighteenth century enterprise with a location-specific modern customer base, where artisans and clerks might rub shoulders with cab drivers. The elites are nowhere to be seen nor perhaps at this stage are the amorphous London poor. These are likely petty bourgeois enterprises largely catering for their own interstitial class and the more prosperous of the working classes. George Dodd in his *Food of London* (1856: 520) concurs that "... pie shops are now numerous in London - not only in the humbler streets, but in the leading thoroughfares where a high rental must be paid." He continues that "the modern commercial system has been adopted to its fullest extent; yielding an almost infinitely small profit on each, and, therefore, a large scale and efficient management are requisite." It appears that at this stage the shops are still likely an echo of the earlier, more traditional pie shop but are increasingly bifurcated along lines of location and client base.

Burnett's (2004: 42) comment that at this point there were "also specialist hot eel, pie *and mash* [my italics] cookshops which were beginning to take over from the street traders" without primary evidence seems hopeful at best but the taxon of eating places to which I will subsequently turn is likely significant.

1.4 Food as cipher

Food, its type and, crucially, the *manner* of its consumption, would become increasingly relevant as a code for understanding how British (and specifically London) society was developing in this period. With an ascendant politically powerful middle class, the early century would see “an increasing convergence of outlook between the middle classes and the aristocracy” (Stedman Jones, 1974: 462). It was to France that these upper classes had historically looked to enhance their gastronomic culture. This was a departure from the traditional roast meats that had come to define the English upper class diet largely unchanged since the mediaeval period. The class adaption of such food was crucial to the emergent prototypes of the eel and pie shop and their genius would be to serve such basic food in familiar pairings (eels, pies and eventually potatoes) and in contemporary surroundings.

The historical pie was likely a way to cook meat without burning and some suggest that the pastry was only eaten by the poor after the master had consumed the innards.¹⁷ By the early Victorian period, however, it was clearly ubiquitous as a form of mobile meal, as was the potato, usually served baked from a street seller (useful to warm the hands on but, as Mayhew records, also in decline). The potato itself in this period accounted for a huge 212.7 kg per capita per annum and was an enormously cheap item on which to base a new commercial venture (Lummel, 2016). The eel, a historical staple, was still immensely popular. At this point they were brought to the Thames by Dutch merchants and in 1851 “an astonishing 9,797,760 eels were sold in Billingsgate market”. Mayhew (1851: 63) records them being sold hot in liquor, hawked on the streets by costers. This is likely the culinary pedigree of the contemporary dish of eels and liquor.

Spang (2001) claims that Paris was the birthplace of what we now know as the restaurant and the term, from the sixteenth century, initially referred to a restorative consommé. In 1765, a man named Boulanger was sued by the caterers’ guild after they claimed his shop, selling such ‘restaurants’, compromised their monopoly (the English guilds had lost their own control over the catering trade almost a century

¹⁷ This commonly held culinary belief is however disputed by - Clarkson, 2009.

earlier). This brought him notoriety and other enterprising Parisians soon opened their own similar establishments.

Spang (2001: 11) cites Roze de Chantoiseau, proprietor of the *Champ d'Oiseau*, as the first recognisably modern restaurateur in the 1770s. Conveniently he also published a business directory allowing him to promote his cooking in a way that appealed to the elites' preoccupation with health and the growing fashion for *cuisine*. Crucially Mennell (2003: 250) suggests that this process of elite dining out was also developing, by exchange in London. Indeed, inns and coffee houses had prefigured the role of the restaurant by at least a century or more and there had likely been free mixing in inns between intellectuals, merchants and landed gentry especially when winter sittings in parliament had necessitated 'eating out' away from country estates. When the Revolution began, "Paris already had a hundred restaurants" and in a bloodier echo of the breaking of the bonds between the English elites and the small masters, Paris had a surfeit of cooks previously employed by the now depleted aristocracy (Mariani, 1991: 25).

After 1789 the new Jacobin class echoed their earlier English cousins by using dining spaces as political and cultural arenas that eventually contributed to an aesthetic of wider public gastronomy. According to Jürgen Habermas ([1962] 1989), restaurants became, like music and art before them, part of a bourgeois discursive and linguistic sphere, a public arena open to all 'private', rational individuals to debate and discuss. Participation was based on literacy, opinion, subjectivity and experience, not by dint of social rank or hereditary status.

Mennell (2003: 247) echoes Habermas' ([1962] 1989) notion of the dissemination of elite culture to the 'reasoning' public by the figure of the gastronome, a cipher who by his writing, eventually democratized this notion of elite taste. Mennell further suggests that the gastronome's role as an arbiter of taste and fashion might be analogous to that of the flamboyant Regency dandy whose challenge to convention signifies a moment of social flux in which it may be possible to cross "social grades" (Mennell 2003: 251-252).

By 1825, Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin in his *Physiologie Du Goût* recorded that all of Europe has imitated Paris and "...you may see here and there, some foreigners, especially the English, who stuff themselves with double portions of meat... (1970: 231). Crucially, for the French bourgeoisie and their English class-cousins, the emergent institution of the restaurant represented a distinctive and unique Parisian cultural landmark in similar ways that their earlier incarnations had for the elites on their Grand Tour. As the century progressed Spang (2001: 86) suggests, that the restaurant began to represent "... the translation of an eighteenth century cult of sensibility into a nineteenth-century sense of taste: the mutation of one era's social value into another's cultural flourish."

By the mid-century, London's population expansion is mirrored by a large increase in places outside of the home that they can eat. Assael (2018: 17-18) quotes the problematic listings in *Kelly's Directory* to show that in 1840 there were 106 restaurants in London. This rises to 570 in 1870 and then to 1147 in 1890. A good deal of this growth is contiguous to areas of commerce, transport and community activity.

Whilst middle class dining remained a leisure performance translated from elite circles and contained the opportunity to redefine societal manners in their own image, much expands into the daily arena of work. Now, "the heterogeneities in nature of London's public eating" was synchronous with the demands of the working day (Assael, 2018: 15). London cooks no longer represent the prestige of their previous aristocratic masters but serve food to a wider, although class-segregated, eating *public*. Towards the 1870s as trade grew in both rapidity and volume, food became cheaper and there was a rise in both disposable income and immigrant labour to service the sector. The London restaurant eventually becomes a foci for notions of the modern: for advances in technology, hygiene, manners and the creation of an identity of certain types of Londoners defined through their class and thus gustatory cultures.

For the urban poor, much food is still taken outside but some cook shops, analogous perhaps in some limited ways to later working class *caffs* started to provide limited seating for their customers to eat adjacent to the shop (Assael, 2018: 41). By the

latter half of the century, the expansion of cheap working class restaurants signify a democratisation of eating in the public sphere and the extension of urban social interactions. Eating as theatre was now not solely confined to the bourgeoisie and Assael (2018: 97) cites James McKenzie who relates of his childhood in the 1870s a local eel shop with “‘lady servers, standing behind a counter [who] wore cleanwhite [sic] aprons’ serving stewed eels from steaming containers. whose outside stall attracted crowds watching the eels being killed.” Later in the century, with the rise of the consumer society, the customer could increasingly choose to identify with types of food that expressed their own tastes and those of their contemporaries. The eel and pie shops would become hyperlocal emblems of a distinctive and emergent working class culture no longer based solely around work but synchronous with entertainment and the opportunity not only to demonstrate but also to *perform* respectability.

1.5 Hunger and the ‘Great Unwashed’¹⁸

During the first half of the century the diet of the poor people in the towns was bad. The greater part of their nourishment came from bread, potatoes and strong tea (Drummond and Wilbraham, 1991: 329).

If the period between Waterloo and the First Reform Bill had been exultant for the wealthy, it was much less so for the poorer residents of London. As Himmelfarb (1985: 356) remarks, the shock of their discovery by Mayhew and his urban explorers “was actually a shock of recognition.” They could be ignored for long periods, demonised even (as they certainly were), but as Tom Nairn (1964) suggests, the issue and problem of the working classes was inextricably linked to that of the English bourgeoisie because they developed in a synchronous dance.

Industrialisation and the machine age had meant a different development of the labouring classes in London. Unlike the mill towns of the north, many workers in the capital retained a limited stake in how production occurred and were not just the

¹⁸ Usually attributed to Edmund Burke, the first published use was by Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1830. See - Bulwer-Lytton, 1833: 49.

unthinking automatons conjured by the word 'proletarian'. Although these men likely supported the "ideology of economic independence and sturdy individualism" (Thompson [1963] 2013: 710), delineations in earnings were large between a labour elite like compositors and tailors, relatively unaffected by recent industrialisation, and the those like the silk-workers of Spitalfields, part of the urban casualty-mass of the same process. These divisions were to some limited extent closed within the early decades of the century by the erosion of artisanal independence in the workplace yet, market precarity meant that even skilled workers might be subject to periods of "prosperity and poverty" Burnett (1979: 52). However, it was sharp and unexpected food-price spikes that were most disastrous.

In the early part of the century, especially after 1815 and the introduction of the Corn Laws, bread prices especially were subject to regular and acute price fluctuations. These 'laws' or, more accurately, tariff restrictions, were initially introduced in 1804 to impose a duty on imported grain to protect the interests of British agriculture, a sector dominated by the landed aristocracy. Solidified in the Importation Act of 1815, the Liverpool government sought to exclude foreign-grown corn until the domestic price of home-grown corn exceeded 80 shillings per quarter. This led to rioting almost immediately and the following year climatic change (likely prompted by the eruption of Mount Tombora) exacerbated shortages causing famine across Europe. Disturbances around food prices and (the lack of) democratic change ushered in an era of draconian state repression. As Perry Anderson (1964: 31) suggests, the new English manufacturing class "

rallied to the aristocracy... [The whole era of] wars against the French abroad and repression against the working class at home marked the years of its maturation. Two decades after the fall of Bastille, it celebrated its entry into history by cutting down working class demonstrators at Peterloo.

Although there is debate about exactly how the economic situation affected working class nutrition patterns, what seems clear is that workers' wages (and thus purchasing power in relation to food) stagnated simultaneously with a rapid expansion of per-capita gross domestic product during a period of technological upheaval (Allen, 2009).

The ability to purchase food to consume was one (very significant) thing but where to consume it was quite another. In a Britain where one-fifth of the population was now living in urban areas there was a unique necessity for the provision of food and drink to be available close to work and home. This fragmentation of the social fabric in terms of location and activity, in addition to the cost and ability to acquire fuel, required working people to seek sustenance in new ways. The lack of storage, refrigeration or indeed general space at home was exacerbated by temporal changes to work, especially shift patterns and early starts. This meant that most working class men relied on transient coffee and food stalls in the street for sustenance. In parallel, traditionally gendered rural skills such as around cooking, baking and brewing declined. This had much to do with women that had entered the workforce either in factories or domestic service having less time to practice them and the changing (and smaller) urban living spaces (Burnett, 1979: 4).

In urban areas, eating outside had largely been the prerogative of those who begged. Workers had to shop outside too and did so largely from tiny stalls that sold small amounts of staples very cheaply and often on credit. Working patterns also meant that much of the shopping was done on a Saturday night and especially at the very late close of business when perishable items would be discounted for a quick sale. The markets would be,

Hives of activity, noise and bedlam. The stalls would be lit with naphtha flame lamps... It was... midnight before the noise ceased and then the Council workmen stepped in to clear away the debris" (Southgate and Philpot, 1982: 83-84)

Food that was bought had to be cheap, tasty and easy to cook. In tea and white bread, there was an ironic inversion and likely social imitation of the food of the previous century's elites. In comparison to seasonal, rural eating scarcely a generation previously, the urban poor's diet was monotonous, relatively expensive and contained much less nutritional value. Urban bread was now almost entirely cosmetically white, the result of 'high milling' that removed nearly all of the bran. It was taken with tea that gave crucial warmth, converting a meagre meal into the

appearance of a hot dinner. Thomas Wright was a worker who 'tramped' (one of many thousands who had no option but to seek seasonal employment) and he records the necessity of purchasing breakfast at street stalls usually on the edges of town centres:

The gleam from the hot coffee stall comes like a guiding star ... here you get warmth to your hands on the outside of the cup, and for the inner man from the liquid, which you get piping hot... (Wright, 1868 in Burnett, 2016: 33)

George Sala (1859: 13) describes one such common rickety stall in Covent Garden Market as "something between a gypsy's tent and a watchman's box."

Urban food was about cost, speed and palatability. Mayhew (1851: 174) likely has it correct when he states that "men whose lives are alternations of starvation and surfeit love some easily swallowed and comfortable food better than most approved substantiality of the dinner table." At regular intervals throughout the century and coinciding with price fluctuations or bad harvests, soup kitchens became a feature of London life and well-to-do women ventured like explorers into the jungle of slums to dispense lectures on the benefits of cheap and nutritious food - failing of course to answer issues around fuel-poverty or sheer exhaustion.¹⁹ Burnett (2014: 29) suggests that soup became for the working class a symbol of pauperism, reawakening terrible memories of the workhouse.

Food price instability and ultimately famine meant that the 1840s were characterised by great hunger. It is in this period that the street pie men would see their livelihoods diminished where an opportunity arose to provide indoor meals based on cheap palatable and common ingredients. Concomitantly, it was also a period where the legend of Sweeney Todd (the 'demon barber' of Fleet Street whose customers ended their days as pie fillings) would be established.

¹⁹ See for example - 'Soup Kitchen in Leicester Square', *The Poor Man's Guardian*, 6, 11 December 1847.

By the late 1830s, because of falling incomes, potatoes were increasingly replacing wheat in working class diets and there are reports in the *Times* of farmers shooting people caught stealing them (Gurney, 2009). As well as becoming a key ingredient for what would later become the eel, pie and mash shops, the potato had its own symbolism in the debate around hunger and its articulation in the so-called 'Hungry Forties.'²⁰ Thompson (2013: 348) notes that around this time potatoes were seen as the food of the 'primitive' Irish peasantry ("Erin's root-fed hordes") contrasted with the food (wheat for bread) of the free-born Englishman contributing to a gastro-nationalistic moral panic.

In Victorian literature, hunger is portrayed both as a pervasive threat to order but also has a moral dimension. In the cultural texts of the period there was a "nervous interest in what, and how much, paupers ate" (Berry 1999: 48) but simultaneously a trope of self-control. In Christina Rossetti's *The Goblin Market*, Lizzie's refusal to eat the goblin's fruit is a spiritual act of denial concomitant with the period's valorisation of idealised womanhood. In contrast, John, a representative of the male working class in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* ([1848] 2018: 125) is dehumanised by starvation, reduced to a pre-civilized state, with "hunger in his shrunk, fierce, animal look". The breakdown of the family unit is shown through the impoverished, typhus-stricken Davenport's 'selfishness [which] he has never shown in health" when he "snatche[s]... with animal instinct" the jug of tea intended for his wife (Scholl, 2017: footnote 26). Dickens' Magwitch in *Great Expectations* will be forever grateful to Pip for feeding him at the opening of the tale and will become his invisible benefactor.

However, food representation changes in Victorian narrative by the 1860s when "taste begins to supersede hunger" (Scholl, 2016: 5). The eel pie shops, likely serving the petit bourgeois and respectable working classes in a simulacra of the emergent bourgeois restaurant, sit between these two poles.

²⁰ 'The Hungry Forties'. This term, it is now acknowledged, was a retrospective invention coined in the 1920s by free trade supporters as criticised in Chaloner, 1967.

1.6 Eating out and translatable spaces

As least as far back as the fifteenth century, England had a network of inns that meant travellers no longer had to rely on the hospitality of monasteries. “However, it would seem that availing oneself of a meal provided commercially was restricted to people journeying until sometime at the end of the eighteenth century (Warde and Martens, 2000: 22).” Prefiguring the bourgeois developments of the restaurant, cuisine and an associated societal change in Paris, Felicity Heal (1990) concludes, rather depressingly, that the early modern Englishman never appeared terribly hospitable to strangers. According to her, hospitality by the elites became performative and a way of estimating the recipient’s moral worth against a backdrop of an emergent market economy and the beginnings of state charity for the needy. Importantly for emergent patterns of dining, especially amongst the growing working classes, the growth of urban London changed prevailing notions of hospitality by foregrounding personal preferences and individualism against a more traditional rurality of social duties. Hospitality was increasingly frustrated and delineated by social rank and became focussed on rites of passage and communal festivities. Both of these would decline in nineteenth century London as part of the ‘civilising’ of the street and the allied pacifying of the mob (Golby and Purdue, 1984).

By the turn of the nineteenth century, the necessity of providing food services for those away from home resulted in “what might be called professional as opposed to amateur building. Prior to that... most buildings were ... adaptable for a variety of purposes” (Olsen, 1974: 269). We can see this in the building of new public houses that reflected the need for privacy and segregated drinking areas for different patrons. As so many of the contemporary eating places were inadequate to their new, expanded role (and fashions that dictated that middle class meals at home became increasingly ritualised) the public landscape within which the eel and pie shops would emerge started to change (Drummond and Wilbraham, 1991: 335). Coffee houses of this period had altered little from their heyday in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when their associated function was of facilitating debate amongst customers. Their wooden compartments were open to the centre of the room but, with the increasing concerns of Victorian propriety, many added upstairs spaces for women and families.

Astonishingly, by 1820 there were some 3,000 restaurants in Paris (Zeldin, 1977, 2: 739). Transplanted to London for the upper classes, these spaces were translated and revelatory. The Grand Divan Restaurant on the Strand in 1848 still nodded to the coffee house in booths on either side of the room but also utilised long mirrors set in gilt frames. In place of pewter, there were electro-plated tankards, clean linen and napkins (King, 1980: 237). From a dark London of the early century, “the new restaurant did good in other directions. It let in the daylight into London life generally (Scott, 1900: 12).” It is this cheerful and bright aspect the eel pie shops would inevitably copy.

Such spaces were well publicised in the press as *a la mode* and aspirational. We may certainly conjecture that an early taxon of the eel and pie shop would have been aware of these developments. However, for most of London’s population, public eating spaces in this period left a great deal to be desired:

On working days the artisans and lower middle classes often ate their midday meal at a Tavern or a cheap eating house where an ordinary of hot meat, vegetables, bread, cheese and beer costs from 6d to 1s. Some of these places were none too attractive (Drummond and Wilbraham, 1991: 333).

‘Himself’, the anonymous author of *Memoirs of a Stomach* (1853) records that:

I have dined at eating-houses, the effluvia of which, steaming up through the iron gratings made me qualmish before eating, and ill all the day after ... I have groped my way down hypocausts in Fleet Street, and dined in cavern-like taverns, wishing myself a thousand miles away the moment the eternal joint was uncovered (Drummond and Wilbraham, 1991: 333).

These are also highly gendered spaces. In Dickens’s *Dombey and Son*, women like Miss Tox have to seek refuge ‘in a musty little back room usually devoted to the consumption of soups and pervaded by an ox-tail atmosphere’ (Dickens, 1848 in King, 1980: 235).

In early Victorian London, certainly by 1830, we see a “hierarchy of eating-places, catering for a range of needs and incomes - from humble cook-shops and ‘ordinaries’ to better class inns, chop-houses and dining rooms up to a few renown taverns and hotels” (Lummel, 2016: 9). The emergence and fading of these numerous types of eating places are synchronous with the early eel and pie houses and in nearly all, some later element is partially visible.

The conduit between the working class food of the street, the beginnings of mass catering, the restaurant and crucially the owners of the embryonic eel pie shops is most clearly seen with the pastry cooks and their cookshops. These cookshops supplied a variety of cooked dishes to the lower middle classes and, according to Dickens, were often grim:

Mr Grazinglands looked in at a pastry cooks window, hesitating as to the expediency of lunching at that establishment. He beheld nothing to eat but butter in various forms, slightly charged with jam, and languidly frizzling over tepid water. Two ancient turtle shells on which were inscribed with the legend ‘soups’ decorated a glass partition within, enclosing a stuffy alcove from which a ghastly mockery of a marriage breakfast spread on a rickety table, warned the terrified traveller (Dickens, 1877: 27).

The poor frequented their own versions of cookshops or bakeshops which sold more or less similar fare but also had communal ovens where people without facilities could take food to be cooked. These date back to the seventeenth century and as well as housewives bringing meat in a pot to be cooked, street vendors would also have their food cooked here.²¹ Dickens, in *Little Dorritt* mentions such a place:

... a dirty shop window in a dirty street, which was made almost opaque by the steam of hot meats, vegetables, and puddings... within, were a few wooden partitions, behind which set such customers as found it more convenient to take away their dinners in stomachs than in their hands (Dickens [1857] 1967: 283).

²¹ For working class cookshops, see - Flanders, 2014: 291 (footnote).

Cookhouses, notorious for skimming slices of customers' meat for themselves, inevitably declined later in the century as more homes were built with rudimentary kitchens of their own.

When visited by Egan's Tom and Jerry, coffee-shops for the lower orders, seemed to be places of "drunkenness, beggary, lewdness and carelessness" but a few offered newspapers and a pause in the city *en-route* to work (Egan, [1821] 2019: 165).

Judith Flanders (2014: 294) relates how:

The coffeehouses clearly filled need: from only a few dozen catering to artisans in 1815, they had increased in number by 1840 to nearly 2000; There a full breakfast could be purchased for 3d. A coffee house in one working class district served up to 900 customers a day, who had a choice of three rooms: the cheapest was open from 4:00 am to 10:00 pm, where customers could enjoy breakfast of coffee, bread and butter for 1 1/2d day; the second grade room offered coffee, a penny loaf and a penny worth of butter for 3d; or, in the most expensive room, customers could order a dinner where the coffee shop supplied the bread and the coffee, but the diner brought his own cooked meat.

Soup houses were even less charming offering basic soup, bread and the inevitable potato for 2d or 3d. Chop houses were a cut above all of these, although they varied considerably in quality of food and surroundings chiefly because the waiters were not paid but expected to live off tips and paid for the tablecloths to be laundered themselves. So-called 'slap-bangs', named for the onomatopoeic slamming down at speed of the dishes, were a cheap and not-so-cheerful cousin of the more salubrious chop houses that fed better-off clerks and City gents alike.²²

Further taxons of the eel and pie houses could be found in less likely places. By the 1830s, traditional public houses were also under threat from modernity by the rise of the new Gin Palaces. From the mid-eighteenth century, gin had become

²² For a description of Guppy's meal in a slap-bang see - Dickens, [1853] 2008: 276.

progressively more expensive due in no small part to the 1751 Gin Act and pubs had developed from taverns that were essentially a front room of a house onto a more professional footing. Now, however, plate glass windows and gas-lighting meant that customers flocked to these fashionable, bright and decorous new wonders that served only gin. As Dickens ([1836] 1995: 217-218) significantly remarks, “the more splendid do these places become, the poorer the area.” Indeed, gas light could be such a modern and dizzying spectacle that *The Times* reported in January 1837 on a confused drunken man demanding gin from a baker’s shop (Jackson, 2019: 7).

By 1861, *The Sporting Life* gives us a rare and brief glimpse of what we may expect to find in a mid-century eel and pie shop when it mentions “splendid shops, dazzling with gas, and glass, and Women’s charms”.²³ The shops appear as a modern ‘spectacle’ synchronous with a nascent consumer commodity culture framed by the earlier Great Exhibition of 1851 (Richards, 1990).

One may conjecture that location, price and not a little business acumen was required to make these new prototype spaces profitable. The number of advertisements *selling* these new businesses are clearly noteworthy. One such, from 1848 is typical and from its mention of a coffee house may indicate a joint venture.

To be let, near Finsbury square, a HOUSE and SHOP, well adapted to any business - now in the pie trade - low rent, and partly made by lodgers - coming-in moderate. For particulars, apply at the Globe Coffee house, Caroline-place, City road (*Morning Advertiser*, 15 June 1848).

Further variants of the trade can be seen here:

Worthy of Notice - To be let - an old established eel pie house with immense Ginger beer trade, with fountain, cylinder, and receipts complete, in a crowded thoroughfare, near the Borough rent low; coming-in moderate. Apply at the eel-pie house, 49 White-street near St George’s Church, Borough (*Morning Advertiser*, 23 May, 1848).

²³ The Betting Interest, Its origin, *The Sporting Life*, 30 May, 1861: 1.

From the mention of ginger beer, we may assume a further (and unexpected) menu item from very limited source material.

In 1849 a mini *cause-célèbre* was reported in several newspapers of a romantic, failed suicide attempt by a young man who was (allegedly) prevented from jumping to his death from Blackfriars Bridge. He carried a letter to his new bride apologising for their poverty after he had “set up an eel-pie house, which had proved a disastrous speculation, for he had lost upwards of 40/-...” (*Daily News*, 16 January, 1849) An article a week later clarifies the situation that the man in question:

... prevailed upon a female servant to lend him 20/-. With which he took an eel-pie house in Barbican, and instead of being turned out by the landlord as he had stated, he absconded after selling some of the materials, and with the remaining portion of money got married, and lastly excited the sympathy of the public in his behalf by what the writer considered a sham attempt at suicide” (*Daily News*, 30 January, 1849).

1.7 Defeat and the culture of consolation

The potato blight of the ‘Hungry ‘Forties’ brought untold suffering but “[t]he fungus (*Phytophthora infestans*), however, did what 20 years of bitter agitation had failed to do; it brought about the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846” (Drummond and Wilbraham, 1991: 283). With this legislation dead, mid-century London expanded to an extraordinary 2.4 million people (Green, 1982: 129).

The following decade saw the start of a period where food generally became cheaper and, after years of economic and political turmoil, dining for the middle classes increasingly became to be seen as culturally significant within an arena of pleasure and amusement in an expanding ‘leisure’ economy (Rich, 2011: 2). For the London poor, a term that now included a vast army of casual labour and those whose occupations left them at the mercy of economic and seasonal fluctuations, charitable feeding and soup kitchens remained a constant presence. These parallels however were mirrored by an increasing ‘hollowing out’ of the capital as the middle

classes, increasingly drawn to an 'improving' Evangelicalism (Holladay, 1982), settled in the suburbs away from the 'corrupt' commercial centre.

Historically, the artisans, small masters, their workers and apprentices had lived in close proximity to their workshops. This community, full of rituals, drinking, gambling and sport was lost by the middle class flight and cut adrift from the proletarian poor that had moved into the city centres. The artisans, who could trace their lineage to the remnants of the guilds, had been generally hostile to mass industrialisation. Steeped in an eighteenth-century Radicalism, their language spoke to encroachments on the Civil War settlement of the 'free born Englishman' and they looked to the writings of Thomas Paine and republicanism. The traders and small masters were more influenced by the classic liberalism of John Stuart Mill who championed their own beliefs of self-reliance, free trade and individualism.

Nonetheless, the legacy of the 1832 Reform Bill marked a consolidation within the middle classes who strove increasingly to emulate the aristocratic elites. By the time of the final defeat of the 1848 Charter, London had become intensely stratified, and by the 1870s the middle classes were "generally voting Conservative" (Stedman Jones, 1974: 465). The working class, having no ideological vehicle of its own on which to carry its emancipation forward, fell into political despondency, largely abandoned and increasingly demonised by the bourgeoisie.²⁴ In turn, the class would divide as Engels, writing to Marx in the late 1850s explained. He saw a growing conservatism in some sectors of the working class and referred to it as a 'Labour Aristocracy'.²⁵ This notion, although contestable, regards these mostly skilled workers as becoming 'bourgeoisified' (Gray, 1981).

This working class introspection would not end until an upsurge in trade union activity in the 1880s, but by then the cultural framework into which proletarian culture developed had been largely set. The partial granting of suffrage by the Conservatives in 1867 served only to prove how limited the earlier radical threat had become and how unassailable the architecture of capitalism. In this context the

²⁴ Marx would not write the Communist Manifesto until 1848.

²⁵ See Marx's response to Engels on 9 April 1863 where he reflects on an "apparent Bourgeois infection of English workers" - Marx and Engels, 1965: 140.

working classes, through trades unions and co-operatives societies, increasingly sought an accommodation within class structures that would guarantee at least some stability and dignity.

During the last thirty years of the century the London working classes, as Stedman Jones (1974) suggests, appear to have turned more and more towards the consolations of pleasure and distraction found within family, sport, seaside outings and the music hall. In this it appears that they were at least outwardly receptive to an overwhelming new cultural hegemonic message from the middle classes. This was of thrift, hard work and a delineation between the 'good' and the 'idle' poor: one that equated cleanliness as a code for moral probity. This concomitant obsession with aspiration, materiality and consumption, drove an expansion of dining culture with its associated manners around public and private spaces. Here was a coetaneous "culture of governance and pacification by spectacle" (Harvey, 2004: 223) that now included both cheap cafes and expensive restaurants that signal directly to the growth of the eel and pie shops.

Although we might profitably conjecture that sections of the London working class were guided by some form of memory of *pre*-industrial solidarities and convivialities, much of the emergent proletarian culture from the 1880s onwards was formed within the interstices of now entirely working class neighbourhoods that had known little but urban living. As McLeod's (1974 in Savage and Miles, 1994: 64) work evidences, working class married couples came overwhelmingly from the same geographic areas and this hyper-locality of micro-class formation became crucial to the types of culture that proliferated. Despite the fact that the London working classes were constantly surveilled by the bourgeoisie, the culture that grew within these communities was largely opaque and defensive in nature signalling to its own uniqueness.

1.8 Cat's meat and glue for the gravy

From the thirteenth century onwards the Guilds and the Assize system oversaw much of bread and ale production and their prices. By the end of the eighteenth century however, regulations became more lax and rapid urbanisation, poor

sanitation and extended food chains meant that food quality and the incidence of deliberate adulteration became endemic. The level of contamination was made public as early as 1820 when Frederick Accum published a *Treatise on Adulterations of Food and Culinary Poisons*. By 1830 an anonymous publication called *Deadly Adulteration and Slow Poisoning Unmasked* made it clear that almost all commercially available food was corrupted in some form. A rising hegemonic belief in the free hand of the market, competition as well as periodic inflation, food shortages and remote, “highly capitalised and mechanised producers” meant that not only was the country’s food not safe, it was also not trusted (Burnett, 1979: 110, 113). Victorian literature is full of social horror at suspected (and sometimes real) poisoning at the hands of servants (Horn, 1990). It was this as well as potentially substantial losses to the treasury on heavily taxed comestibles (often the most adulterated) that led in the 1850s to Dr Thomas Wakely, the editor of the *Lancet*, commissioning Dr Arthur Hassal to write a report of his investigations into the scandal of contaminated food. These became known as the *Lancet’s* ‘Sanitary Commission’. There followed a Parliamentary enquiry itself followed by a Select Committee which led to the Adulteration of Foods Act in 1860 with much media interest. Successive legislation continued throughout the century (although the issue wasn’t resolved until comprehensive inspection regimes in the 1930s). Just as the early pie-man was slandered by notions of adulteration, the stigma was still referred to by Manby Smith about the new eel pie houses:²⁶ He retells a humorous story of a widowed pie-maker who refuses the matrimonial advances of a new upstart who has taken all her trade and who is saved by a friend arriving at the competitor with a “huge brace of dead cats” and announces that he’s arrived with the regular order...” (Manby, 1857: 208-209).

The 1850s to the mid 1870s, commonly referred to as the *Golden Age* of Victorian society saw the economy grow and ‘generally’ wages increased ahead of prices. There is a marked increase in consumption across all classes and this period prefigures a point where “... there was a dramatic growth in the number of public eating establishments in the second-half of the century” (Assael, 2018: 17-18). More “... the records of inspection and regulation illustrate the specific ways in which the

²⁶ See - Dickens, [1836] 2020: 292. The pie-man relates that in Summer, “fruits is in, cats is out.”

restaurant related to the issue of public health and testify to the increasing significance of public eating within the shaping and ordering of the later Victorian and Edwardian urban environment” (Assael, 2018: 130).

Restaurants had started to advertise themselves as ‘well ventilated’ and ‘hygienic’ literally building themselves into the narrative of the city, along with physical roads and pavements that were increasingly inspected and regulated. By 1874 *Kelly’s* lists thirty-three eel and pie houses and, although contemporary reportage is patchy, we can assume that they were at some level a deliberate replication of successful and fashionable bourgeois restaurants (Hawkins and Garlick, 2002). By this period then we might conjecture that the mid-century pie shop has likely morphed into a largely working class space that probably served pies of eel, and (probably) meat, stewed eels (likely in a liquor) and soup. The fare is almost certainly an aggregate of the offerings of an earlier pie shop with proletarian street food served in a space that resembles a cookshop or coffee house with bench and (possibly) booth seating. The pie-shop or house (not the bourgeois, restaurant) appeals largely to the employed, skilled or semi-skilled working class and possibly (largely depending on location), self-employed petty-bourgeois tradesman. It is situated within, or in close proximity to, a street market and is common in these areas with some operating until very late at night.²⁷ They were certainly popular, affordable and prolific as an article in 1869 explains, “There is a wonderful outbreak of pie shops... we know of a locality that boasts three such emporiums in succession” (“How we dine”. *London City Press*, 13 November, 1869: 13). The pie shops are, or try to be, respectable as several newspaper advertisements of the period record vacancies for: “*Respectable* [my italics] able boy... to make himself generally useful in Eel and Pie House” (*Kentish Mercury*, 2 August, 1895).

One of the best reportage that we have of shops of that era, however, does explicitly confirm that disreputable adulteration was continuing. As Olive Malvery, an extraordinary Anglo-Indian reporter recalls when undercover in an eel pie house, she is instructed to go to “...the oil shop to get sixpen’orth o’ glue” which will go in the

²⁷ “Report of two drunk and disorderly men”. *Lloyds Weekly Newspaper* 25 September 1898: 1. The article relates how “*Shortly after midnight*, the prisoners went into an eel and pie shop in East Street, Walworth.

gravy as the customers, “like it thick” (Malvery, 1908: 83). Malvery doesn’t reveal the identity of this shop but in this period, analogous to the emergent chains like J. Lyons and Spiers and Pond’s, we see the establishment of what might be called the triumvirate of the eel pie business that would dominate until the late twentieth century, each speaking of consistency and reliability.

In 1889 Robert Cooke, an East Ender with Irish roots and a background as a butcher, fishmonger and a publican, opened an eel and pie shop in Watney Street Market and, shortly after, his wife, opened another in Hoxton Street (adjacent to the market).²⁸ On his death, his widow, Martha would also own a coffee house at 169 Hoxton Street, illustrating well the complimentary and commutable relationship between different early taxonic working class eating establishments.²⁹ A decade before, a penniless Italian peasant, Michaele Mansi, had arrived from Ravello and married Cooke’s daughter Ada. The Cooke family gifted an eel and pie shop to them in Tower Bridge Road (that remains open to this day). From this Mansi built an empire of such establishments, in his own name, making himself and his family fabulously wealthy.³⁰ In 1915 another Irish immigrant Samuel Kelly opened an eel pie shop in Bethnal Green and by the outbreak of the Second World War had four of his own shops and a live eel business.

1.9 Modernity, space and identity

Adulteration had been so widespread that it’s little surprise that eel and pie houses, now splendidly dressed in their ‘gas and glass’, would appeal to a working class clientele by producing what was essentially honest, homely food. By the late

²⁸ The Cooke’s claim that it was their family that paired pies, mashed potato and parsley liquor in a shop in Sclater Street in 1862 although no record of this shop exists in either tax records or the Land Registry. There is evidence however from the 1871 census that Robert Cooke was resident at 104 Sclater Street with his wife and two daughters and was a fishmonger.

²⁹ Martha Cooke is listed in the 1901 Census at 169 Hoxton Street in the Borough of Shoreditch as an employer, working from home originally as a ‘Refreshment Housekeeper’. This is crossed out and written over with “Coffee Ho.” See - TNA PRO 1901 RG 13/274: 26. However by 1905 she is listed in the Post Office Directory as the owner of an Eel Pie House at the same address. See - *Post Office London Directory for 1905*, Commercial Directory, *Post Office London Directory for 1905*: 1051. An image of Olive Christian Malvery working in a ‘cheap coffee house’ shows an interior that would be instantly recognisable to a contemporary eel pie and mash shop. See - Malvery, 1908.

See - Appendix, fig. 2.

³⁰ The family would change their name to a less sounding foreign *Manze* during the First World War.

nineteenth century, the shops have about them an air of respectability and a cleanliness. Perhaps the best description of a late Victorian eel pie shop is this by the writer and *bon vivant* George Sims:

The dressing of an eel-pie shop window is conservative. It is a tradition handed down through many generations to the present day. The eels are shown artistically on a bed of parsley which is spread over a dish... To see the eel pie business at its best, to appreciate its poetry, you must watch the process of serving to its customers. Behind the counter on a busy night stands the proprietor in his shirt sleeves, a clean white apron preserving his waistcoat and nether garments from damage. Observe with what nimble deftness he lifts the lid of the metal receptacle in front of him, whips out a hot pie runs a knife round it inside the dish, and turns it out onto a piece of paper for the customer - possibly into the eager outstretched hand. He is generally assisted by his wife and daughter, who are almost, but not yet equally, dextrous. There are metal receptacles in front of them also, and the pies are whipped out in such rapid succession that your eyes become dazzled by the quick continuous movement. If you watch long enough it will almost appear that a shower of hot pies is being flung up from below by an invisible agency. (Sims, 1903, 3: 51)

Although Sims' description is likely from the 1890s and still speaks of pies as being eaten by hand, it also speaks of cleanliness and speed. Ultimately, it also speaks of a working class modernity, an arena engaged in commerce and debate. More, as Harvey (2003: 232) has outlined, such enterprises enabled spatial dialectics around which specifically community values and identities could be built. The London working classes, zoned into clearly defined areas, have used (and continue to use) the historic eel pie houses as gathering points in which to performatively celebrate their identity, partly unique and partly a distillation of bourgeois notions by osmosis.

Historically for many working class people we might imagine, the novelty of the eel and pie shop was seen as offering the possibility of experiencing in reality some of the idealised pleasure already consumed in imagination from the restaurants of the wealthy. Consumption of the food was by the late century not only the solution to

hunger but also about the excitement and crucially the *anticipation* of that purchase. It expressed the consumers' uniqueness - ('autonomous imaginative hedonism' (Campbell, 1987: 77) but also identified a relationship to 'acceptable' class tropes (Johnson, 1988: 27-42).

Indeed, as George Dodd reported of the mid-century pie shops, "At some of these commercial dining rooms... [that are] in themselves a characteristic of the middle class respectability of our times..." (Dodd, 1856: 507). Although this 'respectability' is crucial as it gave a moral and cultural framework to consumption and an indication of how to act 'appropriately', it requires some clarification within the context of a late nineteenth century London working class.

Delineations within that class were significant. The capital's artisanal elite had always divided itself from other workers and this appeared to mirror the hierarchy of micro-class divisions that "extended down to the very lowest stratum of the London poor" (Stedman Jones, [1971] 2014: 338). In that sense, the notion of Victorian working class respectability likely had a distinct, class-located sense. This was probably a contingent, situation-specific compromise and often performative rather than one "'emulative' of bourgeois patterns" (Bailey, 1979: 347). In that way, there could be a 'duality' of respectability as evidenced by performers within the music hall whose satire could undermine bourgeois pretensions (Walkowitz, 1992) or by negotiations around the strictures of Victorian temperance (Harrison in Bailey, 1979: 336).

Although the last two decades of the nineteenth century saw an economic decline, there was a rise in working class spending especially in the arena of entertainment and leisure (Bakker, 2011). The eel and pie shops would become, as I expand in a subsequent chapter, arenas of these class and site-specific 'respectabilities' and, like the music hall and Association Football, sub-cultural touchstones of a new working class life. Indeed, the shops would become as much a part of cultural production as any Marie Lloyd song or coster slang. In essence, although they held within them a refusal to completely acquiesce to bourgeois values and (overt) control, they were as much about conciliatory comfort and offered "...an assertion of personal dignity in the face of adverse circumstances" (Goby and Purdue 1984: 185).

By the turn of the twentieth century the shops had turned culturally inwards creating around themselves a protective cocoon of performative self-mythology and a political conservatism wrapped in a gastro-nationalism. They were, in the strictest sense, subaltern counter-publics (Fraser, 1990) without any of the implicit radicalism. Frozen in development from perhaps the 1920s, they have survived in a semi-fossilised state, spatialised to (often former) market-adjacent sites, hyper-local, unnoticed and untroubled within plain sight, becoming only visible to a twenty-first century London when their customer demographic and racial constituency was challenged by globalisation and gentrification.

Conclusion

Following Norbert Elias' warning that "nothing is more fruitless, when dealing with long-term social processes, than to attempt to locate an absolute beginning" (Elias, 1983: 232), I have sought to demonstrate that the origins of the eel and pie shops lie not in the entrepreneurial figure of any one family dynasty but much earlier in the changing class relationships between a largely corrupt state of Thompson's ([1980] 1991: 27) patrician 'banditti' and the artisans that served them.

Economic rationalisation along with the elements of an embryonic bourgeois state (aided by amongst other factors, an emergent press with its adjuvant literate readership) meant that the humble pastry cook now served a different clientele and in doing so would propagate a taxon of working class eateries respondent to the temporal disruptions of capitalism, one of which through class descent, would eventually birth the contemporary eel, pie and mash shop.

The shops themselves, clearly an earlier inception than previously recorded as my research evidences, would be partial responses to the 'coming inside' of the working class. This was a process of bourgeois control (physical, cultural and moral) of the street and the necessity of mass catering, initially as a reaction to hunger but also congruent with the middle classes growing consumerism, morality and fears of pollution. The genius of the new eel and pie shops was to combine elements of advancing modernity in a replication of the 'gas and glass' of, amongst others, the

gin palaces with the warmth and respectability of a home that spoke of a proto-industrial conviviality.

The food served utilised the historic food of the London poor (the eel) with easily available ingredients in a setting that was geared to speed and necessity rather than the reflexivity of the (Habermasian) public sphere. Contrary to contemporary memorialisation (the political and cultural signification of which I shall discuss in my final chapter), the fare was more mixed with some shops like Evans' (the forerunner of today's Arments) still serving soup until at least 1914.³¹ Indeed, in a revealing interview in David Furnham's forgotten film, *Noted Eel and Pie Shops* (1975), Joe Cooke's grandmother, Lily, 91 at the time significantly recalled that "Robert Cooke [the founder of the Cooke dynasty] was-my-father in law... in Watney Street, Stepney "He never sold pies, he sold hot eels and mash."

By the mid-nineteenth century, this intensely localised and market-adjacent communality, itself derived of a synthesis and 'remaking' (Stedman Jones, 1974) of the culture of different types of manual workers, saw the emergence of a unique coster identity, simultaneous with and intrinsic to, a wider London working class culture. This, by the 1870s, without political navigation, had turned inward, defensively orientated towards the family and home set against a pacified lifestyle of consolation and distraction that saw them congruent with music halls, association football and seaside excursions (Stedman Jones, 1974: 485). This was the community that would largely become the customer base for the late nineteenth century pie shop. Although we cannot be entirely sure, it is to this period that straddles both centuries and likely no earlier, that we can trace the contemporary shop, its rituals and its traditions. By the early twentieth century the shops had become numerous but shielded within an urban working class culture of hyper-local social solidarities based around micro-class divisions of work, respectability and propriety.

³¹ In an image from a family photograph held by the Arments dated c.1914, a window display clearly offers soup.

The handful of eel, pie and mash shops that now remain within London, memorialised in contested recollection, are the product of a unique synthesis and are nothing less than a fossilised *extant taxon* of an early feeding-station/canteen/restaurant hybrid closely associated with, and synchronous to, the development of the identity of the costermonger who in turn contributed in no small measure to the emergence of a distinct and unique London character. It is to that character, long in creation, that I now turn.

2. The Theatre of the cockney

Perhaps we can remember and adapt Marx's insight: we make our identities, but with inherited resources and not under circumstances of our own choosing. (Gilroy in Gilroy, Grossberg and McRobbie, 2000: 127)

Introduction

Except perhaps in a generalised, geographic sense, the cockney identity, fundamental to, and the main signifier of the contemporary eel and pie shop, is seen as more or less redundant in a global, neoliberal city. Today, cockney is a nostalgic signal. The image of the good humoured, 'rough diamond' of the Lambeth Walk has been in decline since at least the 1940s and is now largely found in half-remembered and reconstructed simulacra in Essex. However, it remains a referent of an exclusively urban, London identity whose dominant register remains a 'proletarian entrepreneurialism' (Hobbs, 1998) associated with selling and service. From London's historic army of clerks, artisans, shop keepers, costermongers or casual labourers it survives, if only in the recollections of old men as "you got something to sell? I'll buy it off ya."³²

In this chapter I attempt to chart the contested evolution of the idea of cockney that appeared to emerge from its pre-modern roots evidencing an increasing divide between earlier rural power and knowledge and nascent, urban forces synchronous with early capitalism. I trace the notion, increasingly defined by a spatiality that began to articulate the contours of the new, expanding city of London towards a tension between the commoners and the elites; between the educated and the non-educated, between the patrician and the plebian (Thompson 1991). In this sense I argue that cockney began to display a duality: firstly, as an identity defined by speech type and then by barbed comedy but increasingly as a metaphor for the interplay between the powerful and the powerless.

³² Brian. Interview by author 22 June 2022.

Towards Victorian modernity, I use cultural texts to plot the rise of, and brutal satire towards, an interstitial, Romantic class that defined itself in cultural opposition to the elites of the *ancien regime*. Secondly, I describe a new strata, initially outlined and personally represented by Dickens, as grocers, journalists, shop assistants and (eventually) eel and pie shop owners. I then examine the fluidity of the moniker and the circumstances of the term's rapid class slippage, synchronous to the alliance of the bourgeoisie and the old elites, that sees cockney become a symbol for the multitudinous urban poor. In that sense, I argue that the journey of the cockney is about who controls the word and its fluid connotation.

During early Victorian modernity, I trace the performativity of the cockney as both an escapist pantomime that simultaneously aped, celebrated and satirised the appearance of the elites and a dynamic, dramatic identity informed by street commerce (Jankiewicz, 2012). Both forms I suggest may owe much to pre-industrial forms of the crowd and carnival reflected back through early working class musical and entertainment traditions that began to shape a specifically London proletarian identity. This identity I argue was carved from precious moments of enjoyment during periods of extraordinary privation and political impotence after the defeat of the Charter. I attempt to contrast this by delineating the characterisation of the cockney as a representative of bourgeois fears of both the street and degeneration: simultaneously repulsive but erotic.

In this I question the notion of the construction of a Victorian 'underclass' (Davis, 1989) by examining the conflation of the coster class with cockney (Brodie, 2001) to describe the further class descent of the character and its re-inscription by the contrasting outlooks of Victorian Liberalism as both comic and criminal: simultaneously a representative of sympathy and fear. I relate this fear to a burgeoning cultural hegemony that sought to meld the potentially revolutionary cockney from the 'abyss' into a figure of imperial incorporation. Here, I utilise Stuart Hall's (1973) work on the dissemination of hegemonic messaging via television to sketch the increasingly middle class music hall's eventual co-option of the authentic voice of the street ventriloquised by a bourgeois performer across culture and media.

This process, I suggest, further utilised Walter Bagehot's (1867) idea of political theatricality to absorb the cockney into the nation via a popular imperialism within a discourse of 'invented tradition' (Hobsbawn and Ranger, 2012). The cockney is then I indicate, utilised as a vessel to encapsulate a particular type of 'ordinary' Englishness and periodically valorised according to its usefulness to capital.

2.1 The cockney in history

Writing in *The St James' Magazine*, Cadwallader Waddy (1873: 127) suggests that the origin of the cockney was "shrouded in mystery." The contemporary association of the cockney with a specific philosophy and dialect is however, largely a nineteenth century construction (Stedman Jones: 1989).

Indeed, in projections redolent of his own period, William Matthews in his seminal *The Cockney Past and Present* (1938: 4-5), identifies in amongst (many) others, the colloquialisms of Shakespeare's Mistress Quickly as those of a "Cockney char woman" and in Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1613), finds George the grocer and Nell his wife, "Cockney treasures". Yet upon inspection, these appear no more than Elizabethan conventions of guileless, 'lower' language. Matthews again hopefully cites the example of the dramatist Samuel Foote, "one of the first writers to formalise the Cockney" (1938: 4-5) whose *Taste* (1752) relies on the humorous mistakes of the alderman Pentweazel and his wife. These "vulgarisms" are again conflated with a later, 'lower-class' cockney.

Early editions of Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* make no linkage at all between cockney and diction, simply citing it as a London 'native' and secondly as an "effeminate, ignorant, low, mean, despicable citizen (Stedman Jones, 1989: 281). Johnson's subsequent etymological suggestion connects the cockney to the notion of *cockagne*, 'a country of dainties' that may additionally related to the Norman word for sugar cake but also refers to the Elizabethan notion of a dear child, or 'cocker'. Thomas Tusser in his *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry* (c.1557) seems to foreshadow this. He has -

Some cockneies with cocking are
made verie fooles,
fit neither for prentise, for plough, nor
for schooles (Tusser, [1557] 1878: 549).

Here, 'to cocker' was to spoil or pamper and all of these definitions seem to suggest that cockney was in this period identified with urbanity and a subject unused to hard rural labor.

Julian Franklyn (1953: 15) follows Matthews in citing John Walker's *Pronouncing Dictionary* (1791) that congratulates the cockney as "models of pronunciation to the distant provinces [who] ought to be the more scrupulously correct." Walker ([1791] 1830: 17) comments at some length however, on what would become a mid-nineteenth century cockney trope; the use of 'v' for 'w' and the dropped 'h'. This seems to be a grammatical mistake across the board: perhaps a fashion or an affectation and not just amongst the urban poor. His real concern with the mistakes of the 'lower orders' however is the mispronunciation of 'curtsey', that "... has its last syllable changed into the *che* or *tshe*, as if written *curt-she*."

The main problem in his view was the -

difference between the metropolis and the provinces is that the people of education in London are free from all the vices of the vulgar; but the best educated people in the provinces, if constantly resident there, are sure to be strongly tintured with the dialect of the country in which they live. Hence it is, that the vulgar pronunciation of London though not half so erroneous as that of Scotland, Ireland or any of the provinces, is, to a person of correct taste, a thousand times more offensive and disgusting (Walker [1791] 1830: 17).

The distinction of 'educated' and 'vulgar' is not necessarily class (this period certainly predates an industrial proletariat) but between the educated and the non-educated, the elites and everyone else. We might say, in echo of Thompson (1991), between the courtier and citizen, the patrician and the plebian - the genteel and the vulgar.

This tension dominated the late eighteenth century mirroring as it did the rise of a new kind of Londoner.

The first reference of cockney with its direct spatiality, Bow Bells, seems to have come from the English lexicographer John Minsheu in 1617 and he repeats a trope that links William Langland's *Piers Ploughman's* small and misshapen eggs ('cocken-ey') to people brought up in cities and ignorant of real life (Stedman Jones, 1989: 281).³³ The retelling of this story, again linking the townsfolk with ignorance, is repeated over and over in subsequent centuries:

That a cittizen's sonne riding with his father... into the country... asked, when he heard a horse neigh, what the horse did, his father answered, the horse doth neigh; riding farther he heard a cock crow and said, doth the cock neigh too? (Elmes, 2005: 52).

Cockney is then an early signifier of the developing tensions between emergent forces of capital in towns and older, feudal forms of power and knowledge in rural areas. Samuel Pegge's counterblast to Dr Johnson's dictionary echoes this analogy centuries later and his criticism is couched in exactly the same terms. Pegge objects to Johnson's alleged ignorance of "antient dialectical words... [and] ... treats them as outlaws who have lost the protection of the Commonwealth" (Stedman Jones, 1989: 281). For Pegge, cockney is a language "in use among the citizens within the sound of Bow-Bells is that of Antiquity and, for the most part, composed of 'Saxonisms' (Stedman Jones, 1989: 282). This is of course, a tenuous link to an older England: a more authentic and symbolic 'cockney' Englishness that allegedly predated the Norman yoke. The comedic also begins to link with the geographic. In Chaucer's *The Reeve's Prologue*, the cockney is a dull fellow. Oswald worries, "I shall be held a daffe, or a cockney". In the second act of *King Lear*, Shakespeare has the Fool exclaim:

³³ Interestingly, inhabitants of both London and York are described in this way by Robert Whittington in his *Vulgaria*, (1520) - "This cokneys and tytyllynges [*delicati pueri*] may abide no sorrow when they come to age. In this great citees as London, York the children be so nycely and wantonly brought up that comonly they can little good." McArthur, Lam-McArthur and Fontaine, 2018: 142.

Cry to it nuncle, as the cockney did to the eels when she put ‘em i’th paste alive; she knapp’d ‘em o’th’coxcombs with a stick and cried, ‘Down wantons down!

Not only is this useful in locating the eel in the historical English diet but it places the cockney as an early figure of modernity, completely uncomfortable in any other environment than the city. A century later, the *New London Magazine* would write that:

There is no popular subject of satire, on which the modern common-places if wit and ridicule have been exhausted with more success than on that of a mere cockney affecting the pleasure of the country.³⁴

The cockney was invariably a figure of humour, “a living paradox, a metropolitan provincial, the stunted offspring of the big city” (Dart, 2012: 5). Rather than a single tongue however, in Pierce Egan’s *Life in London* (1821), the city is a patchwork of local dialects:

A kind of *cant* phraseology is current from one end of the metropolis to the other... In some females of the highest rank, it is as strongly marked as dingy dragged-tail Sall, who is compelled to dispose of a few sprats to turn an honest penny. (Stedman Jones, 1989: 84-85).

This *cant* is located in the geography and attitudes of the character, but this is not identified by Egan as cockney. Egan’s cockney is to be found in his 1839 novel, *Pilgrims of the Thames*, where conspicuously monikered Peter Makemoney, a City alderman, becomes the Lord Mayor of London. Makemoney is “... a thorough cockney... The sound of Bow Bells... was delightful music... he had seen nothing else, but London and he thought that there was no place like London” (Stedman Jones, 1989: 285). Makemoney is a connective between the eighteenth and nineteenth century representation of the identity. He is a born and bred Londoner, who “... despised anything like ostentation; and self-importance he was equally

³⁴ “The Genius.” *New London Magazine, or Gentleman’s Monthly Intelligences*, August 1761: 424.

disgusted with; but his home and fireside were great objects to his mind..." He liked a drink and "was particularly fond of a good song..." (Egan, 1838: 7-8). Makemoney links the earlier idea of the innocent, London-as-the-world (he is gently mocked in an episode on the waters at Chelsea Reach) with an honesty and solid, burgher values. Similarly, Robert Smith Surtees writes in his 'sporting cockney' *Jorrocks* novels of the (more) comic, corpulent cockney squire who has risen through society. *Jorrocks* is not genteel, but he stands in his honesty and plain speaking contrasted with the greedy (and effeminate) aristocracy.

But 'arter all's said and done there are but two sorts o'folks l' the world,
Peerage folks and Post Hoffice Directory folks, Peerage folks, wot think it's
right and proper to do their tailors, and Post Hoffice Directory folks wot think
it's the greatest sin under the sun not to pay twenty shillings i' the pund
(Stedman Jones, 1989: 286).

Cockney could also technically refer to anyone who wasn't aristocratic. He could be the wealthy grocer, Watty Cockney in *Love in the City* (1767) or the out-of-place Cosey in *Town and Country* (1807) but he must have the city in his blood. That city was *old* London; the mediaeval and the historic. The city of a certain pedigree. According to Thomas Barnes (a future editor of *The Times*) in a review of James Kennedy's farce, *Love, Law and Physic* (1813) it is noted that the cockney shopman from Southwark, a character known as Lubin Log, exhibits "the illiterate vulgarity of manner and of idiom which distinguish the native London shopman... for the lash of comic satire" (Dart, 2012: 7). This seems significant in two senses. Firstly, shopkeepers typify for Barnes, "... the real home of the cockney character, the place where its peculiar mixture of pertness and illiteracy, dullness and vivacity, were most fully expressed" (Dart, 2012: 8). Secondly though, it marks the geographic spread of this new type of cockney to the (then) London suburbs such as Islington, Camden Town, Clerkenwell and Southwark. These are areas that become home to a "new lower middle class of dependent clerks, technicians and professionals" (Mayer, 1975: 417), part of the growing service-sector. It is from these areas and this constituency that the first owners and customers of the burgeoning eel and pie shops had begun to emerge by the 1840s. These were now part of an uneasy class and cockney had become code for the vulgarity of modernity uniting city and the new

suburbs. This is the grammatical (and lived) pivot of the central struggle of the nineteenth century, the rise of the bourgeois and its synchronous dance with the working class. At the turn of the nineteenth century, cockney had become a catch-all term for those who lacked property: a barbed metaphor for those without authority.

This barb is the spite and bile unleashed in *The Satirist* in 1813 and again in 1817 in *Blackwood's Magazine* against the so-called Cockney School of Leigh Hunt and his collaborators, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley and William Hazlitt *et al.* The main thrust of *Blackwood's* venom was Hunt's *commonness* and narrow, classed, crucially suburban vision, that "has never seen any mountain higher than Highgate Hill, nor reclined by a stream more pastoral than the Serpentine River (Cox, 2010: 251). The period from 1813 (when Hunt was imprisoned for libelling the Regent) up to the 1840s has been called 'The Cockney Moment'. As Jennifer Cox (2010) suggests, the Cockney School defined its own cultural legitimacy against the elites as part of an emergent bourgeoisie, a unique 'cockney cosmopolitanism'. The audience that Hunt (the son of a clergyman) and Keats (the son of an ostler) and the other 'cockney' poets were addressing was found "among the skilled workers, small shopkeepers, clerks and the better grade of domestic servants that the mass audience for printed material was recruited during the first half of the nineteenth century" (Altick 1957: 83).

Literature was but one part of a culture of self-definition that was, in some sense, solidified in 1832. The limited Reform Bill allowed the propertied middle class to define itself *against* the aristocracy and *from* the lower-middle class and the poor. According to this definition, cockney was a demarcation between cultural and political legitimacies and, not for the first time was a cipher for power: for those who had it and those who did not.

Now, cockney was in cultural terms, "the misshapen 'foster-child' of Romanticism and Social Realism" (Dart, 2012: 26). In political terms, it outlined the downward trajectory of a class, ascendent during the Regency but largely unaccommodated afterwards.

2.2 Dickens and descent of the cockney

The 1830s was a period of great influx into London. Dickens' sharp eye as *Boz*, collated the changing city through the prism of his own difficult formative years. Forced to work in Gray's Inn as a solicitor's clerk at fifteen he was, essentially, a north London cockney.

In his sketches Dickens outlined a new interstitial class of grocers, journalists, shop assistants and (eventually) eel and pie shop owners. This grouping, made precarious by the 1832 Reform Act, was unable to gain acceptance as true bourgeoisie yet desperate not to fall into the abyss below. As petty bourgeoisie they were as Engels remarked, "great in boasting... [yet] very shy in risking anything" (Marx and Engels, [1851] 1912: 232). This political impotence meant that for the bourgeois proper, the cockney class was no longer suspected of radical intent and "... even by the late 1830s in England, the clerkly and shopkeeping classes were no longer the object of quite the same suspicion as in the 'Cockney School' period" (Dart, 2012: 26).

It was also Dickens who seems to have encapsulated the class slippage of the cockney into more familiar registers by his portrayal of Sam Weller in *The Pickwick Papers*. He does this by transposing his London voice, rather archaic even by this time, with that of the lower-classes. As Benjamin Smart recalls in *Walker's Pronouncing Dictionary* (1846):

The diffusion of literature among even the lowest classes of the metropolis, renders it almost unnecessary to speak now of such extreme vulgarisms as the substitution of v for w, or w for v. Few persons under the age of forty years of age with such a predilection for literary nicety as will lead them to these pages can be in much danger of saying that they like 'weal and winegar wery well'... [this speech pattern belongs to a] ... more distant generation of cocknies...[and that] ... the cockney speaker has to learn at least consistency in his pronunciation (Stedman Jones, 1988: 287).

Certainly, Mayhew (1857: 5) writing of the 1840s in his *London Labour and the London Poor* makes a similar comment that "The characteristic dialect of Bow-Bells

has almost become obsolete: and alderman now-a-days, rarely transpose the vs and ws.”

Indeed, Mayhew (1857: 5) lists several other London dialects such as The London exquisite, The affected Metropolitan Miss, The fast young gentleman, The Cadger's Cant and the coster's backslang. A version of one of these would form the basis of what would be known as cockney rhyming slang but that connective between the coster community and the working class (labouring cockney) would be some decades away.

Dickens' motives for Weller's class demotion are unclear and it was an odd reversal: although Dickens only described the character as a “specimen of London Life”, the true cockney in the book should have been Pickwick himself, the epitome of the long-established vein of 'sporting cockney'. Yet Weller is by speech and manner a reassuring character. He has a rough, urban wisdom that is almost an ironic echo of the rural knowledge that the earliest cockney stood against, and his diction is a contrast to the staccato delivery of Jingle, the cockney confidence trickster. Weller, like his wider cockney compatriots has ambitions to be a gentleman but by the end is again Pickwick's loyal servant. This may be Dickens' way of putting working class ambition in its place, but it may also be seen as a gentle (if slightly patronising) humanising of the labouring classes: a repeat of his earlier attempts in his *London Recreations* (1833-1836). Tellingly, in 1850 Dickens remarked that (it is) “The wish of persons in the humbler classes of life, to ape the manners and customs of those who fortune has placed above them... is often the subject of... complaint. [Yet] some of the some of the finery of these people provokes a smile but they are all clean and happy, and disposed to be good natured and sociable” (Dickens, 1850: 55-57).

Although Turner (2020: 115) suggests his use of speech may have been deployed to “satisfy public expectations” and adhere to theatrical convention, it may also be a signal that the lower orders are no longer willing - or capable - of rising as a threat to the social order. Whatever Dickens intended for the cockney, the term now became a weapon of satire in the culture war by the dress and affectation of the aspirant class embodied in the youthful shop assistant or clerk. That these (men, predominantly) are typical of the new consumer dynamic that sees food (such as the

emergent eel and pie shops) and dress as modernity and progress is no coincidence.³⁵ Clearly, the journey of the cockney is about who controls the word and its fluid connotation.

The mid-century sees two major changes in the representation of the cockney. The first was the 1867 extension of the franchise and the second was the growth of consumerism especially amongst the lower middle classes. This was concomitant with the birth of the character of the 'sham-genteel swell'. Although the 'dandy swell' as a London figure had existed for some time in various incarnations, it is now linked to a performative life-style that crossed classes.³⁶ Cockney dandyism was an escapist pantomime celebrating the aping of the appearance of the elites. Revolutions in the fashion industry meant that decent but cheap imitations of the elites' clothes were, for the first time "generally available... to the better class of plebian worker" (Dart, 2012: 206). Although clerks and apprentices were restricted in what they could wear at work, they were free to dress as dandies in the evenings. This performative, simulacrum 'look' has transmitted itself down to contemporary working class (especially youth) culture - the Teddy Boys' adoption of Edwardian fashion being an obvious example. The appropriation of the elites' style and the ensuing cultural faux-pas (and fear) contingent upon that continues to be a subject of satire. The 'Del-Boy' character created by John Sullivan in the BBC comedy, *Only Fools and Horses* for example, combines the cockney ('flashy') adaptation of 1980s formal wear with the linguistic contortions reminiscent of Dickens' 'Wellerisms'.

Presciently, and somewhat ironically given the bourgeois appetite for social emulation of the aristocracy, William Hazlitt (1821: 41) would, in the early part of the nineteenth century warn on the dangers of "... being taken for what one is not."

³⁵ It may be instructive to look at Dicken's *Shabby Genteel People* - another Sketch by Boz - that reflects on the clothing of the less cheerful and not-so-young characters of the lower middle class, struggling in their patched and threadbare clothes. They wait to rise from their predicament but never do so whilst the young believe they will but find fulfilment in fashion and style.

³⁶ Piece Egan would write for example about the earlier dandy cockney fraudster, Samuel Hayward who affected the life of a man of leisure. See - Egan, 1822. We might see the Regency dandy, George Bryan "Beau" Brummell (1778-1840) here as an archetype of modernity and performativity in this sense against the backdrop of consumerism although his elite status meant that his style was as a leader rather than a follower.

Hackney-born Renton Nicholson's *Cockney Adventures and Tales of London Life* (1838) gives us a city full of aspirant cockney young men, their consorts and their often humorous adventures in dialect. A weekly penny-dreadful concurrent with Dickens' *Sketches by Boz*, Nicholson would describe the characters of the London street of the 1830s in an anticipation of Benjamin's (1999) bourgeois *flâneur* that would chronicle Paris' characters and *physiologies* in his *panoramic literature*.

2.3 The Music Hall as distorting mirror

The embryonic music hall, so crucial for the development of cockney identity, reflected back and refined these styles of the street. It became the mecca of the salaried youth of the new working population, the single young men ('counter-jumpers'), and performers like Alfred Vance (1839-1888) better known as 'The Great Vance' who embodied this symbiotic trend on stage as 'swells' or *Lion Comique*. These characters were parodies of the upper classes, generally dressed in evening wear, and sang songs that were "hymns of praise to the virtues of idleness, womanising and drinking" (Dagmar, 1996: 175).

The fear of the masses entering the polity via the music halls was expressed by *Tinsley's Magazine* in 1869:

We do not hesitate to lay upon the music-halls the parentage of that sham-gentility which has become so abnormally prominent among the striplings of the uneducated classes during the past few years. Nowadays, your attorney's clerk - apparently struck by some 'levelling up' theory of democracy - is dissatisfied unless he can dress as well as the son of a duke" (Stedman Jones, 1988: 290).

The 'swell' is just one of a range of characters that music hall performers could call upon. Others were Irish, blackface, the rustic - and the cockney. They are all by this time however played by professional middle class performers in what Derek B. Scott (2002: 243) calls 'the imagined real', "where the identity of the performance remains separate from that of the character portrayed." The period coincided with a simultaneous duality within liberalism itself that both articulated a

fear of this 'levelling up' and expressed guilt surrounding the extreme poverty that laissez-faire had undoubtedly unleashed. The sympathetic ventriloquising of the poor onstage by bourgeois performers may have partially reflected the cultural ascendancy of a Gladstonian moral tone, or as Himmelfarb (1968: 300) succinctly has it, "a Victorian angst". Increasingly, the cockney is simultaneously both satirised and represented in a more benevolent way in songs like "The Ratcatcher's Daughter" that take a romantic view of poverty (Koppen, 2014).

Discussion of the exact type of precursor to the music hall goes beyond the scope of this study, but my argument is that this largely undocumented culture is simultaneous with the working class culture that would meld into the eel and pie shops. Just as the early shops in the 1840s would adopt the appearances of the gin palaces, publicans in the 1820s and 1830s, "... successfully invested in gaslight and gilding" and looked for other ways to expand their business (Lee, 2019: 32). Public houses formalised so-called 'harmonic evenings' or 'free-and-easys' that would typically be held in rooms above the saloon. It seems that in addition, working class youth had their own clubs, and these were, allegedly, "[places where] boys and girls meet... and get drunk and debauch one another" (Lee, 2019: 36). It seems that a "Georgian permissiveness lingered well into the early Victorian period" (Lee, 2019: 36). What is equally clear is that there was a vibrant and authentic working class entertainment culture, that ran parallel to the bourgeois entertainment halls but waned (Speight, 1977). This decline was two-fold. It was achieved by moral panic in the press and by legislation. It seems likely that the intervention of Sir George Grey, the home secretary, in 1849 was decisive and his interest in opposing unlicensed music and dancing venues may well have had a great deal to do with the fear of Chartism and local unrest. Unlicensed and temporary makeshift theatres, the so-called 'Penny-Gaffs', continued for some time however, perhaps until the later part of the nineteenth century. According to *The Morning Post* (Lee, 2019: 51) their audience was young and very poor:

Farces and pantomime, were mixed with stories of highwaymen and murder, drawn from penny dreadful serials (e.g., *The Mysteries of Paris*) or along similar bloodthirsty lines (e.g., *The Blue Apron and the Cleaver*, or *The Sanguinary Butcher of Cripplegate*).

A newspaper article on a gaff in Poplar gives a good account of the audiences of these early taxons of the more 'respectable' halls. The audience we are told consisted of "Ragged boys, each one with his pipe, potatoe [sic] and (we must add) his prostitute" (Sheridan, 1981: 54). Mayhew ([1851] 208: 49, 50) specifically links them with the costers and their "dancing tunes" and is suitably outraged by what he sees. The disappearance of these theatres was simultaneous with the advancement of mass consumption, the 'control of the streets', the moralising of working class culture and its commodification by the forces of capital and modernity.

In a wider cultural sense, this development crucially enabled the creation of a transgressive low *other*, a synchronal notion of the working classes as different, monstrous yet tantalizing and vitally erotic (Walkowitz, 2012). Simultaneously this defined a cultural cartography that delineated zone of exclusion known as the *Abyss* - the East End itself.

This complicated, vampiric cultural ingestion and regulation of the increasingly prohibited carnivalesque in everyday life was fundamental because it "symbolically heightened the eroticised version of fantasy life" and therefore facilitated the "inner dynamic of the boundary constructions necessary to collective identity" for a nation-building project" (Stallybrass and White: 2008: 20). It would also have an ironic resonance in later notions of working class respectability, structural to the identity of cockney and the eel and pie shops.

This process also helped solidify a new cockney identity formed in the pages of *Punch*. The cockney character of 'Arry was created by E.J. Milliken in sketches that lasted from 1877 to the 1890s. He was a fusion of several earlier cockney stereotypes, notably in his aversion to the countryside, his diction, his caddish behaviour and his vulgarity. He was a 'swell', spending his salary on garish clothes, holidays and cheap cigars.

Politically, he was a product of the Disreali's 'Leap in the Dark', the limited franchise expansion of the 1867 Reform Act. 'Arry was a working class Tory ("the

petticoats want keeping down, like niggers and radicals” - Stedman Jones, 1988: 291) and a fervent Jingoist - the term referencing a bullying, expansionist nationalism around the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78.³⁷ The character was celebrated in the popular song of in 1881 that bears his name. Sung by one of the greatest stars of the day, Jenny Hill, the song is a defence not of ‘Arry’s character *per se* but more tellingly of what he represents:

The ‘Upper ten’ may jeer and say
What ‘cads’ the ‘Arries are,
But the ‘Arries *work, and pay their way* [my italics]
While doing the la-di-da (Stedman Jones, 1988: 291).

‘Arry prefigures by a century the latest incarnation of the cockney, the Thatcherite East End ‘barrow boy’ who, in a similar vein, is both comic and threatening; a grotesque that will make the eel and pie shop a central totem of their identity based on a palimpsest of previous (and invented) cockney characterisations.

2.4 The coster confusion

Mayhew’s cockney was rooted simply in an older “dialect of Bow-Bells”. For him, the costermongers were members of the dangerous classes, and their argot was that of “London thieves” (Mayhew, 1857: 5-6). They were “nearly all Chartists”, a synonym for the mob (Mayhew, 1857: 29). His views were angrily disputed at the time by the costers themselves and, although Mayhew is a valuable source of information, his reputation, even at the time was not entirely trusted (Himmelfarb, 1984: 15).³⁸ In light of this, recent scholarship around the coster community and indeed around the notion of casual labour is worth examination.

The demonisation of the street in this period, was part of a complex cultural shift. The costers, part of an older tradition of an informal economy stood, like all of the

³⁷ The term came from the lyrics of a song by George William Hunt, made popular by the performer G.H. MacDermott. “We don’t want to fight but by Jingo if we do/We’ve got the ships, we’ve got the men, we’ve got the money too...”

³⁸ For a contemporary account of a demonstration by costers against Mayhew’s ‘defamatory’ writings, see *Reynold’s Magazine*, 18 May 1851.

street-sellers, stubbornly in the way of this (Jankiewicz, 2012: 403). Rather than the retrospective label of simple ‘penny-capitalists’ (Benson, 1983) who allegedly pursued a “middle class occupation at the working class level of life”, theirs was more likely a “dwindling subsistence economy trapped within the expanding capitalist system” (Richards in Jankiewicz, 2012: 394). As such, their very presence, let alone their unregulated economic activity, was subversive. To the respectable, they represented a confrontation between the stability of the new bourgeois capitalist order and an older, more human set of interactions between members of all classes that were potential customers. Jankiewicz (2012) makes an excellent point when he says that by their very nature the performative role of costers was crucial. In a society where a person could disappear and reinvent themselves (often by necessity) one could transform one’s identity by changing the products that one sold. Although some coster businesses were clearly hereditary, this identity fluidity mirrored the street spaces that the costers occupied (Stedman Jones, 2014: 61-62). To be heard, it was necessary to stand out and perform, and this clearly prefigures their co-opted role in music hall. The open undermining of authority meant that the costers were seen as enemies of order and new laws. Indeed, *The Morning Post* in 1848, reporting on mass demonstrations in Trafalgar Square claims that the crowds were “chiefly composed of the costermonger class.”³⁹ This radical edge to the politics of the streets seems to have been somewhat forgotten by later historians. Work by Mark Brodie questions many of the later conservative assumptions about the coster’s political allegiances. It appears that in many cases they “quite consciously identified themselves and their causes with the working class... that was clearly recognised by politicians of the period, but ... has been largely ignored since” (Brodie, 2001: 149). Some of Stedman Jones’ work on casual labour in this regard is based on earlier studies by Pelling (1967) whose basis for resolving that the costers were an overwhelmingly conservative force is evidenced from just one specific area of east London. Yet “[W]hen first established in 1894, the Whitechapel costers deliberately chose to call themselves a labour union” and certainly, many coster unions “... like the Whitechapel and City unions, seem to have been generally to the left (Brodie, 2001: 149,152).”⁴⁰

³⁹ *The Morning Post*, 8 March 1848.

⁴⁰ It seems likely that the confusion about certain local political alliances was based on, for example, union membership figures from where costermongers *lived* rather than where they *traded*.

In this way, the costers, at this stage, rather than fitting the narrative of the unitary nature of John Bright's *residuum*, demonstrate a more nuanced existence (Koven, 2006).⁴¹ Indeed, Jennifer Davis' work that centres around the construction of a mid-Victorian underclass makes the point that the so-called 'casual poor' exhibited attitudes and behaved in ways "characteristic ...of the nineteenth century working class in general" (Davis, 1989: 20). More, perception and reality of the residuum,

continuously interacted to shape each other in a number of crucial ways. Thus, the behaviour of the casual poor, conditioned by their economic circumstances, often appeared to substantiate the popular image of them as inherently violent and lawbreaking.

This refinement is crucial and again, whilst beyond the scope of this study, challenges the axiomatic association of cultural divisions of the London working class. It postulates a convincing, more nuanced position that the 'casual poor' was an ideological 'turn' manufactured in the 1870s and 1880s as a successor to earlier notions of the criminal 'other'. In this sense, the residuum "was as much a consequence of its identification as it was a necessary precondition for it" (Davis, 1989: 13).

The implications for the identity of the cockney and especially of the eel and pie shops is that it signals a necessary duality: the very definition of a 'respectable' working class *depends* on the criminal, feckless other. These tropes are still, in so many senses, current in the contemporary cockney identity, evidenced in the eel and pie shops, mixed as they are with notions of cleanliness, hard work and respectability.

⁴¹ Bright, a Liberal MP was the first to use the term in reference to an 'irredeemable' Victorian 'underclass' in a debate against further enfranchisement. See - Alexander, 2013: 99.

2.5 The character refined

If street markets, costers and the residuum threatened to interrupt commercial progress mid-century, they provided contemporary writers and journalists, “good copy about the pulsating organism of living London” (Walkowitz, 2012: 144). The hardships of the costers and the closures of their ‘convenient’ local markets for the middle classes that they inevitably served, were clearly linked. It is in this period, largely perhaps due to the everyday utility to a large part of a cross-class audience in the theatres, that the costermonger makes his appearance as a music hall character. He is simultaneously a figure of sympathy and a crook.

Alfred Vance, who we have already seen typifying the ‘swell’ character, was also one of the first of the music hall performers to utilise this ‘respectable’ coster identity with such songs as *The Chickaleary Cove* and *Costermonger Joe*. In a unique character reversal of his dandy (of either the upper or lower-class variety), Vance transforms from the well-dressed cad to become one of “the brutal denizen of Whitechapel...” (Roberts in Stedman Jones, 1989: 295). Vance and a host of other Victorian performers adopted a stage identity of low-life (semi-) realism that exhibited an almost prurient fascination with poverty, moral choice and casual male violence.⁴² This was a performative flirtation between the character of the ‘respectable’ working class and the dangerous criminal, predicated on the middle classes’ increasing acknowledgement that there actually was such a thing as a working class culture.

It was the appearance of the actor Albert Chevalier in 1891 however that cemented him as “...the Kipling of the music-hall”, the cockney as coster and the cockney as a “new archetype in the early 1890s” (Chevalier in Stedman Jones, 1989: 272). Chevalier was an unlikely star for the masses. A veteran of more sedate middle class supper and recital clubs like *The Savage* and *The Green Room*, his debut was the result of a marriage between his artifice, his astute manager, Newson Smith and the founding of new West End Theatre syndicates.⁴³

⁴² See - Anstey, 1888: 36 - “Bein niver too tight of a Saturday night but what I kin wallop the wife...”.

⁴³ The Music Hall landscape that Chevalier conquered was in part the result of the liberalisation of the theatre sector by the Theatres Act of 1843 (amending the regime of The Licensing Act of 1737)

These posited a new financial model that moved away from the sale of alcohol into creating 'star' performers to carry audience numbers. In many ways, this professionalisation of the theatre mirrored the working class restaurants like the eel and pie shops: no longer an artisanal trade but a bourgeois inspired business enterprise. It should be noted however that Chevalier was preceded and outlived by a real cockney performer, Ernest Augustus ('Gus') Elen (1862-1940) who had a "voice of extreme authority, disillusionment and sardonic irony" (MacInnes, 1967: 51).

In terms of identity, Chevalier makes the cockney self-reflective and a figure of great sympathy. This is especially true in the rendition of his famous "My Old Dutch". The song is a lament featuring an elderly coster and his wife who, after forty years of marriage, are separated before the workhouse gates. Not only is this sentimentality a trope that will endure within the cockney identity, but also Chevalier's dialect turns from the comic Dickensian confusions into what might be recognised as a modern cockney cadence. Interestingly, in an interview with *The Graphic* in 1892, Chevalier makes no pretence of his artifice and admits that,

It's a great mistake to suppose that there is any one cockney dialect. There are half a dozen. The 'coster song', as people will call the things I sing, is a kind of embodiment of several; and it isn't necessarily cockney at all" (Stedman Jones, 1998: 299).

There can be no clearer indication that this formative portrayal of the cockney which in its major form still survives, is a fiction: a concoction of the music hall and a saccharine impersonation of the authentic voice of the street ventriloquised by a bourgeois performer across culture and media.

which had allowed for plays to be performed only in the so-called 'patent theatres' - The Theatre Royal Drury Lane and The Theatre Royal Covent Garden.

2.6 The character reflected back

The new, more acceptable representation of the cockney now became standardised. Marie Lloyd (1870-1922) similarly adopted a cockney identity, and she appears as a “respectable crossing-point in the journey of cockney from low to middle-brow culture” (Matthews, 1938: 99). Her, “A little bit of what you fancy does you good” and “The Coster girl in Paris” are evidence of “the music hall’s feeding upon itself rather than by drawing ideas from, or representing, the world outside... a representational code is learnt, reproduced and bingo, you have a cockney” (Scott, 2002: 256). These ‘cockney’ songs, as Matthews (1938: 98) has it, are now “nostalgic for a golden age that preceded modernity...” and can be a cross-class cipher for pretty much any and all representations that can be hung onto them. What was hung onto them, and onto the cockney identity of course, was nationalism.

It is in this late Victorian period, not completely and not necessarily before that it’s possible to categorise the London working classes as turning towards conservatism (Davis, 1989: 103-128). It is in this era that the cockney was conscripted into the nation. No longer part of a ‘wandering tribe’ or a member of the residuum to be feared, cleared or damned for their own moral failings, the cockney was now an imaginary, and cheerfully colourful character that encapsulated very British virtues. From Elgar’s *Cockaigne Overture* to Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, the poor had to be reimagined and repackaged as upholders of the status quo. More succinctly, they were accepted into the body politic because their difference was held in check within a framework of national unity. It is not coincidental that this shift happens against a backdrop of mass Jewish immigration, a rise in trades union activity and a significant dockers strike in 1889.

Indeed, “... from the 1880s, no aspect of Britain’s privileged position was secure. The history of the British state in this period illustrates the profound difficulties of accommodating the changing economic, industrial and political conditions” (Mica and O’Shea, 1996: 27). The riots in London on the 8th of February 1885 that coincided with the severe winter and mass unemployment were seen as more alarming than the threat of 1848 and increasingly the predominant reaction to the

rediscovery of poverty in this period “was not so much guilt as fear” (Stedman Jones, 2014: 290). A riot involving 20,000 unemployed building and dock workers ensued after a demonstration organised by the Social Democratic Federation in Trafalgar Square in November 1887. This in turn was followed some days later by ‘Bloody Sunday’, again in Trafalgar Square, when the police violently assaulted a crowd protesting coercion in Ireland. Certainly, for many within the bourgeoisie, these confrontations must have seemed like the thin blue line of order holding back the barbarians of the East (End) at the gate. Engels (1968: 370-371) was convinced that this ‘New Unionism’ was a political turning-point and William Fishman (1988) has suggested that for many in bourgeois London, these events signalled the start of the coming revolution.

Violent mass repression against the much-swelled residuum was never a realistic possibility. Rather, hegemony had to be “actively constructed and positively maintained” (Hall, 1996, 424). The response to this crisis was the formation of a culture of a ‘suffocating nationalism’ (Anderson, 1992: 24) that continues and is ‘useful’ to this day, visible within the larger identity of the London working class. As Cecil Rhodes had presciently noted, “If you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialists” (Porter, 1975: 125).

At the start of the nineteenth century, notions of an ancient constitution, nationalism and patriotic allegiance were identified with radicalism. This vocabulary was inherited by Chartism but by the 1840s “... the language of patriotism begins to pass out of the mainstream of English radical movements” (Cunningham, 1981: 18). Disreali’s Conservatives began to harness the power of patriotic feeling to both assure the bourgeoisie of Tory intent and to win working class votes.

Although (again) beyond the scope of this study, I argue that Hall’s (1973) work on the dissemination of hegemonic messages via television is analogous to the music hall’s construction of cockney in the struggle for the continued cultural domination of the late nineteenth century’s ruling elites. The music halls’ role in the racism inculcated in the working class audience is well documented (Hobson, 1901) although the work of Andrew Crowhurst (1997) offers a rare challenge, contending that the halls merely celebrated the emergent consumer culture. Hall’s argument is

that within the *discursive* form itself - in this case the *language* of song - (Hall's 'sign vehicle') the 'product' (in this case cockney identity) is circulated. It requires both a 'means' (performance) and its own set of production relations within a media apparatus (the music hall as a newly productive, professionalised arena). It is the 'encoding' and 'decoding' of the hegemonic message that are the *determinate* 'moments' in its (successful or unsuccessful) reception - and crucially - *reproduction*, from source to receiver. It was essential for the decoded identity to *appear* unconstructed: hence cockney was *required* to be palimpsestic, referencing numerous historical notions of origin (mediaeval artisans, street sellers etc) as for example, Matthews (1938) and Franklyn (1953) were only too keen to do. The notion of identity is, according to Hall, subject to the "continuous play of history... culture and power (Hall, 1990: 225) and I argue that it is the role of *memory* to naturalise and habitualise these codes, further concealing their origins. The eel-pie shops become in that sense, both in their linguistic connotations and what they signify visually for Hall, ideological *codes* or shorthand for the cockney identity.

It is this thesis' contention that the music hall was an effective hegemonic device (in tandem with popular fiction in late Victoriana) that centred the bourgeois capitalist class as the shining example of national and racial ideals that by economic and democratic necessity would have to become 'ordinary' and in turn, form a 'popular' imperialism. In that sense, it fits well into both Anderson and Hobsbawm and Ranger's (2012) paradigm that claimed lived 'custom' morphed, under modernity's pressure, into an inauthentic and invented 'tradition'. As Walter Bagehot (1867: 59) had suggested, the masses "defer to what we may call the *theatrical* show of society."

Significantly, as Alistair Bonnett (1998) points out, the inculcation of this popular imperialism was vital to the transition from the liberal, to the more advanced, socially consensual form of welfare capitalism that would emerge in the next decades. That said, it is likely that this patriotic fervour had at least some prior fertile ground amongst the lower-classes in which to take root. Fear of invasion during the French Wars had, as Perkin asserted, meant that "patriotism reinforced paternalism to hold overt class conflict in check" (Perkin, 1969 in Cunnigham, 1981: 21: 208). Further, there was always a "popular John Bullish Toryism" that foregrounded roast beef,

beer and hearty pleasure which found home in the ‘sporting cockney’ (Joyce in Cunningham, 1981: 21). This would be the English ‘ordinary culture’ that Raymond Williams would later transpose as the inheritance of the industrial proletariat.

The result would be a largely compliant, pacified and patriotic urban working class. In London, a loveable, sentimental coster plastered on top of the underlying vulgar of ‘Arry who loved his Queen and country, was “and-in-glove with the nobs” but who knew better than to challenge his position because of the “few bob in his pocket”.⁴⁴ A Frankenstein cockney; the latest in a line of palimpsestic identities.⁴⁵

It enabled the London (now white) working classes “...to start drawing on a form of social symbolism from which they had been once marginalised...” (Bonnett, 1998: 318). Crucially, going forward, the roots of this identification would be forgotten but would form the defence of the eventual Welfare State to which mass non-white immigration would be seen as antithetical to working class political and social ‘gains’.

2.7 The Pearlies

More than any other, it is the ‘pearly’ king and queen families, adjacent to the cockney and central to the cultural architecture of the contemporary eel and pie shop, that are the loci for, and a direct performative receptor of, the music hall tradition.

The pearlies, and their employment by music hall as faux-costermongers provide a folkloric link to, and a direct aping of, royalty and social stratifications. Overall, they provide the final clue as to why the Chevalier version of cockney would displace both the character of ‘Arry, the swell, the cockney-as-criminal and the wider fears of the residuum in popular culture and win cross-class approval.

⁴⁴ *Punch*, 11 May 1878: 205.

⁴⁵ A notion that references the biological and social imperatives of ‘Degeneration’ theory that would influence the second half of the nineteenth century and to some extent perhaps the first half of the twentieth.

As Samuel and Stedman Jones (1989: 64) have shown, the appearance of Henry Croft, the first pearly king, was as a fundraising performer. Croft was not a coster but a road-sweeper who in 1880 (or 1886 - records vary) sewed pearl buttons to his clothes as a charity exercise for the Temperance Hospital on the Hampstead Road. Croft's centrality to this narrative however has been disputed as Charles Coburn (1928: 107), another music hall performer claimed that the pearlies were actually invented by the singer, Hiram Travers who had a costume covered with *brass* buttons.

Although Croft may have simply been copying the music hall 'cockney swell', he might also, simultaneously, be seen as the inheritor of several historic London traditions. Samuel and Stedman Jones link the pearlies to the figure of the Jack-in-the Green associated with much earlier pagan May Day rituals although this is disputed by Judge (2000) who concludes that it seems likely that the tradition was associated with milkmaids (later with chimney sweeps) and was first recorded in the middle of the seventeenth century. Pearl Binder (1975: 19) links them, rather hopefully, to a 'Lord of Misrule' character, the instigator of annual, permitted disorder but this is based on an inaccurate conflation with the coster community.

It is however as showmen that the pearlies symbolise a complicated working class insertion between authority and the poor: one that reinforces the 'imagined tradition' (Anderson, 2006) of the Chevalier cockney. Generally seen as a conservative force evidencing overt patriotism and defence of royalty, the pearlies were, counter-intuitively, instrumental in providing essential funds to pre-state based, hospital, charity and church organisations via their friendly societies.⁴⁶ The pearlies inherited, and then superseded, a nascent system of provident clubs, some of which were temperance based and some, like the Jolliboys, which met in pubs.⁴⁷

Their activities mark a move away from simple charity to alleviate particular categories of poverty to a more universal welfarism providing a class-based

⁴⁶ "... timorous, bien-pensant insurance clubs and wavering support for the Liberal Party." See - Anderson, 1964: 36.

⁴⁷ Binder asserts that the membership of these clubs were the link to the early pearly kings. See - Binder, 1975: 77.

alternative to direct patronage that linked bourgeois guilt to the failure of laissez-faire. Geoffrey Rivett (1986) in his *The Development of the London Hospital System 1823-1982*, relates that dissatisfaction with the hospital system had been growing since the 1850s and that charitable funds were a confusing and inefficient form of administration set against the idea of modernity. Nevertheless, the intervention by fundraising of a section of the London working class caused some consternation among the well-to-do middle class that managed the schemes. Indeed, "Working men... expected a *quid pro quo* as of right, and to have a say in management. They did not see their contributions as an act of charity but as a form of insurance" (Rivett, 1986). This interjection into the political process was concomitant with, but not intrinsically linked to, trades unionism. Publicly however the pearlys never deviated from an avowedly non-political stance, and this may account for their largely enthusiastic reception from the elites: pearlys were honoured by Princess Marie Louise in 1927 and were officially represented at the 1953 Coronation.

Pearlys in some form prefigured the arguments upon which the National Health Service would be based but its institution meant that they lost as a body much of their initial *raison d'être*. Their collections were often carnivalesque affairs that echoed such mediaeval gatherings as the Bartholomew Fair which transgressed rules and subverted authority (Bailey, 1988). So unruly did these 'carnivals' become that the pearly fund-raising hospital processions were finally banned by the police in 1928. Yet the pearlys, analogous to the eel and pie shops (that they continue to promote), remain as independent working class entities and emblems of class solidarity and pride.

The pearlys were however unequivocally not costers but rather in some senses their social inferiors. This was a sub-class of the poor but not the casual poor, that aspired to the perceived independence of the coster with his cart and merchandise, but who were in no position to attain the capital required to purchase them. Despite Chevalier's lyric in his, "The Coster's Serenade":

Mine is the noblest turn-out in the crowd
Me in my 'pearlies' felt a toff that day
Down at the Welsh 'arp, which is down 'Endon way

C. Duncan Lewis offered, “we laugh at the ‘pearliers’... the true London coster would never dream of sporting such buttons” (Stedman Jones, 1989: 386) The idea of a late nineteenth century cockney stereotype was however useful for the pearlies as an adopted identity that both raised and distinguished them from the ranks of the residuum.

As the likely representatives of the working classes that the intrepid bourgeois reporter would usually find on their safaris, the numerous pearly communities were likely partly responsible for the (mis)representation of the pearly/coster conflation (Samuel and Stedman Jones, 1989). As a result of this, the pearly community willingly adopted an identity that was a stereotype based on a fictive notion of a ‘respectable’ poor, fit for an imperial era.

2.8 Modernity, ordinariness and the first decline of the cockney

By the 1890s a generation of novelists sought to challenge the alternate comedic or violent depictions of the cockney in popular cultural texts. The so-called Cockney Novelists, Arthur Morrison, Henry Nevinson, Edwin Pugh, William Pett Ridge and Clarence Rook *et al* relied on first-hand research and activism to portray a more accurate personal and group identity.

These works, whilst not entirely free of some of the patronising cliches of the poor as ‘threat’ or ‘other’ in mid-century writing, do intimate some sense of the living interiority in London’s working classes centring notions of community and belonging whilst not flinching from depictions of brutality or crime.

The authors largely however failed to give any sense of wider class structures that surrounded their characters who have largely accepted their place within the political landscape, “rendered harmless by the new beneficent state machinery, controlled by the upper classes” (Keating, 1979: 221). This cockney is differently ventriloquised but equally stereotypical. He is now a patronised figure with a ‘heart of gold’ and a ferociously loyalty to his superiors despite the poverty that surrounds him. This is perfectly illustrated by Pugh’s short story, *Bettles: A Cockney Ishmael* (1898) where an East End drunkard redeems himself (dying in the process) through his courage

during the imperial campaign in the Sudan. Pre-empted by Rudyard Kipling's *Soldiers Three* (1888) this cockney is the perfect 'pet' for the elites during the First World War who celebrated his subaltern humour, bravery and stoicism.⁴⁸

The duality between this acquiescence and residual working class defiance is more usefully imaged in some of the depictions of the cockney in the elite's art of the period. William Rothenstein's *Coster Girls* (1894) references Hogarth but the subject's hands-on-hips stance shows a wholly defiant, independent young woman.

C.R.W. Nevinson, the scion of radical bourgeois parents led a group whilst at The Slade before the Great War that called themselves *The Coster Gang*. These adopted the dress and boisterousness of the cockneys (Fox, 1987: 152), seeking out mock, and sometimes real fights with the police, progressive students and even authentic costers. This imitation of the subversiveness and violence that lurked under the surface of working class life may, according to Lisa Tickner (1992 in Black 2003: 23), reflect the 'crisis of masculinity' in avant-garde circles of the period highlighting the tension between modernity and the dulling conformity of consumer capitalism. In 1914, Eric Kennington, later an official artist in both world wars, painted the stark, brutal and overwhelmingly modern, *The Coster Mongers* (fig. 3 in appendix). The painting, whose main focus is the confrontational glare of a muscular, red-waistcoated street seller seems additionally to conceal a longing from the painter. In both instances the cockney coster had become an image on which to hang a bourgeois neuroses; a ventriloquised and caricatured symbol of 'real' life.

By the 1920s, after the slaughter of the trenches, the ubiquity of the cockney identity as formulated by Chevalier and the Cockney Novelists had waned. Caught between the dialectic of imperial decline and the first, heroic phase of modernism, cockney henceforth would be only periodically and sporadically useful to its hegemonic creators as a motif and a warning siren that a certain *type* of Englishness was under threat.

⁴⁸ For these wartime recollections see - Hamilton, 1920.

By now, the East End had been captured by Labour. Although this in itself was by no means a systemic challenge (rather the result of campaigning by a timid political organisation rooted in a “defensive solution to the employer’s counter offensive of the 1890s” (Stedman Jones, 1982: 118)), the origin of that success might be partly responsible for the elites’ re-identification with a timeless, bucolic, England *profonde*. The transformation of this hegemonic idea of ‘Englishness’ had certainly started much earlier, but the codification of it as a reflection of its bourgeois image - the cloaking of “...its cold mercantile heart in swaths of chiffon sentiment” - was a relocation of it to the Home Counties where it continues to symbolically reside.⁴⁹

In London, the middle classes looked to the Metropolitan Line and its suburban havens; the sterile semis, housing the sons and daughters of clerks, accountants and returning colonial administrators who had imagined from afar an ordered, leafy home in the image of ordered, imperial cities like New Delhi (Wilson, 1982).

For the cockney, this sense of the pastoral had been encapsulated by the rise of the allotment from the late nineteenth century. In many East End boroughs these small plots of waste land enabled the working classes, especially those in casual employment like dockers, to grow their own food and to supplement their diet. The allotments also linked these (mostly) men with their peasant pasts and cultivatable land lost through previous centuries’ enclosures. It conjoined with notions of local community, civic engagement and, kept them out of the pub (Scott, 2010). In some senses it foreshadowed the Essex ‘pioneer’ movement which by the late 1920s saw East Enders built their own, sometimes rather makeshift, holiday homes and cultivate their own land in the county.

It is within this period that the institutions of contemporary England are formed: The Oxford English Dictionary, the national art galleries and the employment of English as an academic subject. The ‘Georgian’ poets; Rupert Brooke, D. H. Lawrence, Walter De La Mare *et al*, all evoked a romantic rurality along with the virtues of a moral responsibility tied to a particular kind of ‘Englishness’. Kipling broken by the death of his son, retreated to Sussex and Ebenezer Howard planned to create the

⁴⁹ Self, Will. *The Guardian*, 6 September, 2014: 19.

synthesis of a rural fantasy in satellite towns. However, the period was one where, everything seemed, “pregnant with its contrary” (Marx, [1856]1969: 500). This reinvention of Englishness coincided with a modernism (albeit as a confusing site of several intersecting discourses) that championed the city.

Although these ‘Modern Times’ were about the ‘experience’ of the new-fashioned and exciting city, they were also about uncertainty. Once, working class identities had been formed singularly within families or within artisanal living arrangements, but they were now assembled in different, more complex multi-dimensional spaces as workers flooded into city’s offices from working class satellites like Barking or Dagenham.

Although references to eel and pie shops are conspicuous by their absence in the editorial content of Edwardian London’s newspapers and magazines (a reflection of the continuing lack of interest and understanding of developing working class culture by the bourgeois press), they are visible in plain sight and seem to develop quietly within unexamined working class communities away from the glare and approbation from the seats of the wealthier patrons of the music hall (and subsequently the cinema).⁵⁰

Although the coster, with his horse-drawn cart was now increasingly an anachronism, this period was ironically a golden age for the eel and pie shops. These decades mark the start of the empires of the triumvirate of the great pie shop families, the Cooke’s, the Manze’s and the Kelly’s. Print advertisements from the period indicate an expansion of eel and pie establishments and the changing nature of their role and fare. The shops were still selling foods like soup that the Victorian street would recognise but by now they were a natural inhabitant of a contemporary working class high street.⁵¹ In one poor area of East London a plethora of modest

⁵⁰ Within all of my research, I can find only one music hall song that directly references the shops - *The Little Eel-Pie Shop* from the 1870s - that was sung by George Laybourne to the tune of Rossini’s *Carneval de Venice*. I understand this absence as indicative of the ubiquity but perceived cultural unimportance of them. See - Newton, 1975: 61.

⁵¹ *London Daily News*, 10 April 1902: 2 - “£25 eel pie and soup house old established, well-known business, near King’s Cross genuine living trade capital fixtures and utensils included.” *Kentish Mercury*, 12 December 1902: 1 - “Under distress for rent. 31 high-street, Deptford. Messrs Newell and Hamlyn will sell by auction at Two O’clock... the fittings and utensils in-trade of an eel pie

eating places are recorded that included no less than three pie shops and one hundred and twenty-three coffee shops.⁵² This would seem to indicate, likely because of housing conditions - necessity rather than choice - “that much working class life still took place outside of the home” (German and Rees, 2012: 157).

After the First World War, real wages fell, and inequality had grown (Cole and Postgate, 1971: 496-498). Music hall reflected the cockney uncertainties of the time with sentimental songs that dealt with evictions (“My Old Man said follow the van”), homelessness (“I live in Trafalgar Square”) and overcrowding (“If it wasn’t for the ‘ouses in between”). This period may also mark the first of a series of epochs of ‘forgettings’ (and subsequent ‘rememberings’) of the cockney identity and its allied culture in the eel and pie shops.

Although the Chevalier cockney of late Victoriana was palimpsestic, it was, in the final analysis, a fiction. Its subsequent haunting of the following century might be interpreted as a way to anchor both a lost authentic working class culture (based on a pre-capitalist form and an invented platform) and a temporal anchorage *against* the ‘time-space’ compression of the new modernist century (Harvey, 1989: 147).

For the youth of the elite, the inter-war years saw a flamboyant reassertion of class difference. The ‘Bright Young Things’, the inheritors of Stein’s ‘lost generation’ caroused with a Modernist *swagger*, whilst the cockney made do with a flickering projection of their refracted lives in the escapist cinema. The East End sustained itself with Bank Holiday excursions and summer camping in Kent fields picking hops.

⁵³ By 1920 there are 89 eel pie premises listed in the Post Office Directory.⁵⁴

and dining room business comprising counter, seats and tables, eel kettle, pie warmer, crockery etc. Auction offices 487 New Cross Road SE.

⁵² *Clarion*, Friday 28 October 1904: 5 - “A report issued by Poplar Borough’s Sanitary Committee inspires a contemporary to remark that there seems no chance of anyone starving in the borough *if he be in possession of a few coppers*. It was stated that there are in the borough the following establishments - Coffee Shops, 123; fried fish shops, 68; eating houses, 23; dining rooms, 35; cook shop, 1; eel-pie shops, 5; restaurants, 109; pie shops, 3; sausage shops, 4; tripe shops, 7. But what of the scores of people who do not possess ‘the few coppers’ wherewith the purchase the succulent sausage and the toothsome eel-pie?”

⁵³ At its height, from the Twenties to the Fifties, about 200,000 East Enders - mostly women and children - made the annual pilgrimage down into the Kentish hop gardens, filling the ‘hopper’s specials’ trains which left from London Bridge station in the early hours of the morning.

⁵⁴ *Post Office London Directory for 1920*, Commercial Directory, *Post Office London Directory for 1920*: 2131.

The cockney was, however, still a figure of occasional journalistic curiosity, principally for editorial 'colour'. Stephen Graham, writing in the *Westminster Gazette* in 1925, visits the East India Dock Road where he recounts a Saturday night's revelry in the 'four-penny gallery' where "coster flappers" wedge themselves "among the lads." Outside, "The public-houses have arcades, wherein an overflow of customers stand and smoke" and "One walks along to what may be called 'Eel Pie Corner' - for there is so much eel pie for sale."⁵⁵ The cockney identity is alive, well and boisterous, but largely ignored. Again, newspaper advertisements are often the only way to gauge the condition of the eel and pie shops. They seem to reveal that the shops are popular, capacious, and busy often with live eel stalls on the pavement in front of them.⁵⁶ A piece in *The Sphere* from 1925 locates the cockney and the eel and pie shop as both numerous and as a place to eat quickly and run - synchronous with the busy, 'modern', urban cockney:

In the jellied eel and eel-pie centres round the Elephant and Castle the standers gather morning and evening at counters or ledges, wolf their stewed eels, pay and depart.⁵⁷

By 1938, Mass Observation, forensically reported from The Old Kent Road how,

The market men don't pack up until after nine, and the pubs fill up quickly... At closing time... [the street] fills up again ... some sing. Some make for the fish and chip shops, others to meat pie and jellied eel establishments. In these main sale is 2d and 3d. hot meat pies, with pennyworths of mashed potatoes, which have lots of parsley chopped up with them (This parley garnishing seems peculiar to south of the river in London. Obs. has seldom encountered it on the north side, but every sausage and mash shop in the Old Kent Rd or Walworth Rd districts has it)

⁵⁵ Graham, Stephen, "London at night. In the four-penny gallery", *Westminster Gazette*, 25 February 1925: 10.

⁵⁶ An advertisement in the *Westminster Gazette*, 27 September 1922: 3, speaks of "shop fittings inc. eel tanks £175 all in..." Another in *Westminster Gazette*, 29 June 1923: 12, references an "Eel and Pie busy spot. Camberwell. Seats 25: 3 rooms... old estb..."

⁵⁷ *The Sphere*, 18 April 1925: 16.

The piece continues to render further fascinating detail that echoes Victorian health scandals but also offers up rare evidence that by now the shops sell eels, pies and mashed potatoes.

In this shop there is a large notice saying, ‘I will pay personally to anyone £500 who can bring forward the newspaper showing I have been prosecuted concerning the contents of my pies.’ And another notice, on glass ‘Our celebrated pea soup Nourishes and Sustains. Per 2d and 3d basin.’⁵⁸

The mention of soup further gives lie to the contemporary claim that the shops have only ever sold their contemporarily (and false) memorialised combination.

These inter-war journalistic interventions, simultaneous with the reporting of the modernity of the elites, are part of a pivot away from an imperial, heroic national identity to a reinvention that privileged a private, domestic and understated ordinariness. The cockney archetype was now a useful metaphor for an everyday working class Briton defined by their modesty, quietness, simplicity and kindness to animals (Samuel, 1989: xxiv). This ordinariness would soon form the basis of a national fiction of the decent working class grimly ‘carrying on’ fighting Hitler. It would also form the basis of another fiction that Britons were a ‘race apart’ in that battle and subsequently contribute to an exclusively racial concept of citizenship that would develop problematically after the Second World War. For the time being, however, George Orwell could codify this native common-sense normality that “... centres around things which even when they are communal are not official - the pub, the football match, the back garden, the fireside and the ‘nice cup of tea’” (Orwell, 1946 in Waters, 1997: 211).

⁵⁸ MOA: TC Music, dancing and Jaz, 38/2/C – The Lambeth Walk, XIV: 7 (image1381).

2.9 The cockney keeps calm and carries on⁵⁹

The co-option of the cockney's cheerfulness and determination in the face of the Blitz is the basis of the haunting of the present-day's austerity nostalgia. The roots of this may partly be found in the framing of the extraordinarily successful musical, *Me and My Girl* (1937). In it, Bill, a Lambeth cockney stands to inherit an Earldom but risks it all for his 'common' girlfriend, Sally. The Lambeth Walk, the dance the musical popularised (with the help of the massed ranks of pearly actors onstage), cemented the London cockney as "the class who knew how to have a good time" (Madge and Harrison in Stedman Jones, 1989: 313). It contrasted their 'traditional' culture with the 'fast', Americanism of the Jazz age, and also valourised the notion of cockney as crucially *biddable* innocents perhaps a remnant of the Cockney Novelists.

In the inter-war period, the ordinariness of the cockney had additionally been moulded by the 'benevolent bureaucracy' of Herbert Morrison's London County Council. Morrison's endeavours, via the most moderate Labourism, housed and educated many of the London poor, yet the prosperity of this vision depended on the unquestioned role of imperial commodities that by now were traded via a kind of Empire market bloc in contrast to the former rigours of Free Trade. This hegemonic concept was instilled by the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) whose activities (and films like, *Song of Ceylon* (1934) inculcated an idea of benevolence and protectionism that would eventually form an element of the Welfare State.

The successor to the EMB, the General Post Office Film Unit, was responsible for much of the lauded documentary output of its time, especially the film *Night Mail* (1936). The documentary, a precursor to much of the wartime propaganda, features real working class men who were, almost for the first time, not the anonymous subject of ridicule (McGahan, 2010). Notwithstanding the rather ironic aesthetic debt

⁵⁹ I use this slogan in an ironic sense to reference the contemporary nostalgia that surrounds austerity. The now ubiquitous phrase was discarded by the Ministry of Information after a test printing and never found its way to public display. Rediscovered, it was sold as a reproduction by Barter Books in Northumberland and then in the shop at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London where it coincided with the austerity regimes of the Conservative government almost seventy years later. See - Hatherley, 2016: 18.

to Socialist Realism, this prototype of the everyday hero was utilised in perhaps the most famous wartime film, *London Can Take It* (1940). Although cockneys are not specifically mentioned, the title is significant. In contradiction to the profoundly conservative rural locale of the pre-war, the title is geographically specific (much to the annoyance of bombed northern cities) and the heart of the nation is seen once again as London.

It was to this end that the Ministry of Information conscripted the cockney into the war effort. Contrary to the axiomatic notion that the cockney was a reactionary patriot who could be willingly bombed night after night and actually enjoy it, the booing of the royal family in the East End seemed to have been a genuine shock to the political establishment (Calder, 2012). Less so perhaps was the extraordinary rise in crime under the cover of Blitz darkness and the role of the cockney black market 'spiv' who, along with more positive representations, has remained in the public consciousness, forever associated with London crime (Leg, 2017).

The enduring duality of the cockney identity notwithstanding, the experience of wartime shelters had foreshadowed an inevitable period of radical social change. According to Lord Morley in 1941, "It is quite common now to see Englishmen speaking to each other in public although they have never been formally introduced" (Timmins, 1995: 32).

The end of the Second World War definitively marked the universalisation of bourgeois democracy and in many ways was also the culmination of the long, concomitant nineteenth century journey of the cockney and its culture. Its identity, so long defined as a subordinate vehicle of political exclusion, would now be irresistible as a defining character in the new nation as determined by an insurgent Labour administration.

The imperial foundations of that nation however could no longer contain even the most modest aspirations of the working classes. This national, cross-class populist project was a reward, not only for winning the war, but also for their loyalty to capital.

In the decade after victory, the cockney *per se* played a bit-part cultural role but its translation as the epitome of cross-class wartime solidarity was important.⁶⁰

In *Passport to Pimlico* (1949) it was only through an appeal to a 'Blitz spirit' that societal cohesion could again be achieved. In 1959, the Dutch historian, Johan Huizinga suggested that the only distinctive national character the British possessed "was their susceptibility to the illusion that they had one, and a very remarkable one at that" (Huizinga in Waters, 1997: 213). As Chris Waters suggests, "To enter the later 1940s and 1950s is to enter a new world in which the components of national identity that had been manufactured in the 1930s and early 1940s seemed to come unstuck (Waters, 1997: 213). That misplacement of identity is painfully dramatised in the semi-autobiographical *Limelight* (1952) and more presciently in *The Entertainer* (1957) with Laurence Olivier's Archie personifying the ashes of a post-imperial Britain through the character of an old and bitter music hall comic.

The bright hopes of a more equitable post-war society were soon dashed by America's insistence on both the rapid repayment of war debts and Sterling's return to full convertibility. It was also dashed by the Labour government's use of troops to break the strikes of the working class in the docks of the East End in 1945. The docks continued industrial action along with lorry drivers, bus and train workers in 1949 and 1950 when Arthur Deakin, General Secretary of the TGWU told them he would "not move one finger" to help them (Murray, 2008: 100). The Labour government again used troops against power workers and the Smithfield meat porters in 1950 and in the same year sent gas workers to prison for illegal strikes.

Fascism resumed its domestic march as a resurgent Mosleyite movement marched through mostly Jewish areas in the East End and overseas Britain ignominiously withdrew from empire to the bloody horrors of Indian partition and the Palestinian *Nakba*. Phil Piratin (1948: 89) one of two Communist Party MPs elected in the East End in 1945, revealed that only one tenth of the planned 1300 council houses had actually been built by 1948 but that money had been found to redecorate Clarence House for the new queen.

⁶⁰ The character of Mrs Mop, a cockney *char-lady* is likely one of the last mainstream representations of this period. See - *It's That Man Again*, BBC Home service, 1939-1949.

2.10 Disillusionment and the spoils of war

After 1945, as Blackwell and Seabrook (1986: 64) attest,

... what was not recognised at the time, however, was that the bonding which occurred between the Labour Movement and the majority of the working class had occurred at a moment of unusual turbulence and, far from being a base which had been one for all time, was actually a precarious achievement which would have to be fought for in order to be retained.

The palimpsestic cockney identity that had been inherited from the struggles of the nineteenth century was a mixture of different sections of the labouring classes. London had always been a city of artisans and small masters, clerks and shopkeepers that teetered between the precarity of petty-bourgeois trades, the employed working class and the enormous pool of casual labour decried as the residuum. After the First World War, this structure changed. Rapid industrialisation meant that by the early 1930s,

London accounted for five-sixths of the net increase in the number of factories, two-fifths of employment in new factories, and one third of all factory extensions undertaken even though it had only one fifth of the population. (Pollard, 1962 in Stedman Jones, 2014: 348)

However, the ambitions and security of this new proletariat was undermined by the shallow roots of the socialist, Social Democratic Federation and factionalism between skilled and unskilled labour. Overwhelmingly, the future of this class was in the hands of Morrison's timid Labour bureaucracy that had been absorbed into the state apparatus during both world wars. Unsurprisingly, the social structures of these communities, largely uneducated, insular, sometimes self-employed and inculcated by the first bloom of modern consumerism via the music hall, remained relatively conservative by nature.

John Marriot's (1996) work on the history of cockney areas like Canning Town, Silvertown and North Woolwich, however, is instructive. The original migrants to

these areas had been agricultural labourers (not peasants) “who had direct experience of capitalist social relations in the countryside, and casual labourers displaced from the East End by collapse of stable economies ... all brought with them the imprint of an older rural culture and kinship systems that proved remarkably resistant to urban modernity” (Marriot, 1996: 87).

These communities, celebrating their lives in overcrowded slums were insular, boisterous and inevitably, in an inversion of the Victorian imposed social order, the street was their entertainment. The street was important not only because houses were cramped and small but also because the community represented a form of strong local identity, usually the result of casualism. This meant it was necessary for workers to live very close to precarious employment opportunities.

Entire streets were composed of workers and their families who formed inevitable social solidarities connected by work. For Marriot (1996: 87), “street parties... the celebration of body over mind, sport ... and ‘crime’ elements of the carnivalesque survived among the metropolitan poor.” Indeed, the formative Dock Strike in 1880, of which some of these communities had been part, “bore as much resemblance to a mediaeval carnival as to a modern industrial strike” (Stedman Jones, 2014: 347). This epitomised the East End as a spatial disruption to the rest of the city: its occupants transgressive. These were places that the police kept away from “... for the people are rough and more than once water has been thrown over constables” (Ridenhour in Fishman, 1988: 23). In an echo of the earlier eroticisation of the poor as *other* by the bourgeoisie, East End women were inevitably sexualised as simultaneously chaste or bawdy. This dynamic is played out in James Joyce’s ‘Lundub’ (as he has it in *Finnegan’s Wake*) where cockney matriarchs, so important in the nostalgic histories of the pie shops, are “vaudeville, sexually desirable, disorderly and humorous” (Boland, 2016: 84). The growth of these areas to the East of London promoted a distinct cultural and political character. They were “... everyday worlds... multiple sites of resistance and contest outside of traditional political institutions [found within] families and households” (Rose, 1998 in August, 2001:196). If the roots of the contemporary cockney are to be found it is, along with the proletarian entrepreneurialism of the coster, located here.

In 1892 West Ham (South) had elected the first independent Labour MP and the first Labour council, but election turnouts were consistently low. Marriot argues that because the Labour Party was universalist in aims (likely seen as middle class, outside irrelevances) this reinforced a resentful sense of local identity, where “[L]oyalties to place then take precedence over loyalties to class, spatialising political action” (Harvey, 1989: 279). Marriot’s research is clear that certainly in the local West Ham Labour party, sensibilities were un-ideological in that there remained a virulent anti-communist, anti-cosmopolitan and overtly local prejudice that rejected any progressive moves that did not address hyper-native concerns.⁶¹ Extrapolating these tendencies across London areas seen as traditional and cockney, we find that in terms of electoral politics, voting Labour had crucially become a habit for these communities but not a part of their defining identity.

It is within these local ties (albeit in post-war Bethnal Green) that Michael Young and Peter Willmott’s (1957) sociological work was based. Just as the defeated post-Chartist working class sought sanctuary and consolation in the distractions of blossoming consumerism and the music hall, as Richard Hoggart (1992: 166), recognised, the “real things are the human and companionable things - home and family affection, friendship and being able to say ‘Enjoy y’self’”. What counted was not class politics but “neighbours, family, patrons who could do favours or provide jobs” (Hobsbawm, 1989: 10).

However, Jon Lawrence’s recent critical re-examination of the original transcripts of *Family and Kinship in East London* (building on significant, mostly feminist criticism from the 1970s) finds a subtly different world where “... notes paraphrase respondent’s testimony... [and] generally represent *reconstructions* of vernacular speech rather than verbatim testimony” (2016: 574). The re-examined research finds the streets that defined what was left of the post-Victorian cockney identity riven by micro-class differences, petty antagonisms and “specious ramblings about kitchen matriarchs” (Oakley, 2014: 58). Johnny Speight, the working class scriptwriter

⁶¹ Perry Anderson’s arguments about the nature and historical context of England having the first proletariat are significant here. “It was not until the 1880s that the working class really began to recover from the traumatic defeat of the 1840s. By then the world had moved on. In consciousness and combativity, the English working class had been over-taken by almost all its continental opposites. Marxism had missed it.” See - Anderson, 1964: 36.

responsible for much 'kitchen-sink' television in the 1970s, would write of his family moving four streets to a different house in nearby Canning Town in the same period.

It was almost a social upheaval. Some of the people in this new street even had aspidistras in the window. They all wore shirts. At the very top end they even wore collars and ties. The houses had bay windows. We still had an outside toilet...But we were a cut above the others. (Speight, 1973: 20)

Certainly, this may have been a place where "Anyone feeling lonely only had to stand at the door, and ...someone would come along ... and cheer their neighbour up" (Blake, 1977: 12). But it was also a place from which many people couldn't wait to escape from; where despite Young and Willmott's well-intentioned bourgeois socialism, many people *wanted* to move to new council estates in Debden. Bethnal Green was a place where people were scared to admit they liked opera because they would be seen as 'snobbish' and where 'respectability' was often performative. (Lawrence 2016: 576).⁶²

"The working class community, as it survived in the writings and in the political discourse of working class commentators was a retrospective construction" (Bourke, 1994: 137).⁶³ Although this assertion may be too broad, it seems that the allegiance of social solidarities were restrained by limited choice: to 'make ends meet' and 'to keep up with the Joneses'. Relationships based on 'cockney culture' were about negotiations of power structures within tiny community 'cells' - differences for example about how well people scrubbed their steps (Blacker, 1974: 165-166). Different communities were often hostile simply because they were geographically separate, and association was made through marriage, music and sport (Benson, 1989). As Trevor Blackwell and Jeremy Seabrook (although talking more generally about working class communities) presciently recorded in the 1980s:

⁶² Interestingly, the East End *wasn't* an entirely culturally barren zone. As Paul Newland suggests, during WWII, "The working class also enjoyed a surprisingly wide range of culture, including jazz, classical music and drama. See - Newland, 2008: 47. More, The Sadler's Wells Ballet had performed in Victoria Park in the summers of 1942 and 1943. See - Palmer, 2000: 145-146.

⁶³ For a rebuttal of Bourke's 'trenchant' critique of community, see - Jones, 2018: 122-125.

These discoveries serve the function of covering up what was actually happening, which was that working class people were deserting these very communities, as individuals and not as a class as soon as they could afford to buy their way out. (1986: 110)

Indeed, as Carolyn Steedman's (1987) autobiographical work evidences, the grand nostalgic affirmations of working class life found in Hoggart, Young and Willmott often fail to recognise complicated individual psychologies of, for example envy and the very real emotional desire for material *things*.⁶⁴ It is partly these clandestine individualisms that will eventually re-shape the late twentieth century cockney and form its contemporary notion.

Urban densities had been falling since the 1920s and many wanted to move to places where community and personal relationships would be based on love not "proximity and need" (Lawrence, 2019: 1). The fracturing of those casual-work dominated communities, initially by the Blitz, slum clearances and then the palimpsestic replacement of music hall by first cinema and then personal television, showed a world outside these restrictive, 'defended' neighbourhoods (Suttles, 1972: 21). The failure of Labourism to capitalise on the wider solidarities of the Welfare State (and its subsequent absorption into the establishment at both local and national level) led to a further political disillusionment and an embrace of modernity among London's working classes that was profoundly capitalist, leading to a reinforced conservatism that largely defines contemporary cockney identity and with it, the constituency of the eel and pie shops.

For the East End communities that remained after subsequent waves of migration down the A13, that social conservatism was linked to a hyper-local identity that historically defined (in a large part) the customer base of each eel and pie shop. The shops had been overwhelmingly street market-adjacent (or adjacent to where historic street markets or 'ghost-markets' had once been). It is this study's contention that these memories of distrustful, hyper-local micro-communities ensured both the

⁶⁴ Steedman's work is a useful counterweight to the heavily gendered rendering of monolithic, collective, working class life. For a more London-centric perspective, see also - White, 2013.

popularity of the shops in their immediate post-war heyday and their continued anonymity in plain sight to other classes. It may also explain the (partial) cultural distrust of outsiders unaware of local social codes and solidarities, until these bindings were loosened by the final breakage of the traditional high street by Neoliberal forces and increasing gentrification from perhaps the 1990s onwards.

The contemporary 'forgetting' and 'remembering' of cockney, contingent upon utility to the dominant hegemony, can be seen in this context as a modern continuation of a constructed fear and suspicion in an urban geography unmitigated by bourgeois intervention or control and mirrored in the parallel defensiveness and suspicion of cockney communities.

Whilst the Victorian cockney was still within living memory, Franklyn (1953: 45) could observe that, “

Hidden in the cockney soul there is a stubborn, almost sullen resistance to reform; this is based on a deep attachment to environment... [in] the apparent appreciation of all that is being done for him, there lurks a wilful grip on life as he himself thinks ought to be lived, and as he intends to continue to live it...

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the cockney, a specifically London identity born of the increasing primacy of the capital, has signified different meanings at different times. The contours of cockney have largely however been defined by the powerful and in that sense, the ascription of the term has long been a weathervane of changing class relations.

The identity appears to have been an early signifier of the developing tensions between the emergent urban capitalist forces and older rural authority and privilege. By the eighteenth century, cockney had become a site of conflict between the Old Corruption of the *ancien regime* and different stratifications of a new class. This cockney was defined as much through cultural sensibilities linked to urbanisation, modernity and democracy as through cold, hard commerce. Here was a class that had been ascendent during the Regency but by the early nineteenth century was still

politically unaccommodated. The cockney became a site of contestation between the idea of the courtier and the citizen (Thompson, 1991) and this tension mirrored the rise of a new kind of Londoner.

Dickens' early nineteenth century (auto)biography of this precarious interstitial petty-bourgeois group of grocers, journalists, shop assistants and (eventually) eel and pie shop owners further revealed that cockney was now partly informed by a new consumer dynamic. The cockney dandy of the period, reinforced by popular cultural forms performatively linked lifestyles in an escapist pantomime that celebrated the appearance of the elites. However, by his use of an already "obsolete" dialect characteristic of the poor (Mayhew, 1857: 5), Dickens increasingly tied the cockney identity firstly to an urban working class and then by extension to its feared apotheosis, the residuum. This formation conjoined with a performative, dynamic, dramatic identity that was further informed by street commerce (Jankiewicz, 2012).

The continuing class deterioration of the cockney evidenced the identity's increasing dualities. The cockney was now situated between the law-abiding and the criminal; between the repulsive and the erotic and between the 'respectable' poor and the worthless 'other'.

Dickens' representation of cockney likely influenced the music hall, which called for ever more 'authentic' performers (Scott 2002: 237). This striving for authenticity was largely reflexive, with performers often replicating already existing representations, rather than any real figure (Turner 2002: 256). The increasingly palimpsestic cockney identity was further constructed by its conscription into the imperial nation to help pacify a disruptive proletariat additionally signalled through theories of racial superiority and a limited democratic expansion. This coding was transmitted via the behavioural forms of popular song, public houses and the eel and pie shops in, as we have already seen, a culture of consolation (Stedman Jones, 1974).

Largely insignificant between the wars except as a nostalgic signal to a good humoured and dutiful subaltern, the cockney re-emerges during the Blitz to define a stoic 'ordinariness' that would become the basis for the Welfare State. By war's end, the cockney, a character built on the foundations of assumed identity and fragments

of working class reality, did not simply fade as Stedman Jones (1989) suggests but had become inherently unstable, its contradictions, as I shall examine shortly, increasingly evident.

The cockney had at times come to define the nation yet, like the eel and pie shops, it was both culturally coded and hidden in plain sight, insular and hyper-local, its meaning complicated and precarious.

The notion of cockney, and thus the significance and prominence of the pie and eel shops I argue, rises and falls in direct relation to its usefulness to capital at times of political stress. In this way, cockney identity contains dual manifestations of welcome and hostility and is rooted in a deeply conservative melancholia and saccharine nostalgia.

Identity is the landscape upon which the eel and pie shop culture is built; *memory* - which I shall interrogate in due course - is the vehicle of its transmission.

3. The Defensive Trench of Empire

Introduction.

In this chapter I return briefly to the nineteenth century to thematically contextualise the cockney identity within the notion of whiteness and empire.

I examine how the 'dirt and darkness' of the London poor (Marriot, 2003) was recorded and classified by the ascendent bourgeoisie, simultaneous with contemporary racial theories, into moral notions (Stallybrass and White, 1986). These depictions, I argue, imported as they were from the conquests of Empire, were analogous to the representations of the slave society built in America and largely in contrast to the previous (relative) cultural flexibilities of the Georgian city.

The stratagem of extending 'whiteness' to the working classes during the New Imperialism to constrain potentially explosive domestic social forces was I suggest, a fundamental shift by the elites from overt repression to a more consensual version of hegemony. This reframing of the nation as a racial singularity (Bonnet, 1998; Virdee, 2014) I argue was comparable to the elite's appeal to Protestantism during the seventeenth and eighteenth century wars with France.

I suggest that because the London working classes had been "invited to participate in the rule of others" (Mackenzie, 1986: 254), the eventual concessions of universal suffrage and the creation of the Welfare State were conducted within a racial context whose effects are entirely significant to the contemporary cockney identity memorialised in the contemporary imagination as emblems of a largely mono-racial, hyper-localism to which the eel, pie and mash shops are to a large extent a spiritual sanctuary.

By the extensive use of cultural texts, I thematically chart the cockney identity from the immediate post-war period to the New Labour era. The physical devastation of

the Blitz was for the cockney I suggest, a moment 'between two worlds'; the world of wartime Britain, its austere aftermath and the changed Britain that came after. I suggest that this subsequent memoryscape became a central motif within the social imagery of the period. Further I propose that this period and its subsequent reimagining retains enormous contemporary cultural and political relevance as a touchstone for the growth of anti-globalisation sentiment, populism and, eventually Brexit.

I link the destruction of cockney territoriality through generally unsympathetic zonal redevelopments, subsequent gentrification and gradual exodus to a partial paralleling of the Victorian 'clearing of the streets' which largely broke traditional kinship networks. I further connect these developments with the allied decline of long-established forms of labour and concomitant social structures simultaneous to the identity's contested relationship with modernity. In this I argue that housing and its allocation were central to the *ressentiment* towards mass immigration and the hastening of the transmission (and simulacra) of the cockney identity towards Essex and its 'dual class trajectories' (Watt, Millington and Huq, 2014).

In all of this I outline the contours of cockney as an identity concurrent to the evolution of a post-war national economy and a popular modernity celebrated in working class ritual of which the eel, pie and mash shops, although in a long trajectory of decline, remained relatively vibrant and central.

The traditional cockney identity I argue, simultaneously continued its role as a nostalgic conduit to capital but evolved multiple valances that spoke to an increasing emphasis on popular culture, age, choice and individuality (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2018) further complicating its continued existence as a palimpsestic construction. Through this notion I begin to trace a new and coexistent East End culture, born of an emergent multicultural narrative that corresponded to a social democratic project that birthed the ancestors of the contemporary cockney.

My research suggests that the cockney's role as a conduit to the forces of capital was reprised through the years of the neoliberal ascendancy as a signifier of tradition and as a nostalgic scaffolding. This in some ways narrated the "slow cancellation of

the future” (Beradi, 2011) by forces of the Right that captured elements of the East End working class by appealing to their race and their perceived abandonment through an ‘authoritarian populism’ (Hall, 1978). The contemporary reimagining of the eel and pie shops as a totem of a lost white, working class London is, I argue, firmly anchored within this nostalgic haunting.

Finally, I narrate the contours of the subsequent demonisation of the culture of the London working class by New Labour through Late Modernity’s valorisation of globalisation and aspiration. I suggest that the notion of ‘ordinariness’, once epitomised by the Blitz cockney, was now to be located in middle class values through the prism of culture not class. I suggest that Blair’s Labour Party had forced the white working class “to think of themselves as a new ethnic group” (Jones, 2011) and this would be increasingly reflected within the constituency of the eel, pie and mash shops.

3.1 The ‘whitening’ of the London working class

As the Victorian century opened, the bourgeoisie began to hegemonize and historicise their own ascendancy and distinction from the morass of the proletariat. Whereas the poor previously had been seen as simply criminal, the primacy of Britain’s industrial working class meant that it began to be defined in dark, monstrous terms: a creature born of a shadowy, labyrinthine city (Baldick, 1990). Progressively, the proletariat came to be seen, literally as a race apart and this notion was framed in terms borrowed from the subjugation of native populations conquered by Empire.

By the middle of the century, fear of decline and domestic disorder meant that delineations of race and class merged with pseudo-science and were recoded into an explicitly moral formulation around the ‘darkness’ of dirt and disease (Marriot, 2003). In this way, a constructed identity of ‘whiteness’ and racial purity became central to the bourgeois imagination. Its absence defined the location and exclusion of the poor within the nation. For the ‘fallen’ cockney of the late nineteenth century this categorisation would be crucial.

The gentlemen who explored the 'dark' inner-city colonies of London as brave colonial adventurers were a central conduit to this conceit. In this way, the journalist James Greenwood could reference in 1874,

Creatures that you know to be female by the length and raggedness of hair that makes their heads hideous, and by their high-pitched voices, with bare red arms and their bodies bundled in a complication of dirty rags (Marriot, 2003: 161).

Peter Stallybrass and Alon White (1986: 128) have successfully argued that dirt was an important signifier for the bourgeois cultural imagination as it could map a class-based otherness which might contaminate both the physical and moral boundaries of the city. This could be navigated, whereby "the axis of the body is transcoded through the axis of the city (1986: 145)". 'Good dirt' was the result of hard labour and 'bad dirt' the result of moral pollution. The correlation of London's topography in these terms was coterminous with Prince Albert's shocking death from Typhoid and dirt increasingly became a metonym for crime and anarchy.

In the gas, glass and gleaming counters of the early eel and pie shops we see this notion of hygiene and propriety internalised and translated into a nascent, aspirational working class culture. Ironically, of course the shops also traded in eels: a bottom-feeding creature that had been the staple of London's poor for centuries but at this stage, eel-eating still crossed class boundaries. Wesleyan allegories like 'cleanliness is next to godliness' however remain deeply rooted in working class domesticity, identity and memory.

After the mid-century, a racial coding of the home populations started to become central to the classification of the moral structure of the poor themselves. In this way, George Godwin, editor of the *Builder*, could in 1854 suggest that when in order to investigate the conditions of the working classes, "It is necessary to brave the risks of fever and other injuries to health, and the contact of men and women often as lawless as the Arab or the Kaffir" (Marriot, 2003: 161).

Domestically this paradigm created obvious contradictions. London's urban poor, an increasingly significant political and social force, were overwhelmingly white, and this meant that their 'blackness' had to be constructed within a framework of an 'internal colonialism'. The Irish had already been primed for this racial encoding as 'primitives' during the Famine in the 1840s (Thompson, 2013: 348). Against the backdrop of the Fenian campaign, they would be visually *simianized* as monsters in brutal cartoons (Curtis, 1996) and Carlyle would speak of them as "the white negroes" (Marriot, 2003: 165). Significantly of course, both the Cooke's and the Kelly's eel and pie dynasties share an Irish immigrant heritage but as working class entrepreneurs, they rose above "the floating armies of labourers who built the canals, the docks, the railways and transformed the face of England" (Bermant, 1975: 43).

Simultaneous with the new notions of social Darwinism, the theories of Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882) had specifically warned of miscegenation within the *abyss* that would lead to a degeneration of the race (Pick, 1993). In this way, *The Saturday Review* in 1864 could speak about the Bethnal Green poor as, "... a race apart... of whom we know nothing, whose lives are of quite different complexion from ours... offer a very fair parallel to the separation of the slaves from the whites (Malik, 1996: 93).

The Daily Telegraph in August, 1866 would refer to white, working class rioters as "... negroes... who have the taste in their tribe for any disturbance..." (Lorimer, 1978: 195). According to Edwin Hood, "the negro is in Jamaica as the costermonger is in Whitechapel; he is very nearly often a savage with the mind of a child's" (Malik, 1996: 97). Increasingly, there seemed a parallel between the representation of some of the London working classes and the slave society built in America. Bonnett (1998: 336) points out how this 'colour divide' was reproduced in cultural texts of the period and that "the popular stereotype of the Negro in the mid-nineteenth century owed more to the new world than to Africa" (Lorimer, 1978: 206). Indeed, during the Chartist agitation of the 1830s and 1840s there had been a rhetorical (if exaggerated) linkage made by abolitionists between the conditions of bondage of the British industrial proletariat and that of slavery in America and the Caribbean. By the end of the 1860s however, this moral, reforming correlation amongst sections of the English middle classes had started to flag. The Indian Mutiny/The First War of

Independence (1857-1859), The American Civil War (1861-1865) and the Morant Bay Rebellion (1865) had all shaken the notion that colonial subjects could be held captive at arms-length as voiceless subalterns. When significant bread riots followed the collapse of the Thames ship-building industry in the 1860s, adding to the vast and threatening casual labouring mass of the residuum, bourgeois fear led to the questioning of the confident utilitarian moral and economic rationale underpinning of the administration of the Poor Laws (Stedman Jones, 2014: 15).⁶⁵

By the mid-1870s in response to widespread international economic recession European powers scrambled to further exploit the wealth of their colonies by expanding their territories in a race that would become known as the New Imperialism. To simultaneously constrain domestic demands for social change and achieve popular support for such global conquest necessitated extending the notion of 'whiteness' to accommodate the working classes in a transition to a popular, socially consensual (and eventually, welfarist) form of Imperialism. In this way, the nation could additionally be reframed as a patriotic, racial singularity to exclude the racialised 'other' (Bonnet, 1998; Virdee, 2014).

The formula for this transition may however be found in a much earlier, significant extension of the nation that was the elite's appeal to Protestantism during the seventeenth and eighteenth century wars with France. This address was aimed at uniting an English nation with the Scots and Welsh against a Catholic enemy demonised since the Reformation. The ingestion of the idea of nation was a fundamental shift by the elites from overt repression to a more consensual version of hegemony. This national framework appears to have largely held in place when the English artisanal class enjoined an ideological struggle against the Old Corruption and when a specific class consciousness began to form within the early proletariat. Both of these strands coalesced around the rhetoric of liberty that looked backwards to a patriotism framed by the 'freeborn' Englishman's "birthright" (Thompson, [1963] 2013: 85) and forward to the ideas of Paine.

⁶⁵ Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life among the Lowly* (1852) was a well-known and popular novel of the time and the racism and segregation of the society it portrayed drew direct comparisons with the English working class. For the economic crisis and The Poor Law see - Jones, 2014: 15.

However, the early proletariat began to contest the elite's concept of the nation as unjust because it excluded other racialised groups that were seen as equally British. Indeed, contrary to the long-standing view that the working classes were a heterogeneous mass, Irish Catholic migrants appear to have been key actors within these early democratic developments uniting many "radical strands not least the emancipation of Ireland, the abolition of the monarchy and slavery" (Virdee, 2014: 14). Thompson ([1963] 2013: 483, 652-654) attests that the Irish workers were present in Luddism and Virdee (2014) cites both John Doherty, an Irishman who became a national trade union leader and William Cuffay, a leading Chartist and the descendent of an African slave as evidence of this cosmopolitan culture of proletarian solidarity. This nascent inter-racial and religious unity during the "heroic age of the proletariat" (Anderson 1964: 33) was a connected struggle against slavery, imperialism in Ireland and for emancipation. It appears to have terrified the elites.

The siding of the bourgeoisie with the upper classes around the 1832 Reform Bill and the subsequent banning of Combinations began to dissipate this political-racial unity.⁶⁶ Irish labour was used to undercut other working class wages and without political leadership, antagonism grew. As Nancy Stepan (1982: 4-5) suggests, identity began to be manufactured around "a more parochial and nationalist outlook." This was deployed by the elites against the Irish in the 1830s and 1840s and was a "racist discourse produced for the emergent English working class" (Hanley, 2016: 109).

The notion that the Irish were now 'other' became more firmly ingested within the English working classes who, after political defeat, entered a period of "prolonged catatonic withdrawal" (Anderson, 1964: 33). In direct relevance for the cockney, this historical, racial idea of nation according to Virdee (2014: 5) limited "the political imagination of even those who were representatives of the exploited and the oppressed."

⁶⁶ Combinations refer to an early form of trades union.

Whiteness had now been re-framed as ordinary and commonplace to signify “the homely virtues of quietness, tidiness, cleanliness and decency” (Bonnett, 1998: 330). Exactly the qualities that would coalesce around the identity of the ‘respectable’ working class, the eel and pie shops and their customers. Bonnett sees the project of ‘whitening’ almost exclusively as uni-directional but, as Jonathan Hyslop (1999: 402) contends, this “fails to give sufficient centrality to direct working class involvement and participation in, and movement through, the empire, as a historic formative force in British working class racism.”

Historically, notions of blackness as ‘opposite’ had long been connected with performances within English Mummery to represent ancient liberties against the foreign yoke. ‘Blacking-up’ had also used by poachers and dockside against pressing gangs (Thompson, 1977). Both strategies linked ‘blackface’ with protest against the enslavement of the ‘freeborn’ Englishman in some sense sympathetically connected subjugation to blackness whether inferiority was implied or not.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss in fine detail preceding working class racisms, yet it seems clear that previous colonial exploits were informed by notions of white supremacy transmitted through an earlier ethnic chauvinism. Charles White’s 1799 treatise *Account in the Regular Gradation in Man* had suggested all races shared a common heritage in the Garden of Eden, but that Africans were degraded by their lack of civilisation (Hanley, 2016: 118). Indeed, some radicals like William Cobbett appealed to working men to define themselves against abolitionist’s compassion citing the slave’s revolt in San Domingo as evidence of their “politically uninformed barbarism” (in Wood, 1999). A more conservative, overtly racist notion of patriotism itself began to supersede this earlier radical patriotism to enable “the working class to participate in the rule of others” (Mackenzie, 1986: 254).

Like the later cockney identity, it has long been argued that this racism (militarism and jingoism) was inculcated into the working class identity not only by the music hall but by the mass circulation of patriotic fiction (Hobson, 1901), compulsory schooling and semi-military organisations like the Boys Brigade.

By the late 1870s, the instilling of Imperial whiteness linked to a nascent (masculinist) Labourism saw an emergent 'waterfront' culture in the East End docks. This, the defensive trench of Empire was where a tight-knit, hyper-localism of sailors and dockers saw themselves as bulwarks against 'alien cultures' in their own vernacular version of the pure white Englishman (Cohen, Qureshi and Toon, 1994).

Labourism further disseminated whiteness through an imperial working class of British, Australian and South African workers that traversed the world (Hyslop, 1999).⁶⁷ The incorporation of the working class as racially white allowed capitalism to mutate towards a more interventionist form. This mollified the sharper edges of class struggle and simultaneously addressed the "increasing complexity and consumer orientation of capitalist production" (Bonnett, 1998: 329). It was clear that the battles for the eventual creation of the Welfare State (and elements of welfarism across the white Commonwealth) were not conducted in a context free from race. Indeed,

The Imperial working class of the pre-First World War era was unable to separate its hostility to its own exploitation from its aspiration to incorporation in the dominant racial structure (Hyslop, 1999: 418).

So, when it did finally arrive in 1945, "welfare came wrapped in the Union Jack" (Bonnett, 1998: 329).

This process was however not linear: Andrew Crowhurst (1997) posits that white working class people still continued to concurrently identify and represent themselves positively as 'black' or 'other' using earlier music hall traditions. Indeed, when the American cake walk (a dance developed from gatherings on black slave plantations) was introduced to the London music halls in 1898 it was adapted by South London cockneys in their own swagger and eventually became the first danced Lambeth Walk in 1903 (Howkins, Collis and Dodd, 1986: 47).

⁶⁷ Jonathon Hyslop's work on the trans-national nature of the Imperial working class is formative here. He charts the progress of a largely Cornish mining community with in-demand specialist skills imbued with a small-masters ideology of individual liberalism rather than a working class communitarian socialism whose influence on the labour movement was profound. It was their championing of white-worker supremacy within an Imperial commonwealth that dominated the Trades Union movement until after World War Two. See - Hyslop, 1999: 398-421.

Cockney culture was certainly *not* in itself inherently racist. Although the bourgeois construction of the cockney in the cartoon of 'Arry in Punch was deeply prejudiced, London had for centuries been racially mixed - what might be called an early 'ordinary cosmopolitanism' (Gilroy, 2000).⁶⁸ When racial tensions emerged (such as national race riots in 1919) they were almost always due to the economic stresses of scarcity within capital but referred back to the elite-created racialised 'other' of the early-mid nineteenth century. Testimonies of cockneys around race and whiteness in the early twentieth century are rare but Doris, a white resident of Canning Town's Crown Street, known locally as "Draughtboard Alley" for its racial mixing could reminisce about growing up alongside black and mixed-race families in the 1930s with little apparent tension.

There were lots of black kids. We used to play together, no animosity between any of us. There were white women married black, you know, West Indians, they were working on the boats. Got on ever so well together... Everybody in the street used to speak to each other, and all the children used to play together (Padfield in Caballero, Chamion and Aspinall, 2018: 142).

Similarly, Anne Bowes, a mixed-race woman from the same area would recollect that "Where we lived there was no feeling that mixed marriages were wrong. The white people we lived with accepted it" (Padfield in Caballero, Chamion and Aspinall, 2018: 142).⁶⁹

Such solidarities in London's working class communities reflected the rapidly changing nature of cockney territoriality. Mass Eastern European immigration from the 1880s into traditionally cockney areas had created, by the inter-war years, a confident and relatively integrated Jewish population that saw themselves as 'EastEnders'.⁷⁰ The concept of the East End and cockney, although now virtually interchangeable, were crucial spatial delineations of identity from Victoriana to

⁶⁸ For a historical perspective on London's racially mixed past see - File and Power, 1981; Bell, 2002; Shyllon, 1992.

⁶⁹ These interviews started life as a sensational *Daily Express* article, ironically about the 'dangers' of racial mixing with the inevitable brutally cropped photograph excluding smiling white children standing with their black friends. See - "The street of hopeless children" *The Daily Express*, 18 March 1930.

⁷⁰ For a fascinating treatise on Jewish linguistic integration in the East End, see - Sivertson, 1960.

modernity. In areas like Spitalfields, Jews came to dominate the shops and street markets. Some of these 'foreign' costers - especially around Hoxton and Bethnal Green - were members of large socialist and anarchist organisations (Knepper, 2008). It was members of this community that reinvigorated and radicalised notions of a wider cockney community that saw itself valorised at opposition to Blackshirts marching at Cable Street in 1936 and in the almost forgotten post-war struggles against fascism. Indeed, Jews played a crucial, if unintentional role in redefining the identity of cockney through the inter-war years by consciously identifying themselves as locals and to some extent, divisions between Jew and gentile broke down as a younger generation moved from the ghettos into more mainstream white-collar employment (Lammers, 2005: 332). It is this formulation of the cockney that rebuilt the East End from the rubble of the Blitz whilst an historically older, 'whitened' proletariat either decamped to Essex or became marooned within their mono-racial memories within more mixed communities.

It was, however, the arrival of the first wave of non-white British subjects from the Caribbean in 1948 to (in part) address the post-war labour shortage, that almost immediately unsettled the newly-won welfare structures of a constructed cross-class, racial-national community.⁷¹ Their landing coincided with the questioning of what it meant to be British in a post-war and post-imperial world. Bill Williamson (1988: 170) suggests that a more exclusive concept of citizenship had already started to develop and cites the Conservative opposition to the 1948 British Nationality Bill which had sought to expand the definition of citizenship linked to a multi-ethnic Commonwealth.⁷² A wartime national identification towards 'ordinariness' (the conscription and valorisation of the working classes into the nation) that centred around the domestic and private (Light, 1991) meant that "the migrant other was constituted as the 'stranger' *par excellence*" from the 1950s onwards (Waters, 1997: 228). Indeed, Bill Schwarz (1996: 73) pertinently perceives this period as a 're-

⁷¹ In fact, the Attlee Labour government was "taken by surprise by these arrivals of immigrants" but had no legal way to stop them as they were British subjects. The very real labour shortage, put at somewhere between 600,000 and 1.3 million workers, aimed to be stemmed by de-mobilised Poles and freed German and Italian former prisoners of war but not enough of them could be recruited. See Patel, 2021: 61. Indeed, as Neal Ascherson reports, "... the Windrush only put in at Kingston, Jamaica, because it was half-empty, and the captain - hoping to cut his losses - had put an advertisement in the local paper offering berths to London." See - Ascherson, 2021: 6.

⁷² I think it's important to note that Caribbean immigration was also seen as a 'return to the motherland' after Colonial efforts during World War Two. See the arguments in Patel, 2021.

racialisation' of England where the tropes of the colonial frontier came 'home' to Britain (Webster, 2001) along with a generation of Empire administrators creating an atmosphere that resembled the 'embattled' Afrikaner and whites in the American South desperately trying to cling to segregation. Here perhaps was the beginning of the notion of 'whites as victims' where the immigrant would eventually have the 'whip hand'. In cockney communities this may have fed into anxieties about the emasculation of the working man against the increasing gains of woman and of miscegenation. Immigrants, in an echo of the Victorian residuum were seen to live in vice and squalor as evidenced by Colin McInnes' *City of Spades* (1957) in opposition to an increasingly settled and domesticated working class normality. They were also a threat to white women. In Roy Baker's *Flame in the Streets* (1961), Trade Union leader Jacko Palmer upholds the rights of a black worker but struggles with news that his daughter plans to marry a West Indian.

The contestations of the rights and primary entitlements of the white population of East London, of which the cockney subsequently become the embattled motif, is one of the defining legacies of this period memorialised in the contemporary imagination as emblems of a largely mono-racial, hyper-localism: the eel, pie and mash shops, to a large extent, their spiritual sanctuary.

3.2 From the terrace to the tower block

The terrible damage of the war had erased much of the territoriality of the East End and in that sense, part of the historically geographic notion of cockney identity itself. The cockney sanctum, St Mary Le Bow, was lost during the Blitz of 1941. The bells were recast at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in 1956 but not installed until five years later. By the time they pealed again, they did so over a transformed landscape and an increasingly dissociative cockney identity.

This devastated cartography is shown in *Hue and Cry* (1947) in which East End school children battle crooks and spivs over bombsites that brutally expose the compressed multiple buried layers of the city's history. The film links the children's

ingenuity, the new energy of the age, with the lumpen characters of the cockney villains whose password, 'Lambeth Walk', links them to a pre-war *pastness*.⁷³ In *The World my Wilderness* (1950), Rose Macauley's central character Barbary Deniston squats a deserted flat in the anarchy of the destroyed inter-zone of post-war London and engages with a community of outcasts, criminals and deserters. The sites simultaneously speak of the past and the future and damaged cockney youth set against the new Jerusalem of the planners' dreams. Here, the vibrant and chaotic "green world" of the fast-growing rosebay willowherb (*chamaenerion angustifolium*) is contrasted to the grey austerity of London. Macauley suggests this is a potent period of innocence which the cockney children of *Hue and Cry* will never know again.

The children stood still, gazing down on a wilderness of little streets, caves and cellars, the foundation of a wrecked merchant city, grown over by green and golden fennel and ragwort, coltsfoot, purple loosestrife, rosebay willow herb, bracken, brambles and tall nettles, among which rabbits burrowed and wild cats crept, and hens laid eggs (Macauley [1950] 2018: 53).

Within these edge-lands, several generations of Londoners would hide, play and make love away from their impossibly cramped and conservative homes. Antecedents to prefabs and unauthorised, makeshift, re-purposed spaces were the emergent cockney youth's practical responses to the landscape. Eventually, this 'unofficial countryside' (Mabey, 1973) of allotments, pigeon fanciers and 'drosscape' was only to be found in the forgotten outer wastes of Stratford and Bow and would be finally destroyed in the corporate devouring of post-industrial wildernesses by the behemoth of the Olympic Park. Yet this 'temporary' cockney figure, a child of the post-war years that wandered, played and danced pan-like in nature before the city buried it again, stands in ironic opposition to the original mediaeval connotation of the urbanite fearful of the countryside.⁷⁴

⁷³ The film's childhood heroes are not so far removed from reality. During the London Blitz, seventeen-year-old Patsie Duggan, the son of a Poplar bin man, led a gang of children, some as young as ten that acted as unofficial firefighters and rescue squad and were responsible for incredible acts of bravery. They were photographed by Bert Hardy for Picture Post in 1941 but largely forgotten until the publication of a children's book in 2015. See - Ashley, 2015.

⁷⁴ For a description of some the last of London's lost wastelands, see - Sinclair, 2012.

The devastation narrative runs through to the 1970s in cultural texts and is finally contrasted in *Bronco Bullfrog* (1969) with the real and idyllic countryside where Del and Irene, the young, doomed couple temporarily flee to escape their drudgery and entry into adulthood. As Ben Highmore (2012: 75) suggests this devastated landscape became, like the Blitz itself, a central motif within the social imagery of the period. “It constituted an affective landscape that played host to a mood world... sometimes resilient or defiant, joyful and exuberant, and sometimes resigned.” The ‘cultural feelings’ around this panorama and its privation congealed over decades and have been reformed in contested contemporary memory-scapes in which the cockney, as an unwitting agent of nostalgic capital, is once again valorised as an exemplar of self-sufficiency and *robustness* via modernity especially within the Brexiteer generation.⁷⁵

This devastated interregnum is for the cockney, simply a moment ‘between two worlds’ (Hall, 1978); the world of wartime Britain, its austere aftermath and the Britain that followed. In *A Place to Go* (1963), Ricky croons in his local Bethnal Green pub about a council waiting list that is “a mile long” just before his family are given eviction notices as part of their slum’s clearance. The moment is, however, pregnant with possibilities - a rebuilding of the cockney areas in line with organic communities or within a bourgeois modernity: a sympathetic re-assessment of the city and its people or a Brutalist re-imagining. This rebuilding is, in some senses, the continuation of the Victorian project to literally sweep the London working class from the streets and re-zone them. The cockney is banished from this (temporary) Garden of Eden to face re-housing within concrete towers or dispersal to the hinterlands.

There is a forgotten context in which these communities might have been more sympathetically accommodated within a popular modernism whilst “[T]he leftist planners and architects who briefly dominated under Atlee were side-lined after 1951 in favour of developers... are still the usual punching bag for the latter's schemes” (Hatherley, 2008: 131). Raymond Williams however was very clear that the planning decisions taken during this period, while supposedly democratic, were used to mask

⁷⁵ See for example - Hyams, 2011; Jacobs, 2015.

a bourgeois authoritarianism. He ruefully called this the 'smokescreen of consultation' (Williams, [1961] 1992: 312). Opposition was ruthlessly suppressed and framed as "... the white working class as a 'hazard to modernity'" (Skeggs, 2004: 91).

The very public and violent eviction in 1968 of Stephen Hurn and his wife from their home in Victoria Road, Leytonstone following a compulsory purchase order is particularly telling. In Pathé footage the couple are seen behind a barbed wire barricade remonstrating with police and bailiffs who pay no attention to their pleas about their own little "freehold piece of England" and significantly, likening the council to the Nazis. Their appeal to an earlier, radical patriotism of the Englishman and his liberty is almost a century too late. They are beaten and dragged away.⁷⁶

The tower blocks and low-rises that came to dominate the East End throughout the 1960s, although initially welcomed by some of their new residents, destroyed the recognisable landmarks of communal spaces of places like the pie and mash shops. They imposed a -

privatised space of family units stacked one on top of each other, in total isolation... [and] the ... effect of redevelopment was to destroy what we have called matrilocal residents. Not only was the new housing designed on the model of the nuclear family, with little provision for large low income families... but the actual pattern of distribution of the new housing tend to disperse the kinship network... (Cohen, 1981: 79).

By the early 1970s white Bethnal Green residents that remained in traditional housing found themselves squeezed between their own decrepit living conditions and a (largely bourgeois) squatting movement enjoined by a small community of Bengali seamen living in equally squalid private lodging houses. New housing, predicated on council waiting lists that had traditionally kept generations of East Enders together and was seen as the white community's post-war reward, was largely allocated on the basis of need to the fast-growing immigrant population of

⁷⁶ Pathé. "Angry scenes during East London Eviction, 1968." See - <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/VLVA52HPMYO0ZRUY0BPPUAGXFFZRM-UK-ANGRY-SCENES-DURING-EAST-LONDON-EVICTION>

Bangladeshi's.⁷⁷ This was supported by new urban modernisers within the local Labour Party. There followed what Dench (2006: xviii) called "a lengthy period of undercover class war" where white residents were "required to submit to new social rules and rulers and above all to continuing immigration" (Dench, 2017: xviii). Increasingly branded by the media as racist and supported by far-right groups, many white residents moved out of the area (largely to Essex) leaving behind a mostly poor and elderly population who were joined by new "[M]iddle class whites who did not need to compete directly with international immigrants for public resources, and so could take pleasure in their exotic culture and pride in their presence" (Dench, 2017: xviii).

This so-called 'white-flight' from the East End however, had a long history. During the early 1920s, London had continued to grow at an enormous rate. It did so increasingly outwards, pushing towards the suburbs. Inwood (2000: 708) suggests that around "...two million migrants (a third from inner London, the rest from elsewhere in Britain) settled in suburban London in the interwar years" (Inwood, 2000: 708). Even so, by the 1930s, East London was still, along with the industrial North-East of England, the most overcrowded area in the county (Inwood, 2000: 758).

Many in the capital looked longingly to the fresh air of the of the Thames estuary, historically a place of day trips for London's respectable working classes. The landscape they would have passed through on the trains to the seaside became building sites for local authorities and private investors buoyed by low interest rates and the burgeoning building societies movement. Encouraged by the extension of rail and Underground lines, a building boom between 1934 and 1938 meant that in London's eastern outer suburbs there were several huge London County Council estates with a total population of around 250,000. By 1939, Becontree in Essex had 116,000 tenants, more than the population of Ipswich or Halifax (Inwood, 2000: 718). These homes, with indoor toilets, several bedrooms and outside garden space were a huge improvement on London's decrepit slums. There was something of an ironic

⁷⁷ Between 1971 and 2001 the numbers of Bangladeshi residents in Tower Hamlets, the borough that contains Bethnal Green, rose from around 4000 to almost 66000: from 2% of the area to just over 30%. See - Young, Gavron, and Dench, 2006: 227.

Empire notion about the idea of the East London homesteader colonising the empty veldt although many of the villages that were swallowed or annexed by these newcomers took a dim view of the new populace. The working class settlers, heirs of the world's first proletariat drew on the only image available to them for an ongoing vision of this promised land. This was the bucolic, ordered middle class suburbs of the well-to-do Home Counties - an image itself largely borrowed from returning colonial administrators. It would sometimes sit uneasily with the modern and often Brutalist designs that the post-war New Town designers would envisage.

After the devastation of the Second World War London still had a “‘crude net deficiency’ of 470,00 dwellings” (Inwood, 2000: 824). New towns linked to the 1944 Greater London Plan like Harlow and Basildon were constructed through cutting-edge architectural design and planning and all the while slow, steady emigration from the East End continued across generations. Older, better-off East Enders sought out their old holiday locations to settle for their retirement. In such matrilinear cockney culture, “where ‘nan’ went the rest of the extended family often followed” (Cohen, 2013: 67, 83).

In May 1948 Lewis Silkin, the Labour Minister for New Towns nodded to Ebenezer Howard's vision of a suburban utopia suggesting that the towns would “produce a new type of citizen... healthy, self-respecting... with a sense of culture and civic pride.”⁷⁸ John Reith, the first Director of the BBC and chairman of the New Towns Committee called them “essays in civilisation” (Cowley and Palmer, 2018: 132). Many of the new residents shared the Utopian dream simultaneously with recreation of a lost East End embodied in Welfarism, education and social housing. By the 1970s however, some of the New Towns began their inexorable decline with lack of investment revealing their “marks of early malnutrition” (Cowley and Palmer, 2018: 147). The children of the original settlers began to embrace the increasing cultural and politically assertive individuality that had emerged through the 1960s blended with a largely conservative, working class cockney heritage whose culture was one of small business and ‘betterment’. Ian Dury would attest to one half of this vibrant, dual culture that was “doing very well” in songs like “Billericay Dickie” whilst Mike

⁷⁸ Silkin, Lewis, Labour. HC Deb 08 May 1946 vol. 422 col. 1072-184.

Leigh presciently satirised the *nouveau-riche* inhabitants of Romford in *Abigail's Party*. These might best be described as emergent “dual class trajectories” (Watt, Millington and Huq, 2014: 127).

Both of these portrayals drew heavily on the ‘sociology of aspiration’ (Hall 1992) and the idea of the (alleged) dealignment of social class. These evocations of the ‘new’ Essex anticipated a significant turn to the Right as detailed in the MP for Chingford, Norman Tebbit’s book, *Upwardly Mobile* that would appear a decade later. It is between these twin geographical and cultural co-ordinates that the cockney and the pie and mash shops’ future would be reinscribed.

Hand-in-hand with the re-location of cockney families to Essex was the decline in London’s traditional patterns of work. Much of London’s skilled working class started to decamp to the New Towns and automation began to replace traditional artisanal skills that had been the backbone of London’s small industries. Tailoring, furniture-making and dock work slowly died by the end of the 1970s. In *A Place to Go* (1963) Matt, the epitome of the individualist working class cockney who had worked in the docks all his life remarks, “... in the old days a job was a job, and nobody told you how or when to work... but at least it was your own life, and you was in charge of it.” The docks represented perhaps the distillation of all that might be seen to be cockney. Here was a closed community that had fascinated the bourgeois since Pierce Egan’s wanderings, “...[the] patriotic cockney and congenial crook, heroic boxer and sexual rough trade” (Cohen, 2013: 67). The docks came to symbolise what Phil Cohen (1981: 80) suggests was,

a gradual polarisation in the structure of the labour force: on the one side, the highly specialised skilled and well paid jobs associated with the new technology and the high growth sectors that employed them, on the other, the routine, dead end: low paid and unskilled jobs associated with the labour intensive sectors, especially the service industries.

Work was no longer to be found locally and employment meant travelling further. The historic connection between the artisanal London workplace and the community was lost and social solidarities inevitably dissolved. What Cohen (1981: 82) calls the

working class 'respectables' were trapped between the pull of the new, rising suburban working class, their adoption of conspicuous consumerism and the downward pull of a residual precariat clinging to the dignity of manual labour. This had a disastrous effect on the young of the East End whose living examples of work and familial cultures disappeared and were replaced by the growth of youth subcultures.

The territoriality of the East End was not just disturbed by relocation to the Essex or Kent hinterlands, however. Emigration to the (white) colonies of especially Australia and Canada continued apace after the war with many fleeing the East End for the promise of a better future.⁷⁹ In reality, this was largely the result of an official policy to source cheap labour and reinforce a white managerial class in the colonies. This crude social engineering had in actuality been happening in various forms since the seventeenth century (Coldray, 1999). Although records are imprecise, it appears that British emigration into Australasia was around 50000 in the early 1950s and grew to a peak of 80000 in 1965 (Clarke, 2004: 321). Footage of Tommy Trinder, the cockney comedian, wishing young East End orphans from Barnardo's well before they set sail for a new life in Australia is incredibly poignant given the catalogue of abuse, rape and forced labour that many were subsequently subjected to.⁸⁰

In London, the streets themselves became a site of transformed meanings. The communities that had been built around working class terraces were specific responses to issues of space and social conditions. For good or ill, people gathered outside to socialise and used the street as a kind of neutral zone - a way of maintaining the privacy (and primacy) of the home (Townsend in Moran, 2012: 172). The growth of television sales during the 1950s and 1960s meant that the pivot of the street became focussed into the living room. Similarly, the enormous growth of motor traffic meant not only that roads were widened but were becoming dangerous to children's traditional outside play. Despite updated legislation that stipulated certain roads had to be closed to traffic in the evenings, by 1971, nineteen million

⁷⁹ See - Constantine, 1998: 176-195.

⁸⁰ For this abuse see Child Migration Programmes Investigation Report, March 2018 at <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/reports-recommendations/publications/investigation/child-migration>. More than one million people left Britain for Australia alone between 1945 and 1972. In 2010, the British Prime Minister Gordon Brown formally apologised on behalf of the nation to the child migrants.

cars meant that effectively children's outside traditional play was stopped.⁸¹ The pie shops, the focus of many working class neighbourhoods, reflected this change. Many, like the Cooke's shop in Stratford who found themselves next to vast and busy roads that had brutally cut through traditional areas, simply closed. However, for some of the pie shops the redevelopment was not all bad news. Roy Arment, the owner of Arments Pie and Eel shop in South London recalls that "... we still had some of the locals but also... we had the biggest council estate in Europe [The Aylesbury Estate] on our doorstep... we were massively busy in the 1970s and 1980s..."⁸² For other pie shops, the demolitions and remodelling of the city marked the end of an era. Chris Cooke, the co-owner of what was regarded as the city's most palatial pie shop in Dalston recognised that times and demographics had changed, "A lot of our customers had moved out... they wanted to improve their standard of living ... they wanted their own house..."⁸³ The experience of relocation outside the capital, especially of those who came from the Bethnal Green slums was summed up by Betsy, Ricky's sister in *A Place To Go* (1963) who has moved to one of the Essex estates. "The house is nice really, trees all down the street and that but it's just a bit lonely ...the nearest pub is miles away ... it was all so new and shiny [but] there was nobody in it."

In *Sparrows Can't Sing* (1963) Maggie, played by Barbara Windsor, symbolically refuses to embrace the new future that has been forced on her, leaving the modern tower block (and the dependable Bert) to be reconciled with her former lover, the violent cockney sailor, Charlie. Windsor of course was a real-life pivot between the complex social solidarities of the East End's working class communities and their dark underbelly of criminality and violence. Her (alleged) relationships with the underworld and specifically her friendships with the Kray Twins are a significant acknowledgement of the duality of cockney culture. For the Krays themselves, it is their courting of fame and celebrity through a reprised, performative role as conduits

⁸¹ In 1961, Section 49 of the Road Traffic Act updated previous 'Street Play' legislation allowing local authorities to "prohibit traffic on roads to be used as playgrounds."

⁸² Roy Arment, interview by author, 11 November 2020.

⁸³ Chris Cooke, interview by author, 17 November 2020.

to the powerful that connects the 'modernist' cockney back to the Victorian music Hall.⁸⁴

Simultaneous to the demolitions and relocations, another process, as yet unnamed, had begun around the mid 1950s to further destabilise London's working class districts. Slowly at first but with growing confidence, young middle class professionals began to buy and move into the "unspoilt areas of the city... where they... live[d] cheek-by-jowl with the polyglot poor" (Raban, 1974: 181-182). The process of what would become known as 'gentrification' was a reversal of the bourgeois exodus of inner London in the nineteenth century. Yet these were not the "slummers" that the *Weekly Echo* had attacked as 'do-gooders' in 1885 by living amongst the poor but young couples enacting a bourgeois *lebensraum*.⁸⁵ These 'Nigel's and Pamela's' as Raban (1974) has them, took advantage of "the political vacuum created by the decline in the heavily-directed municipal planning of the immediate postwar period (Moran, 2007: 102)." Unsurprisingly, once ensconced they formed highly effective class pressure groups. One, the Barnsbury Society in Islington, successfully lobbied to create a conservation area and redirect traffic through neighbouring working class areas. By valorising their thrift and ingenuity they created a market for 'heritage', lifestyle goods, fashions and cuisine, publicising their achievements in the new weekend colour supplements for whom they worked. The traditional working class residents of Islington were largely puzzled by and suspicious of the bourgeois settlers yet seemed to prefer them to the other newcomers, West Indians (Bugler, 1968 in Moran, 2007: 114).

Through this inward immigration, house prices rose steadily through the period and the gentrifiers formed the basis for the eventual property speculation on which London's contemporary economic landscape is built. They were initially satirised as 'Hamsptead Lefties' by the Right and then by their own class as evidenced by Alan Bennett's BBC radio sketch show, *On the Margins* (1966). By the time Posy Simmonds started to draw a weekly cartoon strip for the *Guardian* in 1977 these

⁸⁴ It is alleged that on the first day of filming of *Sparrow Can't Sing*, men in the employ of the Krays threatened the cast and crew because they hadn't been consulted nor had given 'permission' for the filming in the East End. See - Price, 2021.

⁸⁵ *The Weekly Echo*. 30 May 1885 in Joyce, 1996: 521.

North London gentrifiers were more complex characters. Their financial security was matched only by their liberal self-doubt and their continued, entirely symbolic inability to communicate with the Heeps, their working class neighbours. Their focus was no longer on charming period features and colourful 'locals' but on liberal multiculturalism, cultural change and globalisation. They had become a class within themselves and would eventually form the 'liberal intelligensia' of the Blairite generation, or the "chattering classes" as their entirely unembarrassed bourgeois cousins categorise them.⁸⁶

3.3 The kids are alright

From the 1950s the late-Victorian cockney began to play several simultaneous roles still referencing what Williams (1977) might define as a residual cultural formation. Periodically useful to capital in the form of a nostalgic yet insightful character, the cockney was seen as an anachronism but also as a cultural signifier against urban renewal, town planning and the growing American hegemony. The character was additionally split between the strict traditionalist family and youth rebellion of modernity. The post-war East End became (and remains), a cultural and geographic backdrop for themes relating to a waning of authority, the decline of empire, family breakdown and crime (Hebdige, 1982).

Fittingly, it was partly in the performative arena of social realism, typified by the work of the Unity Theatre and Joan Littlewood's People's Theatre, that cockney was viewed as an authentic and politically revolutionary mirror to society. The emotion of loss for an older working class London is thoughtfully examined in John Krish's *The Elephant Will Never Forget* (1954) that symbolically mourns the city's last tram ("... past the pawnbrokers and through the street markets...") whilst the awkward, conflicted and modern generation of cockney youth is portrayed in Karel Reisz's sincere, *We Are The Lambeth Boys* (1959).⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Watkins, Alan. "The Chattering Classes," *The Guardian*, November 25, 1989.

⁸⁷ In Krish's film, the fear of forgetting the old working class city is underlined by the use of a song from the Music Hall (Archie Haldane's *Riding On Top of The Car*) as a soundscape to accompany a tram journey that sentimentally crosses the Thames. The narrator subtly warns us ("the trams were theirs") that these everyday objects so central to working class life - like the eel and pie shops - are passing and we should beware.

Inevitably, the replication of the cockney character found its way onto the emergent, single channelled television, via the genial (and by the end of the series in the 1970s, geriatric) Jack Warner as *Dixon of Dock Green*. Warner was the perfect establishment cockney; loyal, conservative and inevitably, hyper-local. It was however in the contribution to popular music that the 1950s cockney was perhaps most interestingly and effectively evolved. *My Fair Lady*, a Broadway musical based on the earlier *Pygmalion*, first performed in 1956 (and made into a film of the same name in 1964) internationalised the cockney stereotype. As Dave Laing (2003: 219) points out, this reference would be reproduced by Colin MacInnes in his *Absolute Beginners* (1959) when the modernist hero, the photographer 'Blitz Baby'... refers to a London barman as speaking in an "authentic old-tyme My Fair Lady dialect" (Laing, 2003: 217).

Stedman Jones (1989: 302) rightly suggests that the "earthy freshness" of the language of the cockney was lost to American slang in this period. In the West End, the site of a new, pioneering cosmopolitanism (Panayi, 2020: 52) London's taxonic cafes and tea shops were being replaced by coffee bars resplendent with Formica and the music of Bill Hailey and Elvis Presley within a kind of "working class bohemia" (Coutts-Smith in Medhurst, 2023: 54). Whilst most of the young English pretenders like Cliff Richard and Marty Wilde imitated an American accent, Adam Faith and notably Tommy Steele sang in a voice that as MacInnes suggested was 'Young England, Half English' with a cockney inflection (Laing, 2003: 218). The sinister Teddy Boy, an emergent working class subculture built around Rock n' Roll, wore as a uniform a pastiche of the American Zoot suit, Edwardiana and violence. The Teds were largely drawn from the ranks of unskilled and distinctly *un*-modern working class youth and like their Victorian forebears from the abyss, rough, unpredictable and dangerous to know. MacInnes links them to the racial violence of Notting Hill and has his 'yobbo' talk in a reproduction of the (pre) Victorian cockney confusion of 'w's and 'v's ("So a few of ver blacks got chived. Why oll ver fuss?") (Laing, 2003: 219). The Teds were an intersection of the bourgeois moral panic around the brutality and boredom of Lewis Gilbert's post-war landscape *Cosh Boy* (1953) and a distinctly American cultural brutishness of the American teenager, prefaced in the earlier perfect criminal foil to Sergeant Dixon.

Musically, a naive melding of traditional jazz and the austerity 'make do and mend' ethos of skiffle, (that owed much to American folk music) was fused for a time by performers like Lonnie Donegan who's upbeat, comic songs borrowed heavily from the nostalgic cockney and its music hall roots. His "Rock Island Line" (1956), "Does Your Chewing Gum Lose its Flavour on the Bedpost Overnight" (1959) and "My Old Man's a Dustman" (1966) link to a lost vaudeville tradition that was still within living memory.

More than anyone perhaps it is the figure of the gay, Jewish, East End socialist Lionel Begleiter - later Lionel Bart - that perhaps typifies the performed role of the cockney in the 1950s. Already accomplished as a writer of hit pop songs for Tommy Steele and Cliff Richard, his association with the author Frank Norman resulted in the musical *Fings ain't Wot They Used T' Be* (1959), produced by Littlewood's Theatre Workshop. The show opens up a world of pimps, prostitutes and *polari* (the underground gay language) couched in a nostalgic cockney slang. The words (some of which had to be changed for causing offence) neatly condense an anti-modern, sentimental, *pastness* typified by the cockney characters.⁸⁸

They changed our local Palais into a bowling alley and
Things ain't what they used to be (chorus)...
There's Teds in drainpipe trousers and Debs in coffee houses and
Things ain't what they used to be (chorus)...
Once our beer was frothy but now its frothy coffee well
Things ain't what they used to be (chorus)...
It used to be fun Dad an old Mum paddling down old Southend
But now it ain't done...

It was succeeded by his *Oliver* (1960) which transformed Dickens' workhouse orphan and the murder of a prostitute into a jolly musical caper. In the same year,

⁸⁸ Redacted and re-written lines included "How we used to pull for them, I've got news for Wolfenden" (that referred to the 1957 Wolfenden Report which advocated tolerance on homosexuality) and more bluntly, but still correctly referencing the very real gender violence of the day, "Once in golden days of yore, ponces killed a lazy whore".

the British actress Elsa Lanchester (famous from her 1935 role as *The Bride of Frankenstein*) released her album *Cockney London* and the comedian Bernard Cribbins sang the comic ditty “Right Said Fred” about hapless cockney removal men. By 1962 the cockney, his accent and his impertinent audacity was becoming normalised. Mike Sarne implored the bored and irritated Wendy Richards to “Come Outside” and soon Ray Davies (*The Kinks*) and Pete Townsend (*The Who*) began to familiarise ‘common’ London accents.

These cultural notions nodded to at least the appearance of a complementary shift in inequality via widescale nationalisation and a Welfare State. This mirrored the profound changes in Britain from the classic liberal regime towards a ‘Buy British’, *national* economy largely encompassing both the left and the right against American and EEC (as then was) free marketeers.⁸⁹ Indeed it was the Labour Party that could be seen as “...*the* nationalist party. It put nation before class” (Edgerton, 2018: 386). From the late 1940s into the early 1970s growth averaged 2-3% of GDP per year and by the mid ‘Sixties both Labour and the Conservatives were calling for (an ultimately unrealised) 4% (Edgerton, 2018: 283).

For the working class these were decent years of post-austerity and spending; a long boom with (generally) low unemployment and high union membership.⁹⁰ It is these years, building on the ‘Britain alone’ myth that I contend forms the contemporary nostalgic memory epoch of current populism that has coalesced around the eel and pie shops. In this period, “self-sufficiency in food increased steadily but slowly... as Britons got richer and ate British food” (Edgerton, 2018: 287).

Apart from Joe Brown’s (1960) comic sung homage to the jellied eel (with lyrics inevitably by Lionel Bart) the pie shops during this period remained relatively invisible in cultural texts reflecting their anachronistic status within the emanent modern city. Still very much located in unglamorous working class districts whose Victorian high street landscape of street markets, pubs and corner shops remained largely unchanged, they continued to be part of the traditional, gendered cockney *passaggiata*. For mothers dragging children between market stalls and the kitchen

⁸⁹ See for example - Nairn, 1972: 5.

⁹⁰ In 1960, the TGWU, the largest union had one million members - *The TUC General Council, Report*, 1960 at <http://www.unionhistory.info/reports/index.php>

sink they were the site of vital and connective neighbourhood chatter. For working men, an alternative to the greasy spoon cafés and part of the pre-match football ritual. At the weekends, a take-away relief for the housewife and a post-pub sponge after the 'local' had closed. Chris Cooke, the co-owner of Cooke's pie and mash shop in Dalston, remembers a post-war "heyday" for the shops which were busy and popular.⁹¹ Joe Cooke, his nephew, recalls the 1960s as working "six days a week and two nights slogging our balls off."⁹²

The mid to late 1960s however located the cockney seemingly polarised between two worlds. Alf Garnet, the cockney bigot in the BBC sitcom *'Till Death Do Us Part* (1965-1975) was very much the product of Empire and its defensive trench in a rapidly changing world of immigration and youth revolt. Garnett, like the dock workers and the Smithfield meat porters who marched in support of Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood" speech in 1968, represented the loyal, patriotic incarnation of the earlier century. Unsettled by the decline of imperial power and uprooted from their traditional territory and notions of racial supremacy by the forces of modernity, they provided the foot soldiers of an ascendent Right's economic and cultural counter-revolution against the gains of the Welfare State and (allegedly) faltering egalitarianism.⁹³

Yet concomitantly, the 'Sixties also located the cockney within an arena of working class cultural dynamism primarily through its youth. The roots of this lay in several places. Firstly, we might uncover it in the growing acceptance of the idea of the 'people's war'. This, as we have seen, grew from the desperate scramble of the elite's valorisation in 1940 of a one-nation 'ordinariness' in which the cockney played the starring role as a metaphor for the entire British working class. Secondly, the cultural shift engendered by the Angry Young Men's portrayal of changing class landscapes became something of a bulwark against the reassertion of the literary (and political) values of the Establishment. This prepared the way for 'authentically' working class cultural actors during the more radical 1960s. Lastly, the post-war

⁹¹ Chris Cooke. Interview by author, 17 November 2020.

⁹² Joe Cooke. Interview by author, 25 November 2020.

⁹³ Powell, a member of neo-liberal Mont Pelerin Society and the Institute of Economic Affairs had, along with the Chancellor of the Exchequer Peter Thorneycroft and his Treasury colleague, Nigel Birch resigned from government in 1959 in protest at plans for increased government expenditure in a move widely seen as one of the first articulations of 'monetarism' linking economic and political freedoms that would provide the cornerstone for the ideology of the later Thatcher governments.

cockney was clearly not immune to the attendant narrative of Americanisation and consumerism nor to the burgeoning siren call of 'youth culture'. Like their northern cousins (epitomised by Alan Sillitoe's Arthur Seaton in his *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, 1960), the young cockney saw little value in hard manual labour but hankered for an individual and more personal expression of 'style'.

The son of a Billingsgate porter and a char-woman, Michael Caine (originally Maurice Micklewhite) epitomised this ebullience. Along with David Bailey (the child of East London tailors) and Terrance Stamp from Bow whose father was a tugboat stoker, some fortunate young working class people found themselves at the heart of a new cultural formation that would last perhaps until the 1980s. However, they also remained between two worlds: wealthy but "a synonym for a working class jack-the-lad... and so sustained the 1950s representation of a cynical but *contained* [my italics] male rebelliousness" (Dodd and Dodd in Strinati, Dominic and Wagg, 2004: 125).

For most young cockneys however, not much had - or would - change. The doomed romance of Del, a mod from Stratford and Irene the daughter of an imprisoned armed robber, flowers when they flee to the countryside in *Bronco Bullfrog* (1969) only for them to return to their personal and class fate of drudgery and the new grey Brutalist concrete. The physical and cultural relocation of the cockney would lead Georgia Brown and Lionel Bart (both critically, Jewish 'East Enders') to ask, in a *schmaltz*-laden piece, *Who are the cockneys now?* (1968).

Norman Cohen's curiously unsentimental, *The London that nobody knows* (1967) showed a city increasingly distanced from itself. The film, edged by a haunting early electronica soundtrack excavates a forgotten city that is in sharp contrast to the 'Swinging' Sixties. The camera pans across Islington's Chapel Market and enters Manze's eel and pie shop, a gloomy, forgotten space that competes with the film's documentation of meth-drinkers and Victorian architectural oddities. Inside, we see a succession of elderly Londoners. They are wrapped in caps, scarves and grimy overcoats cheerfully eating pie, mash and bowls of eels in a dingy interior as if in a time-warp: a 'tribe' forgotten. As well they have been - relevant only within a nascent blooming of 'heritage' amongst the young early gentrifiers of the area and wealthy

flaneurs of the city's inner reaches. The only nod to the decade is a young Caribbean girl struggling to manoeuvre her knife and fork amidst the debris of a pre-cut pie and potato.

We get another rare celluloid glimpse, for all of four or five seconds of a pie and mash shop in the saccharine Peter Sellers vehicle, *The Optimists of Nine Elms* (1973) that is repurposed as a generic café.⁹⁴ The film is remarkable only for the texture of the shocking urban deprivation around the edge lands of the Thames that it reveals, the music of Lionel Bart and the hackneyed trope of Seller's faded music hall star.

David Furnham's extraordinary and forgotten documentary *Noted Eel and Pie Houses* (1975) opens to the mournful strains of an old pub piano and later introduces an elderly cockney chanteuse singing the Georgian ballad "Betty Brill". The film, the only dedicated audio-visual record of the shops up to this era, catches them in one of the first waves of their post-war decline. The film gives a sense of observing a living Victoriana. Initially focussing on the Cooke's family eel and pie shop in Broadway Market, the film surveys an almost derelict street and the adjacent rubbish-filled canal to the strains of a barrel organ. The squalor encapsulated the era's (so-called and contested) *Declinist* narrative; the strike-ridden, Sterling Crisis landscape of unrest and decay that 'inevitably' led to the economic redemption of Thatcherism.⁹⁵

Although Mary Cooke is shown dishing out pies in a very busy shop, one of her sons, Bob, merrily gutting eels in a stall outside laments, "You go down on a Tuesday and you see ten stalls where before there was a hundred."⁹⁶ The family matriarch, Lily Cooke, 91 at the time of recording, remembers a very different era when her father, drumming up business for his eels "... used to shout to a packed market, 'everyone a bright eye and silver belly' ... and you never hear that now".

⁹⁴ The shop featured is the long-closed Maggy Brown's Pie and Mash Shop on Battersea High Street, yet Seller's character clearly but incongruously purchases newspaper-wrapped fish and chips for the hungry siblings in his charge further reinforcing perhaps the untranslatability of pie and mash to the general audience.

⁹⁵ For a thorough reinterpretation of the historiography of post-war Britain and the ascendancy of the neoliberal narrative see - Tomlinson, 2016: 76-99.

⁹⁶ In fact, records seem to indicate that even during the busiest period of the market - the 1940s and 1950s, there were only ever licenses for up to 69 stalls granted at one time.

Much of the area's urban decay stemmed from the demolition and subsequent emigration of traditional Victorian housing residents that bordered Broadway Market's south side. Fred Cooke, co-owner of the family's shop in Dalston presciently remarked "I should imagine it won't be many years before they [the pie shops] disappear because you've got Chinese, takeaway meals, Kentucky Fried Chicken and that's replacing them."

The first glimpses of the Neoliberal ascendancy that would come to epitomise the next incarnation of the cockney would be Bob Hoskins' portrayal of Harold Shand, the undisputed king of the capital's underworld in *The Long Good Friday* (1979). Self-described as "a businessman with a sense of history and also a Londoner", Shand is attempting to redevelop his idealised childhood stomping-ground, the now derelict Docklands, with the help of crooked local politicians ("the Corporation") and the New York Mafia. Shand is the embodiment not only of the coster writ large but also of his post-imperialist delusion. Hoskins portrays a different cockney in *Mona Lisa* (1986). Here he is George, a tough ex-con recently released from prison who is forced to drive for a high-class call girl. In the opening scenes, his cockney significantly registers surprise at how multiracial his traditional neighbourhood has become in his absence ("where did all this lot come from?"). Yet it is as an enduring moral signpost that makes his cockney significant. Interrupting his charge Simone whilst she is with an upper class customer he offers, "Put yer clothes on. Make yourself respectable..." It is within that charged phrasing that he is offered as the reprised historical cockney; a character of 'ordinary', dependable decency.

A gentler characterisation of the 'lovable cockney rogue' still selling from market pitches but with a more realistic sub-plot of the inevitable working class proscription to poverty is found in the BBC comedy series, *Only Fools and Horses* (1981). The lead character, 'Del-Boy' Trotter is one of a long line of bourgeois-viewed characters seen through the prism of malapropism and cultural confusion from earlier cockney stereotypes like the ventriloquised voice of Richard Whiteing's *Mr Sprouts* (1868). Trotter is redeemed however from the worst excesses of Thatcher's children by his warmth and humanity: still a simultaneous cockney trope.

Created in opposition to *Coronation Street*, ITV's long-running drama of northern working class life, *Eastenders* (1985) followed on from an earlier and forgotten BBC attempt to reflect the now disappeared cockney communality and territoriality of Soho, *Market in Honey Lane* (1967). *Eastenders* was on some level simply a revised cultural text, the latest manifestation of the malleable cockney character. It reproduced the politically expedient valorisation of the much simplified 1940s cockney and, according to the producers, attempted to encapsulate the East End in the phrase, "hurt one of us and you hurt us all" (Smith, 2005: 11). Despite valiant nods to themes of race, sexuality and gentrification (often portrayed in the style of social realist dramas of the 1970s), *Eastenders* took as its starting point the palimpsestic cockney identity, "... that invented past for the actual past, so the future look[ed] nostalgic" (Edgerton, 2018: 386).⁹⁷

Indeed, the early years of the Thatcher government were characterised, especially in advertising, by the accommodation of nostalgic working class cultural tropes utilised synchronously with an appeal to aspiration and social mobility. This was evidenced in the adaption by the BMP agency in 1979 of the 'cockney rock' music hall of Chas n' Dave into an advertising campaign for Courage beer ("Gertcha"). These campaigns, (along with the less successful George, the lager-drinking cockney bear) and those that dealt with American, blue-collar 1950s memories, (for example, Levi jeans) were examples of what Svetlana Boym (2001) has called a 'reflective nostalgia' that "engages in antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths ... build[ing] on the sense of loss of community and cohesion and offer[ing] a comforting collective script for individual longing" (Boym, 2001: 31-32). Antithetical to this cultural position was a rare and entirely authentic post-punk feminist homage to both cockney and pie and mash from the forgotten all-girl band, The Gym Slips. Their 1983 single *Pie and Mash* celebrates visits to (the now closed) Georges' pie shop in Canning Town. The song recounts their ritual enacted "every Saturday" where you would "... collect your spoon and fork/ shovel it

⁹⁷ After the first episode of *EastEnders*, BBC Breakfast garnered reactions to the show in an East End pub. Significantly one of the interviews suggested positively that "...it's not the usual cliché of pie and mash". Breakfast Time, BBC1, 20 February 1985.
<https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/a7f6ea355fc094a70fd0ba25a192b401>

down, no time to talk.” The song, a B-side to their *Big Sister* proudly chants that “Pie and mash is working class!”

Working class or not, the Thatcher project however (along with the simultaneous New Right Reaganite propaganda across the Atlantic) appealed to some “people who feared they no longer recognised the Britain that they had grown up in” (Blackwell and Seabrook, 1986: 153). It offered the battered and temporally confused working classes a national reconstruction of imperial greatness couched in the language of a Victorian domestic stability described by Hoggart. By utilising working class symbols like the decent, industrious and patriotic cockney, the Thatcher project simultaneously stole Labour’s appeal to workers and closed down the future with a capitalist realism that prefigured Francis Fukuyama (1992) by more than a decade.

3.4 The Unmodern

From the late 1970s onwards, the image of a heroic, wartime British proletariat had started to disappear from cultural texts and the white working class were, as Leon Hunt (1998) attests, increasingly identified with unmodernity. Yet this identification did not come from the working classes themselves. As Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite (2018) has suggested, what “‘ordinary people’ meant when they talked about class” had started to change significantly in this period and that shift directly related to the cockney constituents of the pie and mash shops and the process of the reformation of their identities during the next thirty years.

For the pie and mash constituents, the 1970s were a period of relative plenty. As Michael Collins (2004: 205) suggests, his working class Southwark family were emblematic of such class gains. “People were getting more things now - filling out their homes with new carpets or new sofas... dimmer switches, knotty-pine wallpaper, a bar in the corner and L-shaped Campari red leatherette sofa.” For Paul Kelly, his father’s pie shop in Bethnal Green was symbolic of a simple good life where people “... had a few bob [and the shop] ...was like the hub of the

community... the queue used to be 30 or 40 people.”⁹⁸ Similarly, Melanie McGrath (2018) recounts an interview about two branches of a different pie shop (also Kelly’s) on the Roman Road. “In the seventies it was so, so busy: three people working behind the counter, three continually making pies, two people baking and four people washing up’. And there’s yet more to do at the branch number 600.”

From the angry young man of the 1950s to Caine’s cockney hero as outlaw in *Get Carter* (1971), London’s working classes had become observers of, and participants in, a process of increasing and overt individualisation. With the end of conscription, greater access to education, growing consumerism, secularisation and, via the New Left, the ‘self-realisations’ of gender parity, many saw an era of greater equality. It was captured by a distinct culture of a post-war generation where “‘youth’ itself became a metaphor for social change” (Hall in Barker, 1978: 285).

In a sense, the 1970s were defined by and through this new working class cultural experience. Texts from the period portray a vigorous populism: mass entertainment, especially television comedy, took aim at privilege and pomposity and, for the first time valorised working class characters.⁹⁹ So-called ‘low-culture’ from football to seedy sex comedies reflected proletarian visibility; popular music and fashion reflected working class (sometimes even androgenous) heroes.¹⁰⁰ Yet this success was no revolutionary moment, rather a gate-crashing of the perceived fruits of capital. Its dependence on the Fordist peak spelt its inevitable end and the start of a counter reaction from the Right.

During this period, cockney as a one-dimensional music hall caricature and prop to authority had begun to wane. Its dance with modernity and youth I contend, bestowed the identity with multiple valences and in a sense, the increasing choices of a new generation. One could choose to be a cockney by attitude, by race, heritage or simply by location; but even this was now open to negotiation, largely the result of

⁹⁸ Paul Kelly, co-owner of Kelly’s Pie Shop, Debden. Interview by author, 15 December 2020.

⁹⁹ Television ‘situation comedies’ paved the way for this trend. *Steptoe and Son*, BBC TV 1962-1974, *The Likely Lads* BBC TV 1964-1966 (reprised as *Whatever Happened to the Likely Lads* BBC TV 1973-1974), *Porridge* (BBC TV 1974-1977), *Rising Damp* (ITV 1974-1978) and *Till Death Do Us Part* (BBC TV 1965-1975) are prime examples.

¹⁰⁰ See - Simonelli, 2012.

displacement, gentrification and mass immigration. This 'mobility' of identity echoes Robert Hewison (1988: 7) who comments that increasingly, "moral choices were now a matter of taste, and the collapse of a general system of accepted moral values culture acquired greater importance as a guide to political choice."

Some neighbourhoods like the Isle of Dogs would remain solidly white and firmly closed to outsiders for at least another decade but other cockney heartlands like Bethnal Green saw an influx of Asians. As Monica Ali (2003: 208-209, 92) would write two decades later of the area's changing motifs and cockney's racial structures,

In between the Bangladeshi restaurants were little shops that sold clothes and bags and trinkets... I'm talking about the clash between Western values and our own... the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one's own identity and heritage.

For Paul Kelly, "... the Asian immigration changed a lot of the landscapes of the [eel and pie] shops ... thus you weren't getting people shopping down the market...[and coming to his father's pie shop]" - but you were already seeing cockneys in curry houses.¹⁰¹

Hackney, previously the site of mass Jewish immigration, was now extraordinarily multicultural but especially Afro-Caribbean. The reggae rhythms (like the Blues before them) adopted by punk bands like The Clash and John Lydon would form the musical and cultural backing for a culture of anti-racism and cultural mixing that is the basis of a contemporary and hybrid London working class culture. Jimmy Pursey's Sham 69 articulated a harder edge to London working class life with songs like the semi-comic "Sunday Morning Nightmare" (1978) but it was songs like "The cockney kids are innocent" (1978) which attracted a problematic right-wing following that led eventually to the bands demise. The Cockney Rejects and other Oi! bands were less embarrassed by their "white proletarian masculinity" and their songs

¹⁰¹ In terms of food and constituency, Londoners are more likely to indulge in food from the "imaginary landscape' of former colonies of the British empire that have significant numbers of white settlers. This is the imaginary of the (post) colonial white British." Savage, Mike, David Wright, and Modesto Gayo-Cal 2010: 612.

attacked traditional cockney targets of the age - “hippies and the race relations industry” (Laing, 1985: 112). It is in the figure and music of Ian Dury however that the multi-valent cockney identity in this period reached its apotheosis. The son of a bus driver, Dury studied painting before evoking a music hall tradition that fused a cockney and punk ethos. His use of cockney speech, idiom and characters (“Clever Trevor” and “Plaistow Pam”) not only illustrate a modern, self-critical cockney but also the wider territoriality of the identity whose “...‘imagined’ centre” was shifting eastwards” (Newland, 2008: 151).

Despite the retrospective ascription of chaos in both culture and politics by the right to the 1970s, the New Economics Foundation found that 1976, in terms of national economic, social and environmental well-being was the best year since 1950 (Shah, Hetan and Marks in Beckett, 2009: 3). Class however had certainly not disappeared. If this was the era of ‘Workerism’, it was also the era that the reactionary Middle Class Association (1974) was formed.¹⁰² This was an organisation set up by a Conservative MP, John Gorst and the Ulster Unionist Captain Lawrence Orr that sought to represent the “persecuted, vilified and sneered-at ... minority of managers and the self-employed” (Bechhofer and Elliot, 1978: 57). After less than a year however it descended into a far-right pressure group and disbanded. Yet, the fear of working class gains fed an increasing notion of economic Declinism within the elites that echoed the Victorian and Edwardian cultural and racially inflected fear of Degeneration.

This powerful and melancholy trope was aided by hegemonic messaging from an ascendent New Right through The Monday Club and The Centre for Policy Studies. In 1974, Keith Joseph, a disciple of Friedrich Hayek and Monetarism, gave a speech in Edgbaston where he suggested that the “human stock” was threatened by the over-breeding of the poor and their chaotic lives.¹⁰³ This image coincided with both widescale employment changes and economic insecurity brought about by rapid

¹⁰² For Workerism, see - Edgerton, 2018: 408. For the Middle Class Association, see - Bechhofer, and Elliott, 1978: 57-88. For wider middle class campaigns of the era see - King and Nugent, 1979.

¹⁰³ <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/§document/101830>.

For more on Joseph, his “home-made casualties” and the transmission of deprivation between generations, see - Welshman, 2006: 107-126.

deindustrialisation and globalization.¹⁰⁴ There was further, as Emily Robinson *et al* (2017: 268-304) suggest, a growing frustration across society at the slowing trajectory of people gaining control of their own lives. Modernist solutions - and the 'experts' behind them that had scattered working class communities - were increasingly seen as failures.

For the traditional cockney, disillusionment with the largely unaccountable and remote forms of Wilson's technocratic government had perhaps chimed with deep artisanal roots within their own radical Enlightenment heritage. More, it spoke to their suspicion of bureaucratic and 'corrupt' local labour authorities and traditional politics in general.¹⁰⁵ The death-knell of technocratic modernism was the acceptance of an IMF loan in 1976 by a Labour Party bereft of new solutions within 'The Marketplace of Ideas' that opened a new consensus dominated by the Right. This intersected with a general paranoia around conspiracy, corruption and 'shadowy elites' that characterised the decade (Wheen, 2010).

Unlike the multi-valent and youthful cockney of the parallel popular culture, the traditional cockney formulation was increasingly used in mainstream texts of the period in the form of a nostalgic proletarian masculinism. The television film *Regan* (1974) opens to an East End pub full of grotesques singing the Marie Lloyd music hall song "My Old Man" before an undercover police officer from the Flying Squad ('The Sweeney') is abducted and murdered by East End gangsters.¹⁰⁶ Regan, the 'avenging copper', is thwarted by 'rules and regulations' in his pursuit of the villains. He is a moral cockney figure, but now, congruent with British Noir (and American Western tradition), he doesn't play by the conventional, discredited rules of the establishment 'do-gooders'. This theme of the so-called 'dishonesty' of liberal elites was a key narrative in this period of what Schwarz (1996: 65-67) calls the 're-

¹⁰⁴ The decline of London's manufacturing base in this period was shockingly rapid. In 1961, Greater London had a manufacturing workforce of 1.6 million. By 1974 this had shrunk to 900,000. See - Inwood, 1998: 895.

None of these issues were necessarily unique to Britain. The long post-war boom of capitalist economies was coming to an end and growth was slowing. It was not specifically that Britain was slowing down, rather than the rest of the world was catching up. See the arguments in Edgerton, 2018.

¹⁰⁵ For housing corruption in Hackney, see - Wright, 2009. For a revision of the corruption narrative of Labour leaders, especially with reference to housing issues, see - Griffiths, 2019.

¹⁰⁶ The Sweeney is itself a cockney slang for the fictional pie house murderer Sweeney Todd.

racialization of England'. Robinson *et al* (2017: 297-298) place race relation legislation squarely within the contexts of the critical intersection of the rise of popular individualism. They trace this law-making framed through state planning and consumer rights complete with "whole new professions of race experts and advisors... within *market relations* [my emphasis]... and equality of opportunity." The resentment that this sowed amongst the white working class, fanned by a hostile right-wing press, was allied to growing disillusionment with the framing of the Welfare State itself. If welfare had come "wrapped in the Union Jack" for a London working class that had been made 'white' only a century before, the identities it defined were being "marshalled... in ways that challenged the multicultural narrative of the social democratic project" (Hall in Robinson *et al*, 2017; 297). These narratives of compulsion were also antithetical to the increasingly every-day negotiations between traditional communities that, although problematic, were organic. For the Right in the 1970s and 1980s, the idea of 'unfairness' and 'white victimhood' picked up a key thread of Powellism and became a way to court the white working classes via a contract that would eventually re-categorise them again as largely 'unmodern'.¹⁰⁷

An antipathy to these state-imposed racial narratives was also to be found in the 1970s in what would become known as 'Thatcherism'. Whilst Margaret Thatcher blamed societal decline and the 'crisis of authority' in the 1960s on a Keynesian social democratic state that enabled permissiveness and profligacy, her austere monetarism was simultaneously and fortuitously (partially) congruent to the generational aspirations of a working class, consumer-led individualism enacted within the cockney identity. It (again fortuitously) chimed with a long dissatisfaction with traditional Labourism among some conservative sections of the London working class that it saw as largely remote and antithetical to its nascent entrepreneurialism but also the failure of a corporatist Labour Party to offer solutions to a state in crisis. The adoption of an 'authoritarian populism' allowed Thatcher to condense multifaceted popular discontents and channel them through an increasingly right-wing state. In this way, the project managed to construct a 'historical bloc' of contradictory forces - a reactionary, nationalist section of the white working class, an

¹⁰⁷ See the arguments of - Hewitt, 2005 and Rhodes, 2010: 77-99.

entrepreneurial, managerial petit bourgeois and older elites - that remains largely intact.¹⁰⁸

Fundamentally, the Thatcher project was about creating a new 'common sense' that simultaneously transformed the basis of British capitalism by colonising the past with what Stuart Hall (1988) categorised as a "regressive modernisation." Thatcherism sought to reconfigure (specifically English) memory to "erase the melancholy of a dead empire and to address the fears, the anxieties [and] the lost identities of a people."¹⁰⁹ As Hall suggests, it did this through simple imagery: the stiff upper lip, the Dunkirk Spirit - 'the Good Old Days' - all of which could be regained, though sacrifice, from the opium sleep of the degenerate post-war settlement. With the lack of an alternative mainstream narrative, the possibilities of a wholesale generational renewal of cockney receded and an older identity, reprised through comic caricatures like the self-employed East End plasterer 'Loadsamoney' (an updated version of the jingoistic Victorian, 'Arry from *Punch*) began to proliferate.¹¹⁰

The Thatcher project further re-valued the notion of class from an economic to a *moral* position and thereby, as Hall noted early on, constructed "an enemy within". This pitched the 'trade union bully boys' against, amongst others, the 'hard working cockney sparrers' so that eventually, "on council estates, a freshly painted front door and a copy of the *Sun* in the letterbox was a signal of Thatcher's achievements in remaking the Conservative party" (Clarke, 2004: 400). Cockney was, once more largely a nostalgic scaffold linking rulers to ruled. The pie shop, it's food, history and the lives it contained were now again congruent to a hegemonic message of a rediscovered Victoriana as a marker of stability and propriety in a changing working class landscape. The contemporary reimagining of the eel and pie shops as a totem of a lost white, working class London are firmly anchored within this nostalgic haunting.

¹⁰⁸ For a contestation of the exactitudes of this formulation of Stuart Hall's 'Authoritarian Populism', see - Jessop, Bonnett, Bromley, and Ling, 1984: 147.

¹⁰⁹ Hall, Stuart. "*Gramsci and Us*". <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2448-stuart-hall-gramsci-and-us>

¹¹⁰ 'Loadsamoney', the thuggish cockney plasterer who made a fortune from renovating and gentrifying homes for the middle classes was the product of the comedian Harry Enfield from around 1984. See - Biressi and Nunn, 2013: 32-37.

This trend however was not entirely linear. If mainstream texts were congruent to a regressive Victorian cockney, the conversations on inner-city streets of London were starting to sound different. In 1985, David Emmanuel, a black South London DJ who performed as 'Smiley Culture', recorded "Cockney Translation", a song that spoke to another valence of the identity - a more-or-less successful hybrid racial mingling. The song, largely in Jamaican patois (literally) translated the experience of black Londoners who were by now melding with a younger generation of cockneys and adding another cultural layer.

When New Labour came to power it largely accepted the parameters of the neoliberal state seeking only to blunt its sharpest edges.¹¹¹ However, central to its polity was the notion that struggle was now based, via what became known as Late Modernity, around culture not class.¹¹² Correspondingly, the Blair administration adopted a language of "aspiration... [that] attempted to exploit the fissures in the working class that had emerged under Thatcherism" (Jones, 2011: 91). It instituted a programme of cultural reconstruction to reabsorb what it saw as an incorrigible, recidivous white 'underclass' hooked on a 'dependency culture' into a modern, globalised, multicultural modernity. It did this by challenging the notions of welfare on which a racialized proletariat had been incorporated into the nation targeting "the white working class poor as symbols of a 'backwardness' and specifically a culturally burdensome whiteness" (Haylett, 2001: 351). According to New Labour, now associated with an increasingly professionalised political class, 'ordinariness' was no longer to be found in the stoic cockney of the 1940s but rather in a construction of middle class values (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst, 2001). According to Owen Jones (2011: 102), now that class had been superseded, "multiculturalism became the only recognized platform in the struggle for equality."

In this way, Blair's Labour Party forced the white working class "to think of themselves as a new ethnic group... [and refused] to acknowledge anything about [them] as legitimately cultural [which led to]... "a composite loss of respect on all fronts: economic, political and social" (Jones, 2011: 102). More, it ignored not only

¹¹¹ When asked her greatest achievement, Thatcher replied, "Tony Blair and New Labour. We forced our opponents to change their minds." Burns, Connor. 11 April 2008 - <https://conservativehome.blogs.com/centreright/2008/04/making-history.html>

¹¹² See - Giddens, 1990.

the heritage of very real residual racism in some London working class communities but also an organic, 'deep multiculturalism' - an unofficial assimilation, experienced and "negotiated" on a daily basis by the capital's inevitably mixed communities and the successful anti-racism of the previous decade, embedded in popular music and wider working class culture.¹¹³ It also stoked working class resentment by its "advocacy of immigrants and formerly marginal cultural groups... [which became the] ... moral justification of a layer of cheap labour and enforced entrepreneurialism" (Winlow, Hall and Treadwell, 2017: 70).

Through bureaucratic distance, an increasingly powerful 'liberal' commentariat and a 'fickle parent' style of governance, New Labour issued cultural and moral diktats that took aim at the working class gains of the 1970s.¹¹⁴ It demarcated the whiteness of the middle classes from those classified as 'chavs' or 'dirty' whites contaminated by violence and poverty within their zoned, concrete estates. One of the main arenas of this cultural demonisation was around the working class body and the traditional foods it consumed. I will deal with this notion, as a form of memory, in the following chapter.

Conclusion

The cockney, and his allied signifier the eel and pie shop, is the historical outcome of an intersectionality of identities. This ongoing dialectic is the result both of the interplay between an internal group identification and the categorisation of others; between an emergent nineteenth century working class, its indivisible bourgeoisie partner and modernity.

The identity that categorised the cockney who emerged from the Blitz rubble to stumble, jive, twist and then pogo into the 1970s, simultaneously forgotten and remembered, was not merely palimpsestic in a linear sense but rather the result of

¹¹³ For "negotiation" see - Back, 2017.

The re-written and imposed narrative of New Labour also ignored the very real anti-racism gains of the 1970s and 1980s that revolved around campaigns in music like Rock Against Racism, Red Wedge and the anti-racist / anti-fascist work of East End Trades Unionists like Micky Fenn - see - Fekete, Liz, 2016: 55–60.

¹¹⁴ For the 'fickle parent' argument see - Winlow, Hall, and Treadwell, 2017.

multiple junctures of memory and identity traces. In this way cockney, by the mid-twentieth century, consisted of (amongst many others) mediaeval notions of urbanity, eighteenth century assumptions around developing petit-bourgeois ascendancy, nineteenth century Irish immigrant entrepreneurial anti-authoritarianism and late Victorian propaganda around race and empire.

However, within a framework of mid-twentieth century modernity, the cockney began to play several simultaneous roles. It remained periodically useful to capital as a largely reactionary and patriotic force through which was channelled opposition to American consumerism and the expanding EEC. More, in defence of its Welfarist gains, adjacent to the forces of decolonialisation and amidst mass immigration, the cockney was used to bolster the colonial frontier that “came ‘home’” (Schwarz, 1996: 73) via Powellism. Additionally, however, the cockney developed multiple internal valances around the expanding horizons of choice and individuality via an expanding popular modernity. These were linked largely to its changing age demographic which were partly antithetical to its traditional role, again altering the course of the notion of ‘ordinariness’ within British society.

By the late 1970s cockney continued to embrace a vigorous low-cultured populism but simultaneously began to embody a more moneyed, conservative upwardly mobile element, birthed of a nascent proletarian entrepreneurialism which was valorised and subsequently liberated as politically expedient by forces of the Right, both elements held within dual class trajectories.

These contradictions, I suggest, highlighted by the neo-liberal ascendancy, provoked an increasing internal instability: a confusion around the changing physical and cultural loci for the cockney that accelerated its Great Trek eastwards towards Essex. Here, a simultaneous, adjacent but declining culture had been incubating. Originally birthed within the pioneering, progressive optimism of the Labourist New Towns this enjoined within the precarious memory forms of the new settlers to create a simulacra of what used to be ‘jellied eel London’ (Sinclair, 2004: 58).

Synchronously, within the active crucible of a modernising capital, cockneys changing territoriality, migratory composition, linguistics and transformed meanings

were central to the formation and experience of a new, composite and parallel identity. This was a stratified, multi-layered, modern cockney, increasingly racially mixed and as much contained within a structure of feeling or looser group identifications of cultural signifiers, as the traditional tropes of geography and occupation. These signifiers might be palimpsestic layerings of half-remembered music hall pub songs, a dropped 'h' to the fading "chalky villains, swollen knuckles, liver spots, back from a seven in Parkhurst" (Sinclair, 2004: 37).

As Calvino (1997: 14) had it, "[A]s this wave of memories flows in, the city soaks it up like a sponge and expands." The eel and pie shops, as a unique historical text, inscribed and re-inscribed with these ebbs and flows reflect a cockney whose London and its 'imagined centre' now points eastwards but whose history reminds us of its complicated past.

4. Tastes and spaces of resistance

Introduction

In the almost complete absence of any significant contemporary body of literature surrounding the workings and wider significances of the eel, pie and mash shops, I employ, in the first half of this chapter, a sensory ethnography utilising a ‘democracy of the senses’ (Rhys-Taylor, 2020: 6) to examine the sights, sounds and smells of the F. Cooke’s eel, pie and mash shop in Hoxton. The research was carried out during the autumn of 2019 but is additionally informed by years of work and visits to this and more than thirty eel, pie and mash shops over the last decade or more. Cooke’s is one of the last surviving London shops, its owner a direct descendant of one of the earliest Irish migrant dynasties that dominated the trade from the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Sensory ethnography is a phenomenological methodology that is influenced and guided by the senses, perceptions and experience. It is an emergent research field at whose heart is a growing interest in “new forms of ethnographic knowing and routes into other people's experiences” (Pink, 2015: 187).

I explore the space of the shop as a unique site of a hyperlocal, performative territory of working class culture that through ritual and the ‘secret habits of the home’ are zones of resistance to the modern neo-liberal city “from a stubborn past” (De Certeau, 1998). I suggest that these rituals are mythologised, signified and coded through the senses and the sedimentation of gestures. These remain unwritten but are, I suggest, part of the ‘true archives’ of the city (De Certeau, Giard and Mayo, 1998) that link hospitality, conviviality and memory within and upon the bodies of the customers (Connerton, 1989).

I examine the cuisine of the shops, the ingredients, the preparation and unique serving methods linking them to sensual “generous and familiar” ‘foods of necessity’ (Bourdieu, 1984). I consider the food’s unique historical significance within the British

working class diet using both historical reportage, contemporary theory (Bourdieu, 1984; Douglas, 2003) and examples from popular modernity. I place the food, especially the eel, in historical and cultural context and additionally within contemporary notions of disgust (Falk, 1991; Lupton, 1996) relevant to a changing and problematically memorialised habitus that surrounds them.

I use the sense of smell to conduct an olfactory and sensory history of London's proletarian sensibilities, poverty and memory which, in addition to parallel, embodied gesture, "brings the past into the present" (Serematakis, 1994). I further use the sense of smell to examine changing ideas of cleanliness, so vital to the culture of the historical shops.

The second half of the chapter situates the work within a theoretical framework that examines the significance of the shop, its food and memorialisations within a wider context of a changed and nostalgic working class identity. I examine how the food is an arena "for that most ubiquitous signifiers of class", the performance of respectability (Skeggs, 1997: 1), but also of a particular 'working classness', subtly delineated from the refinements of bourgeois dining and manners as 'microresistances' (DeCerteau, 1998). These I suggest may point to changes in how the contemporary working class may perceive itself (Bellah, 1985; Maffesoli, 1998) around a conflicted cockney identity leading to an inter-class contestation. Finally, I explore how pie, mash and especially eels by their class contestations are a crucial insight into why class tastes have not wholly declined with modernity as Stephen Mennell (1985) has previously suggested but rather, as Beverley Skeggs (2004) notes, are subtle, changeable and subject to a process of constant production.

4.1 Resistances from a stubborn past

It's lunchtime. In the market, people move rhythmically, meandering between stalls selling fruit and vegetables in colourful bowls, cheap winter coats and catchpenny cutlery. The greasy spoon café is filling up and several people wait in soft rain for complicated coffee orders at a mobile barista. A small queue of three elderly women has formed outside the pie and mash shop. One has a tartan shopping trolley and is having some difficulty negotiating the small step at the entrance.

F. Cooke is a former bank refitted in 1987 and owned by Joe Cooke and his wife Kim. Joe is the fourth generation of Cookes to sell pie and mash and grew up with his brother in the family's pie shop (now closed) in Broadway Market, several miles to the east which opened in 1900. The Hoxton shop has Victorian inspired green signage and a glass front with windows inscribed in gold type advertising "jellied eels, tea, coffee, mash, pie mash, fruit pie, ice-cream, cold drinks".¹¹⁵

The space inside is cavernous; high ceilings with white walls lined with white and green tiles. Rows of plain iron and wooden communal benches sit beneath heavy marble tables. There is a scattering of sawdust in the floor. The long counter to the right stretches across the whole of the width of the shop and leads to the kitchen at the back from where food is carried in to be served. The space is utilitarian: clean, bright, functional and unfussy. The movement of the food through to the serving area is linear, fast and efficient. Pies are carried from the kitchen in steel baking trays and emptied, still in their piping hot individual pie cases into a lidded, hinged metal receptacle under the counter ready to be plated by hand. The mash and liquor are brought from the kitchen as needed and emptied from steel buckets into antique heated urns on a ledge that overlooks the street. Cooked eels are brought to the plate when required from the kitchen.

As one enters, one is surrounded by noise and bustle: the clatter of plates, the clack of cutlery. These create a wall of echoing noise that competes with shouted orders and chatter and laughter. There is heat and the room smells of warmth, hot ovens, baking, pastry and because of the drizzle outside, very slightly of damp clothes. There is a constant flow of people coming in, ordering at the counter, being served, sitting, eating and leaving. There are multiple, overlapping conversations. In the far corner an infant is being fed with a mixture of mashed potato and liquor. By the wall, a man devours a pie covered in white pepper and vinegar. Another has a bowl of eels in liquor that he swirls around his mouth indulgently sucking at the flesh. He

¹¹⁵ For a visual comparison to an earlier historical taxon that echoes the plate glass, see - "The Betting Interest, its origins", *The Sporting Life*, 30 May 1861: 1.

uses his spoon to spit out the bones back onto the plate underneath. In another corner, a waitress stacks and clears empty plates and wipes down a table.

This is a transactional space full of action. On the one hand it is "...a social world, taking part in a play of sociability within the confines of the marketplace" (Erickson, 2007: 22), on another it is I contend, a unique and living archaeology of an early industrial feeding station caught and ossified in the transition to modernity where habits, rituals and preferences have inscribed upon and within the body.

There is a sense that the food served here could *only* be served here, the space inimical to the gustatory offering. This is, to paraphrase Marx's notion of 'species being', a place where the historical and contemporary socially constructed cockney body is being fed; an "entity in the process of becoming" (Schilling, 2012: 24).¹¹⁶ Here the (cockney) body is a nexus of class and modernity; the food a negotiation between the worker and the owner. The shop is the interstitial space of that negotiation.

The eel, pie and mash shop and the food it serves might also be defined by what it is not. Based on the specificity of its menu and the nature of its temporality it is neither restaurant nor a café. The eel, pie and mash shop is not a place for daydreaming where time is measured in Prufrock's coffee spoons nor the 'layabout' cafés that Quentin Crisp (1981: 33) remembered where "you would sit through lunch, tea and supper without ordering anything more than one cup of coffee..." In very clear terms, "You're meant to queue up, get it [the food], find an empty table ... hopefully if you're a good shop that chair's still warm ... eat it as quick as you possibly can and fuck off..."¹¹⁷

London's dwindling pie shops are almost what Ray Oldenburg (1999) calls a *Third Place*. These are social spaces that are not 'home' (first space) nor work (second place). Third places - like barbershops for example, are sites that anchor communities through informal ties that stimulate and nurture broader social

¹¹⁶ Shilling refers to Marx's notion from *The German Ideology* (1846) that the full potential of the body as a biological *and* social entity could only be realised in a future communist society.

¹¹⁷ Greg Camp, joint owner of T.J. Kelly, Debden. Interview by author, 5 October 2021.

convivialities. They are “public place[s] that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work (Oldenburg, 1999: 16). Anna Marie Steigmann (2017: 46) also suggests that within late capitalism “retail and gastronomic facilities” have blurred distinctions between private and public life. Accordingly working class spaces are arenas that have become “important symbols in postmodern life.” These are spaces where different social classes may meet, and entry isn’t based necessarily on social capital - a place where people might “rub elbows” (Rosenbaum in Steigmann, 2017: 47). In some respects, because of the gentrification of places like Hoxton Market and its surrounds this is increasingly true.

Rainer Kazig (2012) suggests that in all of these type of businesses, the owners often exhibit the behaviours of a host and create an atmosphere where everyone feels at home.

The old lady at the door, a regular for many years, is still having trouble getting her shopping basket over the threshold. “Come on in love” shouts Joe from the kitchen, “we don’t bite.”

The eel, pie and mash shops have become semi-secret spaces where only locals may tread. These are territories that in a sense cannot be seen from the “normal globalised street”: where locals, or “ordinary practitioners” make use of spaces that are only semi-visible (De Certeau, 1988: 93). The pie and mash shop in this sense becomes a sort of secular *eruv* - a Jewish tradition where an outside space is temporarily and ritually redefined as part of the home. This religious loophole is usually made by natural or man-made boundaries and is sanctified by the sharing of food that merges the spaces. Within this space, ‘home-like’ behaviour is tolerated, and, in that sense, the shops bridge a space that exists between “the public world of the market and the private world of the home and family” (Erickson, 2007: 22).

Historically, the early eel, pie and mash shop, as a response to working class hunger around the capitalist temporality of labour, sat between the home and workplace. As Hoggart (1957: 35) has it, “‘home cooking’ is always better than any other... café food is almost always adulterated ...” Yet of course, ‘home’ cooking often wasn’t an option for some of the shops’ original customer base. As we have already seen, working class Londoners were often forced to eat away from where they slept either

because of work pressures or lack of cooking facilities. The 1911 Census of England and Wales showed that in London, Finsbury, Shoreditch, Bethnal Green and Stepney were all areas where a third or more of the population were living two or three in a room, while in Southwark, Holborn and St Pancras just over a quarter lived in overcrowded conditions (Oddy, 1971: 265). Unsurprisingly then, as Maude Pember Reeves (1914: 103) recounts, in similar areas, “The Lambeth woman has no joy in cooking for its own sake. The eating of food then was therefore seldom a social occasion and, in terms of diet, “the limited consumption of animal foods indicated their uses in working class diet as a vehicle for consuming larger amounts of carbohydrate foods.” Meat, in Benjamin Rowntree’s (1913: 308) words, was often “a flavouring rather than a substantial course.” That said, “potatoes are an invariable item. Greens may go, butter may go, meat may diminish almost to vanishing point, before potatoes are affected” (Reeves, 1914: 98). Yet, “a good deal of pastry consumed. Some housewives make nearly half the flour into pastry, ... It is usually regarded by the worker as more satisfying than bread; and it saves butter” (Rowntree, 1913: 39).

Inevitably, by the turn of the nineteenth century, the food offerings of the eel, pie and mash shops reflected these basic tastes (largely jettisoning additions like pea soup and baked potatoes for example) and seem to have settled for easily available and cheap ingredients in a simplified meal that in some sense mirrored the food of ‘home’.¹¹⁸ The ‘homeliness’ of the shops was a result of an intimacy that nodded to notions of bourgeois hegemonic ‘respectability’ but represented a ‘sensual’ food pleasure - a food that was warm and filling, eaten in the spirit of the “generous and the familiar” (Bourdieu, 1984: 179). Indeed, in 1938 *Picture Post* quoted a customer in an eel-pie shop in Lambeth honestly remarking that the plain food was “... something that fills you and after all, that’s the chief thing.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ In an interview with Graham Poole from Manze’s he explained that “we stopped doing that (soup) just after the Second World War because that was a meal in itself ... we still make it at home as a family... you get a marrowbone, cook all the marrow out, add the split peas and handfuls of mincemeat. It was almost like a ragu – so by the time they’d had that, customers wouldn’t want pies.” Graham Poole. Interview by author, 14 December 2020.

¹¹⁹ Barber, Ada. “Life in the Lambeth Walk”, *Picture Post*, 31 December 1938: 47-53.

These spaces were not ‘posh’ (an adjective that encompasses an entire gamut of ‘non-working classness’) but because of their origins they contain within them negotiations with a bourgeois respectability where we “speak and act against our feelings and ... control our passions” (Finkelstein, 1989: 130). They are also places where in the words of the “Lambeth Walk”, you might (within limits) “do as you darn well pleasey”. Here, people might additionally indulge in the ‘secret’ habits of the home. People might eat with spoons; they may slurp their tea - laugh and eat with their mouths open. These are zones of *de facto* working class rules and respectability that have organically formed within these spaces. Indeed, within living memory people spat eel bones on the floor and smoked at the table.¹²⁰

Although the less sanitary eating habits may have disappeared, the performative element within this ‘cockney eruvim’ means that people (especially men) appear to become *more* cockney here. Once temporarily freed from the strictures of the globalised city (and perhaps more so in the new out-of-London pie shop locations like Essex, the Kent coast and Norfolk to where the London diaspora has emigrated), one may experience an over-emphasised, almost caricatured behaviour, ironically mirroring the original music hall creation of the character. This is particularly noticeable within a demographic of the post-war generation of the 1950s and 1960s (a generation largely, although not entirely, responsive to Thatcherite and subsequent Brexit messaging). This over-emphasised behaviour is evidenced by men gruffly ‘bowling’ and ‘strutting’ in from the street and affecting a slang dialect where they might exaggeratedly drop their ‘h’s or replace the ‘th’ sound for an ‘f’ sound.¹²¹ They become, as Paul Kelly reports of many that come to his shop in Debden, Essex, “more ‘London than London’... they hear the stories... that’s how things should be, pie and mash, West Ham. That’s what they aspire to be and that’s how they portray themselves.”¹²² Prescient here is Marcel Mauss’ seminal essay, *Les Techniques du Corps* (1934) that showed how societal membership meant that people use their bodies in situation-appropriate activities like walking, sitting, eating

¹²⁰ Rita Arment. Interview by author, 20 November 2019. Rita, now in her 90s recalled people spitting eel bones onto the floor into the 1950s.

¹²¹ For the cockney ‘bowl’ see - Kersh, [1938] 2007: 38. “... the swagger of the Cockney costermonger, the indomitable fruit-vendor, tougher than leather, more indestructible than the stones of the City...”

¹²² Paul, Kelly joint owner of T.J. Kelly, Debden. Interview by author, 15 December 2020.

and marching. The food served within this TARDIS-like space is a sensory and gustatory conduit for this behaviour: a foci for an increasingly re-imagined city and a temporal and spatial anchor for a projection of a past identity.¹²³

In this way the meal, as Margaret Visser (1991) contends is multi-faceted, simultaneously a social interaction, a commercial transaction and in some cases, a form of art. Within the space of the contemporary eel, pie and mash shop, staff and customers appear to collaborate (self-consciously or otherwise) in a thoroughly post-modern performance where they bring together these elements together. For the eel, pie and mash shops, these foods and behaviours are according to Michel De Certeau (1988: 133, 141) like “resistances” to the planned city “from a stubborn past.”

4.2 No mate, this is a pie shop...

A young, fashionably dressed man with a fashionably dressed beard who has been queueing behind the elderly women comes to the counter and asks Julie, one of the staff, what kind of pies are served. Joe Cooke, on his way out from the kitchen and, wiping his hands on a tea-towel simply but politely answers, for her. “Meat” he says and then almost as an afterthought, “but we can do you a vegetarian one.”

The man’s eyes look upward to the (limited) menu on the wall in front of him. He sees:

1 LARGE PIE & MASH 4.50; 1 SMALL PIE & MASH 3.90; 2 LARGE PIE & MASH £7.60; 2 SMALL PIES & MASH 6.40; VEGAN PIE AND MASH £3.40; SMALL EELS & MASH £4.90; LARGE EELS & MASH £8.30; JELLIED EELS £3.50.¹²⁴

¹²³ TARDIS is a reference to a time machine and spacecraft in the BBC television series *Dr Who*. I use it to signify an expansive and expanding internal space that defies logic where a whole re-imagined world of the past is performed and glorified.

¹²⁴ This menu echoes Malvery’s description of an East End eel shop. “The windows of these places were generally placarded with printed slips which conveyed the information that hot stewed eels were to be obtained at *3d.*, *2d.*, and *1d.*, a basin”. See - Malvery, 1908: 74.

“Do you do anything else?” he asks. “No mate” says Joe plainly still wiping his hands, “this is a pie shop”. With that, the man turns and, without another word, leaves. The space and the food remain untranslated for those who are not local in the geographic and cultural sense. Within this cockney *eruv*, there is a “... collective convention, unwritten but legible to all dwellers through the codes of language and of behaviour...” (DeCerteau, 1988: 16). Behaving in a certain way is expected. De Certeau calls these “miniscule repressions”, and they are I suggest, a code for hyper-local and hyper-situated behaviours.

The next customer is another young man but one whose paint-splattered overalls suggest that he might work locally, perhaps renovating one of the many ex-council properties that have found their way onto the open market and are being traded for huge profit.¹²⁵ Clearly a regular, he orders in a code that few outsiders would understand. “Two and two and a coke please love.”¹²⁶ Kim, who has taken his order shouts to the kitchen for more pies to be brought out of the oven.

This insider language is reminiscent of that used in an earlier taxon of working class eateries at the turn of the twentieth century. Olive Malvery, the Anglo-Indian investigative journalist writing about working class life, reports that whilst working undercover in a cheap coffee house, customers would order from her in similar terms:

- Now then miss, ‘arf of thick, three doorsteps, and a two-eyed steak”
- Rasher an’ two, three and a pint”
- Large tea, two slices and a neg, my dear (Malvery, 1906: 152)

¹²⁵ The so-called ‘Right to Buy Scheme’ was a cornerstone of Conservative government policy in the 1980s. By the end of the 1970s, almost one in three homes were owned by the state. The policy subsequently forced the remaining council rents to rise to cope with a shortfall and contributed to some working class families leaving the area completely. The current market rates for ex-council houses around areas like Hoxton are prohibitive and even small properties now occupied by gentrifiers are exorbitantly priced. The situation has created much anger and resentment amongst the remnants of ‘traditional’ communities that either still cling-on in (very) diminished social housing or come back to the market and the pie shop to reminisce.

¹²⁶ The figures simply refer to the number of pies and servings of mash potato: two pies and two helpings of mash.

Now, mashed potato is brought from the kitchen in a steel bucket. The potatoes are usually *Maris Piper* that are boiled and mashed in huge pots without the addition of either salt or butter. “It’s plain and honest” Kim tells me. Crucially, it is *never* scooped onto the plate with the help of an ice-cream scoop as some pie shops use, rather it is *smear*ed and *scrap*ed over the side of the plate. “Joe’s mother taught me (how to do it) ... you stand your mash up on the plate... its tradition... it’s my way or no way...”¹²⁷ This performative culinary exceptionality is, for regular customers part of the attraction. The anticipation of “seeing them smarm the potato on the plate on the pie and what I’d call rubbery pastry and the liquor... you wouldn’t dream of doing it in your own home...”¹²⁸

These repetitive ‘movements’, these ‘ways of doing things’, these ‘gestures’ are a living ethnographic archaeology that links generations together. For De Certeau (1988: 141) they are “... the true archives of the city” and are the “bricolage” of a palimpsestic cockney identity “that Lévi-Strauss recognised in myths.” They are echoed in the way that Joe Cooke still bones out his own meat bought from Smithfield; in the way that he mixes the pastry, the way that he moulds (“podding”) pastry pie tops onto filled pie tins. They recollect the worldview of Bourdieu’s (1984:173-174) old cabinetmaker: “... the use of his language and choice of clothing are fully present in his ethic of scrupulous, impeccable craftsmanship and in the aesthetic of work for work’s sake which leads him to measure the beauty of his products by the care and patience that have gone into them.”

With deft, practised hands, Kim empties two pies from their scalding tins onto a heavy, white china plate and, with a wooden spoon, scrapes two piles of mashed potato onto the side. With a ladle she spoons a liberal amount of liquor from a steel urn over the entire plate. She leans back and grabs the customer a tin of Coke from the shelf behind her. She takes his money, proffers his plate as he walks further down the counter to collect his cutlery.

¹²⁷ Kim Cooke. Interview by author, 2 December 2020.

¹²⁸ Eileen Errol. Interview by author, 22 October 2021.

The meal “brings diverse factors together... [and] in doing this, no one factor, not even nutrition or attentive experience to the food, is the [whole] point of a meal” (John, 2014: 258). According to Mary Douglas, the mid-century British anthropologist, pie and mash is an anomaly. Douglas, sought to classify working class meals within a set of rules by delineating their serving order and ingredients. The working class cooked meal - a ‘proper’ meal - with a centre piece of meat, fish or eggs must, according to Douglas’ research, be served with a carbohydrate like potato from below the ground. This is usually accompanied by another (green) vegetable from above ground like peas, beans, brussels sprouts, cabbage or broccoli. Gravy is the “essential but last ingredient of the meal, the element which links the other components together to form a plateful (Douglas, 1975: 273). No addition of cold foods like jellied eels are accepted on or with the plate. Additionally, meat and fish cannot be mixed so that meat pies and (hot eels) should not exist simultaneously.

The role of gravy is substituted for liquor in the shops as a sort of false green vegetable. Liquor is a simple sauce that contains fresh parsley and historically (although generally no longer because the shops do not keep fresh eels) the juice from the boiled eels. Douglas suggests that in working class households, if these dietary ‘rules’ aren’t followed, disharmony will result. Yet eels, pie and mash are an example of a London gustatory exceptionality that additionally defies eating times for main meals. Indeed, the food is still eaten for breakfast, lunch and evening meal further revealing its historical roots as fuel for workers.

The young man in overalls reaches noisily inside a plastic tray to collect his cutlery as the cash register crashingly rattles shut. He slides into an available bench and shuffles along to make room for others, nodding to his near neighbour - a stranger - in an unspoken yet meaningful micro-conversation of mutual recognition and acknowledgement of spatiality. This simple movement speaks to the heritage of communal eating. Once painfully associated with soup kitchens or the workhouse, the contemporary pie and mash shop excavates a pre- or early- capitalist “conviviality that sweeps away reticence and restraint” (Bourdieu, 1988: 179). A place where “those who choose to eat together tacitly recognise their fellow eaters as saliently equal” (Korsmeyer, 2002; 200). Falk (1994: 25, 20) suggests that

although “the role of the meal as a collective community-constituting ritual has been marginalized”, this kind of space-sharing signals “the incorporation of the partaker into the community simultaneously defining his/her particular “place” within it. The contemporary eel, pie and mash shop is, by definition a negotiation between a premodern “eating-community” and a modern individualised space: between what Pasi Falk (1994: 20) suggests is an “open” and “closed” body that is both “eating into one’s body/self and being eaten into the community.” In that sense, the shops are a kind of living tableau of older London solidarities that in some senses pre-date the restaurant form completely.

After delivering a tray of hot pies to the serving area, Joe Cooke has emerged from behind the counter with a large mug of tea inscribed with the words ‘salaam alaikum’. He jokingly shouts over to a woman who is a regular customer sitting eating with a friend, “You back again? I thought we banned you...” Several heads turn and there is a general murmur of laughter. Joe squeezes onto a bench next to another man with an exaggerated movement and a comic expression of pain and enters into a conversation that starts with him enquiring about the health of the customer’s mother.

These interactions are as much genuine conversation with frequent customers as they are what Anne Marie Steigemann (2017: 49) refers to as “alibi practices” that allow for small talk with people that are known or not yet known. These “... small social life worlds are created ... through ... social practices on a very local level, yet each life world is always linked to broader national and global levels.” Specifically, “the on-site practices link the global (e.g., sold products - in this case the food) with the national (e.g., the legal framework) and the local level (e.g., the business ethos) ...” (Steigemann, 2017: 49).

Karen, the shop girl weaves in and out of the tables, delivering a mug of tea that has been ordered and picking up a fallen fork from the floor. The pie shop seems to run like a machine: no-one runs, no-one bumps into each other; everyone knows the rules that have been passed down through families within this hyper-local community. There is an almost *performative geography* - a sort of dual *dance* of service and of customers. Steigemann (2017: 50) suggests that there is a kind of

“business ballet” where staff ‘dance’ for the audience who wait to be entertained or served. This almost echoes June Jacobs’ (1961) “intricate city side-walk ballet”: the pie and mash shop as an interiorised fossil of the faded coster markets.

The customers and owners have their own unwritten rules and unspoken regulations to which outsiders are not party. There is a “consensus - a tacit understanding between consumer and shopkeeper” (De Certeau, 1988: 20-21). These are the rituals for ordering, the recognition of regulars and the *structure* of exchange. These, especially in the pie and mash shops, signal to both a theatre and performance that recall the late nineteenth century music hall. This echoes Erving Goffman’s (1949) notion of ‘front’ and ‘backstage’ behaviour where the ‘self’ is a performed, if collaborative, character. This approach is reproduced in Philip Crang (1994: 696) writing of his work as a waiter on the English south coast where the *context* (my italics) of interaction “was...’located’ through a range of meanings of there and here, presences and absences.”

London’s eel pie and mash shops are, however, a unique type of space. They can be seen as a version of Oldenburg’s ‘third place’ yet they are additionally arenas where “... rather intimate practices, such as touching, shouting or teasing, along with other practice that are considered to belong to rather private social settings, such as hugging, child-caring and nursing... create a different type of sociability” (Steigmann, 2017: 53). Although the shops are primarily businesses, it is their heritage of ‘working classness’ that delineates them as uncommon. These are spaces, hidden in plain sight, where generations of the same family still visit and the continuities of the family dynasties of their owners provide a unique backdrop to working class family life. Indeed, the shops, by their warm, intimate welcome to regulars are in some senses linked to the distillation of the physicality of the lost Bakhtian carnivalesque of an earlier London. This embodied closeness and affection may mean that “[m]oving in or through a given place, the body imports its own emplaced past into its present experience (Casey in Feld, 1996: 93). Simply put, people eat where they are comfortable and, within the communities that use the eel, pie and mash shops that is largely based in memory. These ‘embodied’ memories become part of our habitual physical movements as well as part of particular environments (Pink and Mackley, 2014). It is to that bodily memory I shall turn shortly.

4.3 Too heavy to steal

As two o'clock approaches, the flow of customers has begun to lessen but is still steady. An elderly man shuffles onto a bench and places his plate, replete with a single serving of pie and mash, onto one of the distinctive marble tables that look like "slabs of old streaky bacon" (Sommerfield, [1936] 2010: 163). When Olive Malvery takes a temporary job in an eel-pie shop in Lower Marsh in Lambeth at the turn of the century, she describes the shop's interior in an exceedingly rare piece of reportage.

... the shop was furnished somewhat after the manner of an ordinary coffee-house with a number of pew-like compartments, each containing a small wooden table flanked with benches. The shop, however, was more bare; and the fittings and appointments were poor and scanty. Tablecloths were superfluous luxuries, and the eel stew and pies were served in basins on the bare tables. (Malvery, 1908: 74)

Gerald Kersh in his *The Angel and the Cuckoo* ([1966] 2011: 57) recalls the remnants of these furnishings, still common to various taxons of cheap London eating places in the Edwardian city and now much prized by the remaining eel and pie houses. "There were tables of cast-iron frames and marble tops, such as used to be favoured by the keepers of poor men's eating houses because they were too heavy to steal, required no cloths, showed no dirt, and might be wiped with the corner of an apron." The benches themselves are wooden, iron and old. They *look* simultaneously antique and Italian which is of little surprise given the immigrant experience of those that came to work in London's burgeoning catering trade in the second half of the nineteenth century. Graham Poole, one of the brothers descended from Michael Mansi, who now runs the Manze shops in London and Essex, recalled a visit to Italy on holiday.

... last year we were walking round a market in Florence, and we went past a shop, and it was Tower Bridge Road to a spit. They weren't selling pies but

Italian food - but it had the marble tables, the benches the mirrors, the sawdust... it was all the same...¹²⁹

in

Not all of the pie and mash shops evoke a *fin de siècle*, Italianate style. The Castle's shop in Camden dates from 1934 but at some point, in the early 1970s it was re-decorated with plastic, orange seating and a Formica counter. Although this would no longer be considered a 'classic' pie shop by purists, the styling nods to the utilitarian outlook of working class space that often attempts a pastiche of bourgeois fashion of the time. The (now closed) Cooke's shop on Kingsland High Street epitomised for example, the late Victorian aesthetic with stained glass and ornate mirrors. The (now also closed) Manze's shop in Walthamstow was resplendent with a pressed tin ceiling. Newer shops, (mostly in Essex or the London suburbs) or recently renovated shops like Harrington's in Tooting have re-interpreted their look to match a contemporary zeitgeist of bare brick walls and industrial lighting.

The pensioner stills himself in front of his plate of food and picks up his cutlery. Instead of a knife and fork, he has chosen a fork and a spoon. This, according to Joe Cooke, is a tradition across all traditional eel, pie and mash shops although few people seem to know from where it originates. Some suggest that it stems from a shortage of metal during World War One, others that knives were discouraged for use in the shops for fear of stabbings (although their use in other working class eateries would suggest that this was not the case). That said, the echo of criminality was reflected in the writings of Malverly (1906: 165-166) who recorded at the turn of the century that "[I]f they were to eat in, the customers were given knives and forks inscribed with 'stolen from Mrs A'. This chimes with the recollections of Rita Arment, ninety at the time of interview, who remembered some pie shops did indeed have their names stamped on cutlery to deter pilfering.¹³⁰ From a utilitarian point of view, it seems likely that the spoon is simply a remnant, first of eel-eating - a vehicle to convey the fish to the mouth and a temporary receptacle to discard its bones back to

¹²⁹ Graham Poole. Interview by author, 14 December 2020.

¹³⁰ Arment, Rita. Interview by author, 20 November 2020.

the bowl - and secondly a relic of the almost-forgotten dish of soup that some shops historically sold.¹³¹

Fully equipped with his cutlery of choice, the man turns over the pie on his plate so that the crust is facing downwards and pauses.¹³² Anticipating. This "... brief ritual prayer is a striking deferral of eating by very hungry people" (Eileen, 2014: 258). He smothers the entire dish in vinegar from a bottle on the table and dissects. As the spoon enters the pie, there is a puff of steam, and the man takes a second to breathe deeply.¹³³ An aroma of pastry and meat and ovens and heat and consolation and family and pleasure is cut by the vinegary tang. The man breathes it all in and starts to shovel. The meal is bland and unseasoned and comforting: it has a 'pre-globalization' smell and has all the madeleine-esque connotations of childhood that may likely be understood fully only by those that were weaned on this culinary (allegedly) 'uninspiring' fuel. The man smiles. He is at home and surrounded by the sensory bouquet of his past.

4.4 The lower classes smell

'What's wrong with the East End anyway?' she demanded as they walked along...

Sure, it smells. It smells of public houses and marketplaces and fried-fish shops. I love the smell of fried-fish shops, don't you? Come and have some chips. (La Bern, [1945] 2015: 153)

Although Georg Simmel ([1907] 1997: 119) saw the sense of smell among the 'lower senses', he suggested that "they penetrate so to speak in a gaseous form into our

¹³¹ Arment, Rita. Interview by author, 20 November 2020. Arment remembered that during the Second War, her mother-in-law buying meat bones to make a hearty broth that was sold in the shop. In a story in *Picture Post Magazine* from 1938 a poster in a pie shop clearly advertises pea soup as a main dish. See - Barber, Ada. "Life in the Lambeth Walk", *Picture Post*, 31 December 1938: 47-53.

¹³² This seems to be an odd but reasonably common affectation (along with some customers' preference for burnt pies) for which I can find no reason except perhaps a sensory preference for soaking the thicker upper crust in liquor for longer and making it softer.

¹³³ Some customers douse the entire plate of food in plain, non-brewed condiment vinegar (sometimes chilli vinegar) others use it only to season a cut-open pie. Often (white) pepper is additionally added to the food. These are traditionally the only condiments that are offered. Some customers 'open' their pie from the crust, others from the base. Some prefer - ask for and receive - pies that are blackened (slightly burnt).

most sensory inner being.” It was significantly for Marcel Proust not only the taste of the madeleine that evoked memories for Charles but also its aroma.¹³⁴ Indeed, the senses of taste and smell are interrelated in a ‘synesthetic’ dance and in this I use the word, following David Sutton (2001: 312), to define a unity of senses that work together to evoke something larger.

The sense of smell has long been associated with notions of moral probity and as a judgement on social rank (Largey and Watson, 1972; Low, 2005). As George Orwell ([1937] 1975: 112) ironically had it, “... the real secret of class distinction in the West [is that] ... *The lower classes smell.*”

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Henry Mayhew described the ‘smell’ of the working class that was the imprint of labour on the body and the olfactory residue of the herring that poor Londoners ate in huge quantities. These were doubtless the aromas that surrounded at least some of the customer base of the early taxons of the eel-pie shops that mingled with the warm, doughy breath of the baking ovens. The smell from bodies that knew hard manual labour and the warmth of sustenance.

The East end of London itself of course had for centuries been the site of polluting and foul-smelling industries situated far from the genteel western seats of power and influence. Dickens highlighted this nascent threat, neatly condensing the bourgeois fear of the vapours of the poor, their work and ultimately their humanity in a speech in 1851 when he suggested that “The air from Gin Lane will be carried, when the wind is easterly into Mayfair” (Fielding, 1960: 128). The wealthy were able to escape from the East wind: a situation that only recent gentrification in London has to some extent alleviated (Heblich, Trew and Zylberberg, 2021). During the nineteenth century, these progressive middle class migrations from the source of their wealth meant that on a very basic level, the olfactory textures of the city were no longer shared across classes and the sensual codes of common taste, still visible in Hogarth’s illustrations, were broken. Whereas once gentlemen like Egan’s Jerry Hawthorn might have eaten a street pie, his descendants would likely not have crossed the class threshold into a pie *shop*. The pie itself, its smell and taste, would

¹³⁴ In Proust’s drafts, the madeleine started life as toast and then *biscotto*. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/oct/19/proust-madeleine-cakes-started-as-toast-in-search-of-lost-time-manuscripts-reveal>. See - Proust, 2015 (the edition contains Proust’s early drafts).

still be enjoyed in different circumstances by different classes marked by an aesthetic delineation of taste and proximity: a culinary nod to a romanticised 'Olde England' but not one to be shared with the residuum. The working class pie, their arenas of sale and consumption were now zones of corruption and defilement.

At the start of the twentieth century, the East End still literally smelt of poverty. As John Sommerfield had it in his *May Day* ([1936] 2010:30), it was "... [a] zone of smells - stale cooking and wet washing, cats, old clothes, sweat and urine, the odoriferous motifs in a symphony of poverty." In James Curtis' *They Drive by Night* ([1938] 2008: 36) an inter-war London caff, certainly a historic taxon of the eel, pie and mash shop, is described in comparable olfactory terms: "Sweaty bodies, an open coke fire, cheap clothes drying from the rain, coarse, dirty fat used for frying eggs. Why, the joint smelt exactly like a cheap kip house." During the Second World War, the air-raid shelter was a salon of smells. In Robert Poole's *E1* ([1961] 2012: 169) Pinkie rankles at the suggestion she should sleep in one. "With everybody eating fish and chips and scratching all the time? No thank you."

In his *The Spiv and the Architect, Unruly Life in Postwar London* (2010: 3), Richard Hornsey describes the incongruity of the malodorous, fetid, almost unofficial working class side-street cafés that lingered as a response to the city's devastation. These were increasingly at odds with the post-war "collective moral project ... to (re)construct [London's] social stability." The cafes were seen as largely 'unsavoury' by the authorities: they had been hang-outs for spivs and black marketeers and were as disreputable as the mobile coffee stalls that they competed with. They were contrasted with the now almost 'staid' image of the eel and pie shop. Although inevitably catering to different sections of the London working class, the shops remained, largely I believe due to dynastic control, primarily a family-friendly space that sold hygienic and hearty food. The 'caff' spaces were delineated as much by the smell of the food as of the customer. Now extinct, some of these cafes mutated into the mid-century modernism of the Formica milk and coffee bars, early high street competition for the pie shops, that in turn have largely disappeared.

We might only conjecture what an historical eel pie shop, or more precisely what their customers, smelt like but the shops were always, and continue to be, judged by their (neo-Victorian) propriety that was partly dependent on cleanliness. The shops certainly smelt of the changing patina of London working class life. They smelt of the food and the people and their complex lives but were also the repositories of subtler aromas. Up until perhaps the 1970s, there would have been a definitive scent of smoke, smog-damp and coal fires. Personal hygiene has certainly changed in the last fifty years and weekly baths in working class homes or public baths have been replaced by daily showers and indoor plumbing. Men's clothing, from cheap gabardine to de-mob suits, worn until frayed or kept for Sunday best were always imbued with tobacco memories. Now the streets of inner London are more likely to be suffused with the spicy tang of curry houses, the spiky, oily piquancy of numerous fried chicken shops and the sickly-sweet stench of e-cigarettes.

Today, the Cooke's shop smells of baking, warmth and contemporary working class domesticity; a subtle whiff of pine disinfectant, a customer's slightly too-strong perfume and vaping residue on someone's coat. There is a nippy piquancy of vinegar that competes with an aroma of meaty gravy and an indistinct but definite grassy odour of the chopped parsley that goes into the liquor. There is none of the greasy smell of fried bacon from the market café opposite nor the slightly burnt hazelnut notes of the artisanal coffee shop a few doors down: commonplace, strong smells. The perfume of Cooke's is more nuanced and less familiar to the uninitiated, yet the pie shops are part of a long olfactory history of classed spaces within the city and the general consensus within epidemiology and the sociology of food is that class differences are still clear enough and that they flow from particular orientations grounded in possession of resources (Atkinson and Deeming, 2015). As Graham Poole, the heir to the Manze shops recalled.

My earliest memory as a toddler is opening the door to the kitchens at Tower Bridge and the smell that would come up... and I can still go into the shops now and I can still smell... it's just a lovely smell... it just reminds me of my

life... I've known nothing else... I've known no other constant in my life except the pie shop.¹³⁵

As Deborah Lupton (1996: 124) suggests, these sensoria and sensibilities are points through which “disparate cultural histories, and the bodies carrying them *potentially* converge” but the pie shops remain almost exclusively white and working class spaces, hyper-local and defended by opaque traditions and what might be seen as boring, plain food with the addition of exotic eel. Only so much of the modern world bleeds into the pie shops and the past is always near the surface.

The lunch-rush in Cooke's is over but people are still ordering pie and mash. Kim shouts to the kitchen to enquire if there's enough mash left. She does this in an indecipherable argot that is another ancient cockney *cant* known as 'back-slang'. Originally mentioned by Mayhew in 1851 it was definitively charted by John Hotten in his *A Dictionary of Modern Slang, Cant and Vulgar Words* (1860). The language utilises a simple reversal of letters in a word to frustrate the uninitiated. Although rare, back slang remained alive in (especially) London butchers' shops until perhaps the 1980s. It is now, as far as I am aware almost completely extinct outside of the Cooke's family shop.

Two teenage girls from one of the local estates, sit together on a bench, robotically scrolling through their smartphones whilst simultaneously spooning food into their mouths. Their colourful acrylic nails clack in a measured staccato that is echoed by their spoons cutting through their lunch. Although side by side, they ignore each other, their historical, human gestures in stark contrast to their rhythmic response to modern technology. These embodied, almost instinctive movements are sensual memories, not fixed as mere repetitive behaviours, but are a “transformation that brings the past into the present as a natal event” (Serematakis, 1994: 6). In a parallel of Edward Casey's (in Feld, 1996: 93) suggestion that “[M]oving in or through a given place, the body imports its own emplaced past into its present existence”, the digital messaging, the temporality of the immediate past relayed through technology, is

¹³⁵ Graham Poole owner of Manze's Pie Shop, Tower Bridge Road. Interview by author, 14 December 2020.

simultaneous with the corporeality of the experience of growing up eating this iconic food and the way in which one does so. These concurrent habitual movements, the modern and the traditional, are - or become part of - particular environments, “[T]hus, our experiences of place - and its social, physical and intangible components - are inextricable from the invocation, creation and reinvestment of memories” (Pink, 2015: 44). These memories are triggered by a “world filled with smells, textures, sights, sounds and tastes” (Stoller in Serematakis, 1994: 119).

As the teenagers are finishing their pies, Kelly, the shop girl brings a bowl of jellied eels to an elderly customer who has sat patiently at an adjoining table. Another woman and her friend who clearly know the man comments “I don’t how you can eat that mate... oooh, no...” and visibly shudders.

Turning, the man smiles and salutes them with a spoon full of quavering fish and aspic, grey in the afternoon light.

“Lovely” he says. “You dunno wha’s good fer ya...”

4.5 The Eel and the East Ender

Hunger is the best sauce in the world. (Cervantes)

Although the pie has immense gustatory and cultural significance for London’s working classes it was the eel that had been the staple of their food.

Eels had been caught for centuries in the Thames either by line or by eel-bucks (wicker baskets thrown across whole sections of the river), yet it was only in 1922 when Johannes Schmidt’s paper on ‘The Breeding Places of the Eel’ was read at the Royal Society in London that it was finally and definitively proved where and how this mysterious and secretive creature spawned (Fort, 2003: 209,103). As their immense popularity had mirrored the growth of London, local eels had eventually to be supplanted by imports. According to the Victorian naturalist, Frank Buckland (in Fort, 2003: 212), it was the Dutch that had largely controlled this lucrative trade. Eels were brought up the Thames in great quantities by eel *schuyts* from the Netherlands and

these were commended for helping feed London during the Great Fire of London 1666. Although their eels were seen by some as inferior to the domestic variety, the British government rewarded them by Act of Parliament in 1699 granting exclusive rights to sell eels from their barges on the Thames thus bypassing the notorious middlemen at the fish market in Billingsgate.

Malvery (1908: 74), writing of a turn-of-the-century eel-pie shop for *Pearson's Magazine*, describes the process of buying eels from the Dutch. As she recounts – “Nell says ‘We’ll git ‘em on the *Dutchman*...’ She hails a boat at the river’s edge and is conveyed to a Dutch boat at moorings ‘under the very shadow of London Bridge.’” From the bottom of the flat - but carefully perforated boat, Dutch crewmen use a wicker basket to weigh the eels from the hold. She takes twenty-eight pounds of eels “all alive” The two eel boats she visits “may constantly be seen lying off Billingsgate”.

According to Katsumi Tsukamoto and Mari Kuroki (2014: 7-8), the decree to allow the Dutch to sell directly to Londoners was in place until 1938 “when the last remaining barges packed up and left due to declining trade.”

If, by the mid-nineteenth century, the itinerant pie-man was becoming a rarity, eel sellers were not. David Badham, a Victorian curate writing in the book *Ancient and Modern Fish Tattle* (1854: 383) notes:

London from one end to the other, teems and steams with eels ... turn where you will and ‘hot eels’ are everywhere smoking away ... and this too at so low a rate, that for one halfpenny a man of the million ... may fill his stomach with six or seven long pieces, and wash them down with a cup full of the glutinous liquor in which they have been stewed. The traffic of this street luxury is so great, that twenty thousand pounds sterling is annually cleared by it. One million one hundred and sixty-six thousand eight hundred and thirty pounds’ weight, on average, are brought from Billingsgate every year by itinerant salesman, who cook and retail them on their different beats: customers are not entirely confined to the lowest orders; some of the inferior ‘bourgeoisie’ condescend to frequent the stands of the most noted retailers; and there are instances reported by some of these hawkers, of individuals coming twice a

day for months, and eating to the alarming extent of tuppence of time, or, in other words of devouring from 30 to 40 lengths of stewed eel, and decanting down their throats six or seven teacupfuls of the hot liquor.

Though our sellers of cooked eels have no disgraceful exemption to boast of, of unpaid taxes and city dues, like their ancient brethren of the same calling at Sybaris yet are they too men of importance in a small way and generally make a good thing out of this savoury calling.

It seems that at least the prosperous sellers even had a recognisable outfit. Badham recalls their outfit which included a “white hat with black crape [sic] round it, and his drab paletôt with mother-o’-pearl buttons, and his black kid gloves, with the fingers too long for him...” (Badham, 1854: 383).

An itinerant pie seller suggests that the poor would even eat the scraps of this popular fish; “... the boys often come and ask me, said an eel pie man ‘if I’ve got a farden’s worth of heads; now I don’t sell heads; the woman at Broadway, they tells me, sells them at four farden, and a drop of liquor; we chucks them away, for there’s nothing to eat on them - but boys though can eat anything” (Badham, 1854: 383).

It appears that what would become liquor in the eel, pie, and mash shops - the cooking liquid - served the same function as the liquid refreshment found at the coffee stalls. Badham sympathetically notes that “there can be no doubt that a warm cupful at early dawn, in a November fog must be a wonderful comfort to the working classes in London” (Badham, 1854: 384).

By the early nineteenth century however, the Thames was so polluted that it could no longer sustain significant eel populations and the Dutch ships had to stop further upstream to prevent their cargo being spoiled, “... first to Erith, then to Greenhithe, then to Gravesend” (Fort, 2003: 103, 215). Yet as Malvery’s earlier testimony demonstrates, some *schuyts* clearly continued to moor adjacent to Billingsgate in fouled waters.

Local lore suggests a Dutch trader, John Antink, sold fish, eels and perhaps pies from a makeshift shop at undetermined dates during the middle of the 1800s although *Kelly's Trades Directory* doesn't mention this business, situated at 331 Caledonian Road, until 1880 (Hunt in Hawkins, 2002: 16). In the same year another Antink, Elise Gerrard, almost certainly an immediate family relative, has a shop listed at 12a Kentish Town Road.¹³⁶ It seems that the Antink family certainly has a claim (albeit an unofficial one) in opposition to the Cooke's as progenitors of the eel and pie shops via their connection to the fish trade - although without further written proof, this remains conjecture. However, by 1898 the Antinks had bought an old fried fish shop at 74 Chapel Street (Market) in Islington and converted it to an eel and pie shop. They sold the lease in 1902 and the shop was re-leased with repairs and improvements (and conjoined with 73) by Luigi Mansi, a relation of Michele Mansi (of the Manze dynasty) who had also been involved in the eel and pie trade. This business (although no longer owned by the Manze family for some years) only closed in 2019.¹³⁷

Mayhew in 1851 had suggested that by the middle of the nineteenth century an estimated 932,340,000 tons of fish and seafood were sold by London street vendors each year. Although the eel had long been a popular and nutritious dish it was modernity that seems the driver for this extraordinary profusion of fish into the Londoner's diet. Changes to fishing boat design and propellers replacing sails and paddles meant that by the 1890s industrial amounts of seafood were being landed and transported by the new railways to the capital. These advances had certainly made many types of seafood plentiful and cheap, yet working class London does seem to be an outlier in its avowed taste for the sea. The Daily Telegraph in 1910 reported that "old superstitions die hard, and the poorer classes in England have long fostered a prejudice against fish, on the supposition that it doesn't contain anything like the amount of nutritive value as meat. The idea has been that there is

¹³⁶ *Post Office London Directory for 1880, Eel Pie Houses: 1721.*

¹³⁷ *British History Online*, accessed 19 March 2020. <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol47/pp373-404>.

"M. Manze closes: Chapel Market punters 'terribly sad' as historic pie and mash shop closes." *Islington Gazette*, April 30, 2019.

Currently, The Noted Eel and Pie House in Leytonstone is the last pie shop to store and slaughter eels on the premises. The owner, Peter Hak's great grandfather was a Dutch eel fisherman and married into the Newton pie shop dynasty around the turn of the twentieth century.

no strength in fish and that it is rather food for children and weaklings than for grown men” (in Oddy, 1970: 136).

It would seem however that the East End in particular did have a penchant for seafood. As Alex Rhys-Taylor (2020: 102) suggests of the now-closed but iconic Tubby Isaacs’ seafood stall in Aldgate, this account of a cockney craving for the fruits of the sea is seemingly “transmitted intergenerationally through the blood and culture of an ‘island race’, [only] interrupted by the city’s new global connections.” For the cockney, along with pies and mash, eels might be seen as a self-defined and so-called ‘cuisine of origin’ (Panayi, 2008) that are “specific flavours generated by environmental factors ... integral to the rituals that bind discrete communities of people together” (Martens and Warde in Rhys-Taylor, 2020: 102). More, these foods signpost how cultural communities are “‘sensed’ and experienced” within national and local mythologies (Howes and Classes in Rhys-Taylor, 2020: 102). Seafood in general as Rhys-Taylor suggests was a potent symbol for a London working class, co-opted into Empire that spoke of a clearly-defined island geography, imperial ambitions and a maritime tradition. Eels spoke also to a deeper, earlier colonial history of the high seas, ‘discovery’ and trade. This older chronology whispered by a preceding Catholic England that demanded fish on a Friday but also to the glories of Tudor sailing (and piracy) that had been “technologically and economically implicated in the advancement of the navy and the emergent colonial trade in commodities and humanity” (Loades in Rhys-Taylor, 2020: 106). It also spoke of the mediaeval commerce of the Hanseatic League that became enormously wealthy from, amongst other things, herring.¹³⁸

However, to relay Panikos Panayi’s notion of ‘cuisine of origin’ that suggests (specifically jellied) eels are quintessentially ethnically British fails to recognise the role of the migrant entrepreneurs (specifically the Irish and Dutch) and their food negotiations that were responsible for the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops.

¹³⁸ The Hanseatic League was a defensive guild-based trading bloc that at its height comprised 194 cities (including Kings Lynn and London) spread over 16 countries.

These negotiations have for many Londoners continued apace since the post-war period, increasing the diversity of foods and tastes available. The steep decline in contemporary eel stocks mirrors in some ways the dwindling appetite for the traditional cockney taste for seafood and eels in particular. Eel stalls, usually outside eel-pie shops and seafood sellers in pubs were a relatively common sight in London until perhaps the early 1980s when the forces of globalisation and immigration changed the food landscape of the capital. Robert Poole's novel, *E1* ([1961] 2012: 34) evokes this very well.

Outside the pie-shop near Bethnal Green Road, was a live-eel stall. They always stopped there for a few minutes so that Jimmy could watch the blue-black eels slithering round the pieces of ice in the shallow metal trays. You just picked out the eels you wanted and the vendor, dripping with blood and guts, chopped them on a wooden block into still-quivering two-inch sections.

The eel remains a re-occurring trope of the 'slippery' cockney. In Robert Westerby's *Wide Boys Never Work* ([1937] 2008: 189), 'The Eel' was a cockney criminal "who made a living out of phoney passports." Innumerable 'spiv' characterisations from popular culture exhibit this threatening, sometimes comic, sometimes lubricious, always deliciously unreliability figure. From Private Walker in *Dad's Army* to George Cole's Arthur Daly to any number of Ray Winstone's roles, the eel acts as an important metaphor in the shifting and unstable role of the historical cockney itself.

4.6 A Regime of Disgust

I'm not a great lover of cold things in jelly.¹³⁹

Although the eel was historically at least part of the bourgeois table, it was essentially a food of the London urban poor. Live, the creatures could be kept in puddles of water for extended periods, boiled and then jellied. With the addition of a common herb like parsley to its cooking juices, it could be served hot. In the Bourdieusian sense, the eel in this form was a 'food of necessity'. Indeed, Malvery

¹³⁹ Graham Poole owner of Manze's Pie Shop, Peckham. Interview by author, 14 December 2020.

(1908: 73) suggests that this food was “indulged in generally by sections of the poorer working classes.”

The decline in eel-eating since the end of the Second World War, but particularly within the last thirty-or-so years has been marked. Although most contemporary eel, pie and mash shops keep at least some stocks of jellied eels in their refrigerators (which can be easily converted into a hot dish by warming and the swift addition of liquor) according to Robert Kelly, “nobody eats it now” and it is reasonably rare to see it ordered.¹⁴⁰ The question is why?

It seems clear that by the 1960s what people meant when they talked about class began to change. The expansion of education, growing individualism, and the decline of deference meant that the axis of traditional class boundaries now appeared blurred (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2018). People increasingly saw themselves as ‘ordinary’ (Savage, 2005) and the subsequent Thatcherite hegemony conflated this with a panoply of middle class values. For the aspirational cockney this process was crucial in delineating a nascent individualism separating those in work from those on benefits and was synchronous with the final decline of its late nineteenth century incarnation. Essex became its spiritual home as a place for people who wanted to ‘better themselves’ and this seemed to engender “a privatised, as opposed to solidaristic civic culture” (Butler and Watt in Millington 2016: 275).

The gustatory de-centring of the eel was coterminous with this process linking a developing dynamic of taste within the London working classes with how they saw themselves. The decline in eel-eating I contend is encapsulated in what Stephanie Lawler (2005: 434) significantly suggests is “a decline in the *worth* of the working class itself.” The eel was a poor man’s food of necessity. Those that continue to eat eels are typically elderly or tend to be male and from a specific demographic that have a political interest in doing so. Many in the pie shops still call themselves working class (“I’m working class because I work”).¹⁴¹ However, this definition likely differs substantially in cultural (and sometimes economic) terms from that of their

¹⁴⁰ Robert Kelly. Interview by author, 15 December 2020.

¹⁴¹ David H. Interview by author, 14 April 2022.

Fordist parents' generations and for some, generally relies on solidarities that do not (largely) extend beyond their own ethnicity.

Whereas the pie is still popular as a moniker of a vague working classness, in general younger people, male or female, below the age of around forty will simply not countenance eating eel in any form. Much of that can be further evidenced by excavating the unstable sensory notion of disgust.

The eel appears to affect people on a distinctly *visceral* level and the gut itself - the viscera - has long been used as a metaphor to describe and gauge innate bodily thought processes: hence the notion of 'gut feelings' (Probyn 2003). In the cartography of the body, the mouth can be seen as a guardian and functions like a "safety chamber" (Rozin and Fallon, 1981).

For Mary Douglas ([1975] 2003), disgust - as evidenced through dirt or 'impurity' - was a cultural construct theorised from the Old Testament. The eel was an abomination because it came from the sea but had neither fins nor scales. The creature is encoded as a *moral* object of disgust - doubly so as it looks and moves like a snake, another Judeo-Christian symbol of sin. Of course, the basis for such 'socio-biological' explanations tends towards a 'common sense' idea that revulsion is inculcated in certain foods (or creatures) because they may be poisonous. Despite the fact that, as in the case of the eel, such ritually 'impure' foods may well be entirely nutritious (Fischer 1988: 285), this coding may easily result in feelings of disgust, revulsion and nausea.

The idea of 'uncleanliness' and morality combined within the Victorian bourgeois psyche with the discovery of the microbe and psycho-sexual hesitancy around bodily orifices. This axiom was decoded and interiorised by the proletariat themselves resulting in a self-policing hierarchy that inevitably valorised probity as a mark of their own respectability within capital. In a typical post to a private Facebook group about pie and mash shops, a customer reviews Maureen's in Crisp Street market with particular and favourable attention to its cleanliness.¹⁴²

¹⁴² The Pie Mash 'n' Liquor appreciation society, August 30, 2021. Accessed August 30, 2021. Maureen's is a popular pie shop opened in the 1950s by a husband and wife, Dave and Maureen and

This 'common sense' remains largely current within the eel and pie shop community with the valorisation of 'clean' British restaurant spaces and food as opposed to 'dirty' and 'brown' (potentially adulterated) immigrant food ("none of that foreign muck").¹⁴³

Food has the potential to corrupt the body according to Lupton (1996: 113) "because it passes through the oral boundary of the 'clean and proper' body; it becomes abject when its nature is ambiguous." More, as Lupton suggests, food, like sexual fluids occupy a sort of 'liminal' state in relation to the body's porousness. Food can be simultaneously exterior and interior and may be seen as threatening when its form is unclear and ill-defined thus threaten the integrity of the whole. Eels as both phallic and slimy, may represent this 'intimate fluid' analogy and Rhys-Taylor (2013: 234-235) further notes that the (cold) jelly surrounding the eel, and its ability to adhere to the skin, further limits our body's sense-boundary. This aspect does to some extent appear however to be highly culturally determined. As Michael Ashkenazi (1991) suggests, the Japanese appear to delight in the sticky and the slimy. Similar arguments are made for increasing hesitancy around the green liquor that is served over pies and mash and over hot, stewed eels. "My girl won't touch it - she says it looks like bogeys."¹⁴⁴

To some extent of course, we *become* what we eat by the simple act of the absorption of food into the body. Claude Fischler (1988) suggests however that it might be more correct to speak of 'incorporation' into the body and this has an ironic aspect to the mono-cultural cockney identity as the eel of course is multinational. The mouth, the symbolic gateway for bodily control is the ultimate arena for disgust and in an apposite allusion to the cockney's accent and speech pattern, Marion Halligan (in Lupton, 1996: 18) points out that the "... tongue names and the tongue tastes." What we do with our mouths, *how* we eat, is also significant. Constraints over methods of eating were, as Mennell (1985) suggests, slowly internalised as

was originally located in the East India Dock Road but moved to its current locale in Chrisp Street Market in Poplar in 1993.

¹⁴³ In the BBC series, *Till Death Do Us Part*, the cockney bigot, Alf Garnett often rails against 'dirty' foreign food as "foreign muck".

¹⁴⁴ Freedman, 2017: 212.

practises of self-control and moderation, based on emergent bourgeois notions of propriety. The eel was always a difficult fish to eat, and, in a recall of older table behaviours, bones were, as we have seen, spat onto the pie-shop floor. As a Victorian etiquette manual records, “eating is so entirely a sensual, animal gratification, that unless it is conducted with much delicacy, it becomes unpleasant to others” (Kasson in Grover, 1987: 125-126). In this way, discriminatory behaviour both about types of food and also the manner of its consumption was class-based and crucially progressed and confirmed distinction.

The humble eel and the eating of it is then an unlikely indicator of the formation and re-formation of change within the cultural sensibilities and tastes of the London working class. For the contemporary cockney, imbued with notions of social mobility, eel eating is generally identified with a squeamishness that links pastness and poverty. Simultaneously however for a very few customers, especially in Essex and within the ‘newer’ pie shops the continued eating of (especially jellied) eel as a ‘food of ordeal’ particularly as a pre-football match ritual has become a performative cultural re-enactment of a selective memory-scape based largely within the post-war 1950s and 1960s whose ‘white diaspora’ identities combine with localisms found in food (Floya in Watt, Millington and Huq, 2014: 124).

4.7 A Working Class Taste and Space

Perhaps in a nod to earlier forms of polite, communal working class eating, at the end of the meal pie and mash shop customers have traditionally taken their plates and cutlery back to the counter. In Cooke’s, this gives some of the customers a further opportunity to chat to Joe or Kim underlining the specificity of the space. These are pie *shops* or pie *houses* with their own class rituals and manners. “Be lucky... and don’t come back” says Joe laughingly to a former East End couple who regularly return to Hoxton from their adopted home in Essex to see friends and walk the old streets.

If, as Loïc Wacquant (in Skeggs, 2004: 28) suggests, it is “the location of the *cultural* practice within a system of objects and practices that define its social meaning and significance”, then for the owners and customers of the eel, pie and mash shops,

knowing the 'rules' of bourgeois society - how to 'behave', what to eat, how to eat, how to hold cutlery and to conduct oneself with 'refinement' in a restaurant space - is only half the issue. What actually matters is how these foods and practices are objectified and approved in relation to the dominant culture. And of course, they never can be. According to Bourdieu (1986: 511), the working class in the eyes of bourgeois culture will always lack "taste" and "the right ways of being and doing" - the result partly of their initial, denuded educational habitus, and more fundamentally of course because we "are born into unequal social relations."

For Marx ([1848] 1980: 44) the working class, and indeed, the very notion of class itself, is brought into existence by the bourgeoisie ("the special and essential product of the bourgeoisie"). This group was consolidated by its need for overtly political - and hence cultural representation - that Dror Wahrman (1995) evidences by the solidifications around the 1832 Reform Bill. Yet, "whereas the middle class were able to use the term 'class' to make claims on the state for recognition and to draw moral distance from the aristocracy, they depicted the working class as immoral and forced them to become accountable to the state" (Skeggs, 2015: 5). Skeggs suggests that one of the ways that the working classes were able to gain even meagre recognition as a group with an identity (as opposed to an amorphous mass) by the state, was appeal via welfare claims. To do this it had to 'perform' respectability in order to survive (Butler and Shusterman, 1999). The eel, pie and mash shop and its food are one of the very few remaining working class arenas (which additionally include football culture) that evidences this dual and complicated navigation around a relationship with propriety and virtue.

As Lawler (2005: 434) suggests, "An entire social and cultural system works to continue the constitution of white working class people as entirely devoid of value and worth." Yet, as Angela McRobbie (2002: 136) has it, "...even the poor and the disposed partake in some form of cultural enjoyment which are collective responses which make people what they are." Crucially, "working class culture ... has a different value system, one not recognised by the dominant symbolic economy" (Skeggs, 2004: 153). Indeed, London's traditional working class, as seen through the prism of their fading eel and pie shops "appears to have an alternative understanding of cultural judgement, seeing it as they practice it, as a group matter... They are not

in awe of legitimate culture and find no value in refinement (Bennett *et al*, 2009: 205).

Skeggs (2016: 5) echoes Bourdieu when she suggests that this classification “brings the perspective of the classifier into effect” and then captures “the classifier within the discourse.” Class and its allied notions of taste and acceptability depend therefore on who defines it. Ultimately, ‘working classness’ for the overwhelming majority of London’s working class is valued *more* than by London’s bourgeoisie. Further, I suggest, even for the eel-pie shops’ customers who consider themselves no longer working class in the sense of meritocratic success, this ‘essence’ of background, this vague but pertinent memorialization of the past, is vital in their self-definition and self-mythologising. That is one of the reasons why the shops still remain spaces that are significant (and more so in the current so-called, ‘culture wars’) and the food valorised. That is also why the middle classes in general, except for some vague notion of ‘heritage’, see the shops as irrelevant and their food - at best a neo-peasant cuisine and at worst - as a disgusting slop. There is simply no need for the middle classes to define their own culture in relation to it because it has no exchange value for them, is no threat and ultimately insignificant. More succinctly, the working class is marginalised from the channels of cultural engagement dominated by the middle classes and rendered invisible from them (Savage, 2000).

However, just because some working class people who use the shops can’t or are reluctant to talk in class terms doesn’t mean that they don’t recognise class, their position within capital or its signifiers. More, just because some working class customers of the eel and pie shops believe themselves to be middle class that “does not mean they stop being exploited by the capitalist class” (Skeggs, 2016: 3).

Class, more than simply an economic qualification is additionally an arena for competition around the uneven distribution of *value* that may be charted by delineating different symbolic matrices (for example, gender and race) that dispense fluid and changeable advantages (Skeggs 2004: 3; Savage, 2015: 22). The shops and the food evidenced within are a rare oasis where working class Londoners have been largely free of the historic legacy of the imposition of bourgeois meaning and accountability or at least have been able to negotiate its limits. Indeed, I would argue

that eel, pie and mash shops remain largely intimidating and exhibit the sort of reverse symbolic violence that Raymond Williams (1958) experienced in a Cambridge teashop where he was made to feel inferior to the 'cultivated people'. As Adam Boutall has it, "When you go into a pie and mash shop you've got to have an old East Ender behind the counter ... I think it'd seem weird otherwise if there'd be some posh person serving you ... all the staff look a bit rough-and-ready; you know what I mean? Every pie and mash shop I've ever been in there's someone in there that looks like they was born and brought up on it ... everyone's a bit rough ... but it's like the old pubs: it's like 'ooh, you wouldn't go in there.'"¹⁴⁵

In essence, the food and the culture that surrounds them are *differently* valued by the working class people that use them in different and unique ways to navigate a specific kind of culture. So, what might constitute an essential and authentic working class food culture represented by the London eel, pie and mash shops? Michel DeCerteau in his *Practice of Everyday Life: living and cooking* (1998: xxi) uses food as evidence of 'subordinate' people's resistance strategies. Within the contemporary neoliberal city working class food, and especially eels, pie and mash I conjecture, offer a refuge from the dominant forms of cultural production. The shops are essentially, hyper-local microresistances, "... which in turn form microfreedoms, mobilise unsuspected resources hidden among ordinary people, and in that way displace the veritable borders of the hold [of] social and political powers." In this vein, Paul Kelly recalls his childhood in the 1980s when the pie shops in Bethnal Green were local hubs where "everyone knew each other; people were talking across tables and there was a real good buzz... if they weren't down the pub, they'd be down the pie shop... you didn't have to be respectable, you could be half-pissed if you wanted to." The shops were "full of hooligans, rough houses, you know the type - what most people would say [was] an East Ender... and everyone was the same... everyone was trying to nick a pound note..." They were places "where someone's knocked over a butcher's van..." and would then try and clandestinely sell the meat.¹⁴⁶ The pie shops remain, as Greg Camp puts it, an arena "of ducking a

¹⁴⁵ Adam Boutall. Interview by author, October 19, 2021.

¹⁴⁶ Paul Kelly. Interview by author, December 15, 2020.

diving... a place to hear the banter; to hear the sounds - to know that you're socially with people..."¹⁴⁷

The shops, the sites of these resistances, are now perhaps in some ways closer to what Jukka Gronow, (2018) suggests are 'social worlds in themselves' - similar to Robert Bellah's 'enclave culture' (Bellah, 1985) and Michael Maffesoli's ideas of 'neo-tribes' (Maffesoli, 1998). Here, new forms of solidarity have emerged into a post-modern *sociality*. The Marxist model of a 'class-in-itself' may no longer necessarily be a 'class-for-itself', rather a more relational model is postulated that is more loosely formed through a series of external identifications. Individuals form overlapping, temporary subcultural (interest) groups that are based on taste, choice and everyday interactions - like eating. Cohen (2017: 114-115) suggests that collective identities associated with becoming working class, such as 'informal' apprenticeships constituted by family, school or workplace have become "decentred" into individual, atomised interest groups, grievances or desires/demands. In this way there is a sentimental nostalgia for past solidarities - but this is simply a "material sensation of mobility" that is "an evanescent momentum which mirrors an underlying socioeconomic stasis." The failure of these endeavours, however, often result in a 'centripetal' trajectory - where groups may reform to redefine themselves as the sole or 'rightful heirs' of these traditions through a performative habitus, that may appear as a stable point for "re-formatting working class identities" but remains "haunted by a sense of their social dislocation." The 'tribes', formed around groups within the London working classes - from so-called 'chav' to self-declared 'middle class' property-owning Essex 'refugees' - bond around "common filiations, fixed identities and more or less fictive kinships, as well as shared memoryscapes linked to local places of pride" (Cohen, 2017: 116).

The shops are also perhaps a living archaeology of some elements of what remains of the pre-capitalist conviviality, lost to the 'internal enclosures' of the mid-Victorian street-market clearances. These remnants in turn echo earlier, largely rural festivities that celebrated the season's changes. This fading reverberation flickered in the Pearlies' street parties before they were banned in the 1920s; it was re-kindled in the

¹⁴⁷ Greg Camp. Interview by author, October 5, 2021.

welcome of the Victorian coffee stall and lives still in the warmth of the steamy-windowed eel-pie shop.

The shops and their food are then portals to a certain past - but not a direct one. Bourdieu (2011) echoed Marx when he suggested that the social world is “accumulated history.” These are multi-headed gateways: different shops have different heritages and different shops and their locales evidence slightly different tastes and traditions. Much depends on their specific hyper-local history. Social media post about rivalries between shops reflects this and that history leaves traces on the actions of social actors - but also on the *context* of their actions so that the shops are also a palimpsestic negotiation with a disputed and reimagined authenticity “... *and* the lived traditions and practices through which these understandings are expressed” (Hall in Samuel, 1981: 26).

There remain the myriad inscriptions upon the working class so that one might be simultaneously a ‘cheeky, lovable’ cockney as well as an East End gangster. This dual projection has enabled the working class to “generate their *own* [my italics] use-value *and* to exist beyond moral governance, enabling a critique of the constraints of morality (Skeggs, 2004: 22). This duality is the basis for the anti-pretentiousness of the food and the culture within the eel and pie shops, simultaneous with music hall performers who (carefully) satirised the ‘snobs’ and the ‘affected’ bourgeoisie (Vicus, 1974). This notion remains a cover-all mechanism against the ‘posh’ and defends the ‘ordinary’: the home-cooked, the comfort and the warmth of a simple meal and a way to “de-value the valuers” (Skeggs, 2004: 114).

Anti-pretentiousness also remains an armour against conceit - a resistance against the “false consciousness bred into the bones of the workers” (Engels, 1953: 522-523). This is of course double-edged. In one sense it has somewhat insulated a working class movement yet has failed to articulate a resistance to capital which has kept the London working class entombed within and constrained by the acceptance of social hierarchy. Typical of this is the character of Jimmy’s mother in Robert Poole’s *E1* ([1961] 2012: 98) where, “She wished ‘e won the scholarship, but what was the good? They only got their ‘eads full o’ strange ideas and got too big for their boots.”

For all that, the pie-shop exhibition of the ‘piss-take’; the ‘having a laugh’ (and also the contemptable modern, ‘banter’, so often a cover-all for politically incorrect, micro-aggressions) remain a way to reject authority. Paul Willis (in Skeggs, 2004: 114) suggests that this kind of humour isn’t just about getting through the monotony of the working day but a kind of ‘doubling’ where the real is simultaneously taken to be fictitious but also “as a practical cultural form in which the variable and ambiguous nature of labour power is articulated.” Oddly, these ‘micro-resistances’ may have reshaped contemporary cultural capital in that the form “now takes cosmopolitan and ironic forms that appear to be pluralist and anti-elitist (Savage, 2015: 51). In this sense the identification of class as evidenced in working class spaces like the eel and pie shops is part of a process of evolution. For Skeggs (2004, 117), this “is central to understanding contemporary class relations. The significance of representations lies in the way in which they become authored and institutionalised through policy and administration, how they produce the normative, how they designate moral value and how they are positioned by negative and pathological representations are both aware and resistant.”

So, the accrual of taste, even within different circles of the working classes themselves, is ascribed by middle class values that are enforced within a reproducing power relationship to differentiate themselves and attribute value. For example, to making oneself ‘tasteful’ through judging other people as ‘tasteless’: this is *exactly* the process that is aimed at people from Essex described as ‘vulgar’ and unmodern. Yet, working class culture is *differently* valued amongst itself, and the eel, pie and mash shops offer a rare glimpse into a realm of space, taste, freedom and relaxation that are at least a negotiation with the hegemonic culture.

Conclusion

Food is a universal signifier for membership, solidarity and belonging. As Falk (1994: 70) remarks, “...members of the same culture eat the same kind of food.” Within this contemporary framework, pie, mash and eels are simultaneously ‘the London ambrosia’, a legitimate and proud working class institution as Michael Collins (2021) has it, and a living gustatory link with an early-capitalist past and a gastro-nationalist present.

If the eel, pie and mash shops and the food they serve are anything, they are arenas of security. They are one of the few places where working class people are not silenced both literally and metaphorically. The shops are a foci for lived bodies that are framed by cultural practices in which identity is performed through a sensual inscription that constitutes “a realm of shared intelligibility” (Charlesworth, 2000: 17). This freedom, exhibited through palimpsestic gestures and gustatory taste, is held in the physical body of the customers through a sort of ‘comportment’ as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (in Charlesworth, 2000: 17) suggests where the body goes through a kind of “postural impregnation” sensing and ‘feeling’ signification. This is a classed experience of place and taste: the body relaxing when it enters a space apposite to its class background evidenced by the changed, ‘classed’ behaviour of the customers. In this way, the physical landscape is inscribed by working class bodies and the working class bodies are inscribed by the space and the food (Bourdieu, 2000: 141).

I suggest that the food literally ties the East Ender to the ‘terroir’ of the London street with its complex notions of cleanliness and anti-pretension but gives us a unique insight into what the convivialities of a closed, almost secretive heritage of traditional working class culture in late capital actually looks like. This simple, historical dish, built from ‘foods of necessity’, is a prism through which an urban proletariat and a decamped suburban diaspora dispute authenticity and originality in an ironic Appadurain dual over a dish that no-one is interested in appropriating because it is unable to travel outside its ‘field of exchange’ (Bourdieu, 1997).

In conclusion, I suggest that the shops are a living archaeology of early capitalist conviviality, the remnants of Victorian feeding stations and a successful taxonomic descendant of London’s first popular working class eating houses. In the contemporary neo-liberal city, they offer an insight into a private ‘working classness’ that is a negotiation with, and a micro-resistance to, the hegemonic culture memorialised within a largely insular, conservative cockney culture infused with a local patriotism (Tuan 1974) that signals to the contemporary ‘culture wars’ around issues of immigration and gentrification.

The eel, pie and mash shops show us a glimpse of a different way to live and a different way to taste.

5. The cockney saudade

Introduction

“Walking through streets that were memories of streets, correct in some details, quite wrong in others, down through Bethnal Green and Whitechapel...” (Sinclair, 2004: 112).

In this chapter, I explore the contemporary landscape of the eel, pie and mash shops and their concomitant interrelated cockney identity through the different types of memories and nostalgias that are performed within them.

The memories that breathe and multiply within the present day shops are linked to the historical specificity of London and their unique but largely overlooked place within British gustatory and political culture. The current memorialisations partly derive from the primary source of the largely invented Victorian music hall character of the cockney. The shops also simultaneously embody earlier, potentially antecedent capitalist notions of conviviality as well as the cultural repercussions of nineteenth century class privation and defeat that led to them as zones of consolation (Stedman Jones, 1974).

The memories of the shops are further entangled and complicated within the simultaneous memorialisations of a separate owner and customer class. The former, largely the historical product of an ideology of the small masters concomitant with notions of Radicalism and individualism has melded with an entrepreneurial proletarianism. This group valorises working class culture, largely sharing customs and language but is generally economically superior. The latter is a customer base that currently comprises of a white, proletarian precariat clinging to their traditional hyper-localities against a backdrop of globalisation, immigration and gentrification. They are further enjoined by a diaspora of re-located Londoners and their descendants found mostly within Essex and the Medway towns who are (generally

but not exclusively) conservative and Conservative in their culture. It is this group, self-defined as the heirs of past class solidarities through re-imagined performities and shared, hybrid memoryscapes linked to historical hyper-localities (often via football team loyalties) that remain “haunted by a sense of their social dislocation” (Cohen, 2017). These tangled, interrelated and often contradictory memorialisations increasingly encounter and compete with each other on (especially) social media and I refer to them as ‘polyphonic’.

The cockney is by nature an essentially nostalgic and sentimental creature. From its humbled, primary incarnation as a rebellious horde of the abyss to its rebirth as a theatrical, largely loyal hostage-servant of the elites within early modernity, it was made to perform respectability to gain even meagre welfare claims (Butler and Shusterman, 1999; Skeggs, 2016), being remembered and forgotten concomitant to its usefulness to capital. Throughout its numerous incarnations it has always looked backwards, yearning for a better time and valorising its privations as central to its integrity and spirit. Each episodic memory epoch, from the jingo of ‘Arry to the brave cockney of the Blitz has contributed a palimpsestic layer to its nostalgic self-remembering and testament.

Memories of cockney and the shops were, I contend, historically mediated by each generation apposite to their own context but largely congruent with their predominant contemporary hegemony. This confluence begins to break down by the 1990s and I argue that the present reimagining of cockney and recent valorisation of the eel, pie and mash shops was initially provoked by the cultural ruthlessness of New Labour’s embrace of globalisation and its acceleration of neoliberal reforms which further undercut the traditional structures of working class life.

I argue that the contemporary cockney memory scripts being performed and reinscribed are those of a largely ageing post-war generation confused and bitter at the ending of the gains of the *Trente Glorieuses* - an ending for which as enablers of, and a conduit to, an initial neoliberal embrace via Thatcherism, they hold part responsibility, the culmination of a sort of working class death drive. These confrontations coincided with an established melancholia around the loss of the fantasy of a British omnipotence crystallised as a post-colonial nostalgia.

These were the underlying causes of the Brexit vote, the alleged turn to populism and the contemporary so-called culture wars. In this chapter I trace the contours of this contemporary memory epoch and thereby simultaneously examine the changing nature of the twentieth-first century cockney.

I take as my starting point the “slippage of terms from the personal to the cultural” (Radstone, 2010) to consider how personal memorialisations of a humble but ritualised food impact on a wider culture that identifies through what Yi Fu Tuan (1974) refers to as a ‘local patriotism’ with a national referent. In this way I move from the personal to the political. First, I trace the context of, and what I identify as, the trigger for the contemporary anger of London’s white working class.

5.1 “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.” (Brillat-Savarin, [1825] 1970: 13).

In the 1970s as Wolfgang Streeck (2017) has it, capital had begun to seek expansion and flow outwards from the protected markets of the recovering post-war economies turning “nation-states into markets”. As an antidote to economic stagnation and the growing power of workers, what was to become known as neoliberalism came to be seen as fundamental to the reimposition of a capitalist hegemony. The role of food and diet, undertheorized in this historical context, was a small but significant arena that was part of the social landscape of neoliberal change. Initially, and concomitant with the ‘relative’ decline of a national agriculture policy that mirrored a growing internationalism of imported food, the eating habits of an increasingly affluent working class remained broadly unchanged (Edgerton, 2018: 479). Especially true of what would become known as the ‘non-aspirational’ working class, people invariably ate a version of what their parents had eaten. These were the meals that Douglas (1975) had explored and charted, the configuration and rhythm of which had remained largely consistent for a century or more. By the Thatcher era, the food landscape had begun to alter significantly. Local markets had been largely superseded by supermarket conglomerates and so-called ‘fast’ and frozen foods began to affect the footfall around the eel, pie and mash shops. Diet, like the pace of life itself, was becoming increasingly based on speed of preparation

and 'sophistication' - an idealised, cosmopolitan vision that mirrored the aspirational, hegemonic striving of the 'competitive individual'.

The everyday food landscape of the London working class had always differed slightly from national norms in that it included large immigrant communities whose diet inevitably spilled into its culture and onto its plate. In that sense, and because of what patronisingly might be called the valorisation of 'ethnic food' by the gentrifying middle classes, the Londoner's palate was by definition slightly more diverse. The entrepreneurial cockney, from the Victorian 'counter-jumper' to the Mod of the 'Swinging Sixties', always had a taste for 'the finer things in life' that might be found in abundance not far away, 'up West'. However, whilst family-focussed communities in the East End remained, the traditional cultures of greasy-spoon 'caffs', dingy, smoke-stained pubs and eel, pie and mash shops lingered on in the ever deepening penumbras of old ghost markets and crumbling, neglected council estates.

At the tail end of Thatcherism and the during the Major interregnum, a complex nostalgia centred around this 'traditional' way of life flowered and was simultaneous with a partial bourgeois colonisation of popular culture. By the end of the 1990s this revived valorisation of 'ordinariness' would feed into the larger political phenomena of the so-called 'Third Way' to become the dominant cultural motif of the era adjacent to the ideas of the End of History (Fukuyama, 1992) and the collapse of the Soviet Union. This was an era where a generation traumatised by the failure to find an alternative to a seemingly never-ending Conservative polity disavowed politics and embraced culture: a rebellion against the seriousness and allegedly dour 'worthy causes' of the 1980s. The Blair years were marked by an initial and expedient but ultimately deceptive cultural convergence with the symbols of working class life. Its re-joining to an authoritarian populism (Hall, 1978) was, I argue, ultimately at the root of current disillusionment with much of the contemporary political process.¹⁴⁸ As Stuart Hall and Martin Jaques (1998) would suggest, Blair embodied "...the ultimate pessimism - that there is only one version of modernity, the one elaborated by the Conservatives over the last 18 years."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Dahrendorf, 1999: 13–17.

¹⁴⁹ Stuart Hall and Martin Jaques on Blair quoted in Harris, John. "Marxism Today: the forgotten visionaries whose ideas could save Labour". *The Guardian* 29 September 2015

During the early Blair years, and led predominately by the style press, there was a brief and complicated colonisation of some of the textures of proletarian life, its food and its locations. Set largely in the fading, physical detritus of the post-industrial city, they were used as props in editorial features but also as a marker of ‘authenticity’ for the young and hip.

As far back as 1912, Thorstein Veblen had recognised that class distinction could be quantified through conspicuous consumption and during this period what became known as ‘poor chic’, an inverted appropriation of “multiple symbols traditionally associated with working class and underclass life” (Halnon Bettez, 2002: 503) became a significant trend. Celebrities affected what might be called a “lower class masquerade” of impersonating poverty in what Karen Halnon Bettez (2002: 516) suggests was a “rationally organised type of class vacationing” which treated poverty as a destination to visit that temporally (and safely) objectified the fear of downward mobility. One might encounter the ‘heroin chic’ of Corinne Day’s models posing in a fish and chip shop or Blur, a British band that partly came to symbolise the era, photographed initially as “dandyish fops” and then “streetwise casuals” lounging in a greasy spoon cafe, their lead singer affecting a ‘mockney’ accent (Maconie, 1999). This further pointed to a convenient cultural appropriation of popular modernism which the cockney youth of a previous generation had, in their own way, authentically embraced but in whose 90s iteration Mark Fisher (2014) would later presciently describe as ‘the slow cancellation of the future’. Not for nothing would Blur’s second album be titled *Modern life is rubbish*.

Chris Clunn, a working class photographer shooting mostly music in this period saw his chance however and managed to publish the first book about the (then) fast disappearing pie and mash shops in 1995 with the help of the Museum of London who briefly saw the shops as an object of heritage. “In hindsight” he recalls, “I think they might have taken it on because it was a novelty ... something that they didn’t know about.”¹⁵⁰ However, the shops made no real imprint on lasting bourgeois

¹⁵⁰ Chris Clunn. Interview by author, 17 February 2022.

consciousness unlike London's decaying 'caff' scene having little exchange value apart from their novelty amongst an increasingly gentrified landscape.¹⁵¹

The 'New Lad' phenomena which segued into Britpop and Blair was almost entirely retrogressive and sought comfort in the cultural ephemera of its devotees own 1970s teenage years.¹⁵² It celebrated a retrenchment of sexual stereotypes and sought (alleged) alliances with a long-established and largely conservative proletarian culture from which its parents had emerged and challenged. It was acquisitive and once again danced to "the joyous ringing of capital's cash tills" (Blackwell and Seabrook, 1986: 10).

Football, a corresponding and traditionally central feature of London working class life and identity, historically linked to the rituals, memorialisations and masculinities within the eel, pie and mash shops, also experienced a significant cultural colonisation by forces of capital. Dogged by hooliganism for decades, both the Taylor Report (1990) and the launch of the Premier League (1992) marked turning points that meant the sport was no longer to be regarded as simply a part of what Stedman Jones (1974) had referred to as a 'culture of consolation' but as a reborn arena of distraction around the middle class dinner table. Nick Hornby's memoir, *Fever Pitch* (1992) concomitant with the capture of the television rights by Rupert Murdoch's BskyB and the developing internationalism of the game made football a palatable dish for the chattering classes - a bone of contention that continues to rankle with working class fans to this day.

These allegedly class-transcending notions were almost all however, according to the critic Andy Medhurst, invented personas created by those on the fringes of the cultural industries. "Loaded, Fantasy Football, Men Behaving Badly [were] all created by middle class men with degrees. This celebration of working class culture is an assumed identity" (Turner, 2012).

¹⁵¹ For an exploration of the resurgent interest in London's post-war modernist café culture, see Maddox, 2003.

¹⁵² The term 'New Lad' was coined by Sean O'Hagan in *Arena Magazine* in 1993.

By the dog days of the Major administration there had also begun the framing of a long delayed cultural contestation around the notion of Englishness itself. Blair had situated himself apart from the former premier's invocation of "long shadows on county grounds, warm beer [and] invincible green suburbs" by draping his party in the Union Jack.¹⁵³ New Labour, utilising both Elgar's *Nimrod* and *Land of Hope and Glory* in party political broadcasts, unashamedly sought to reclaim the flag. As Peter Mandelson had it, "[I]t is restored from years as a symbol of division and intolerance" (Davey, 1999: 11). Indeed, despite a furore around the singer Morrissey's lyrics ("England for the English...") on songs like *The National Front Disco* and his appearance against a backdrop of skinheads at Madstock in Finsbury Park 1992, the iconography passed into passive acceptability with Oasis and the Spice Girls appropriating it as an 'ironic' nod to the Carnaby Street 'Swinging' 1960s. Hywel Williams writing a leader piece for the *Observer* around the fiftieth anniversary celebrations for VE-Day in 1995 drew a line from Blair's walk down a flag-festooned Mall to Atlee's post-war landslide as the creation of "a seductive, subterranean folk memory" (Turner, 2013: 304). Yet this patriotic renewal would grow deeper roots, not only in the gathering pace of (at this point largely irrelevant but growing) Euro-sceptic sentiments on the fringes of the Conservative Party but also in the generational angst about masculinities and fatherhood combined with an invocation of nostalgic military pride of a generation untested in combat. This was the first era in which those in politics or public life had not directly fought in a war but ironically in an age of 'liberal' interventions subsequently started several very significant ones.¹⁵⁴ John O'Farrell's *The Best a Man Can Get* (1997) and Tony Parson's *Man and Boy* (1999) largely echo the sentiments of Gary Sparrow, a character in the BBC sitcom *Goodnight, Sweetheart* (1993) who journeys back in time to the East End Blitz and reflects how, "Our fathers, they did national service... experiences that marked their shift into manhood". The show, interesting in itself by its use of condensed temporalities around the character of the cockney, articulated gendered fears that masculine purpose like the 'stoic' East End itself was disappearing - "fading in the light of late capitalism" (Millette, 2017: 127). At the Labour Party conference in 1997, Blair suggested that he wanted to make Britain "pivotal" in the world and "to use the

¹⁵³ John Major. Speech to the Conservative Group for Europe, 22 April 1993.

¹⁵⁴ For the context of these neoliberal conflicts see - Ali, 2015.

superb reputation of our armed forces, not just for defence, but as an instrument of influence.”¹⁵⁵ This salute to an overt militarism would inhabit the next decades eventually genuflecting towards a crude racial reductionism, a resurgent British nationalism and an anti-immigrant polity which would once again find favour within the white working classes of the East End and Essex.

By this time, “...some of those creators of this culture were starting to have their doubts, concerned that what had been a nuanced retreat into the security of a middle class adolescence was now little more than an ill-educated caricature”. As Simon Nye had it, “I do feel like I’ve created a monster... I despise job culture” (Turner, 2012: 54-55). As it gathered momentum, the culture grew less ironic and started to appeal to a younger, more proletarian audience. This moment was however profound for Britain’s working classes as within a couple of years the notion of the ‘chav’ would enter into the class lexicon to describe “those who behaved like lads without the income or education to justify their conduct” (Turner, 2013: 55). ‘Chav’ became a new orthodoxy in the language of class and went well beyond Orwell’s much quoted line about the working classes as either objects of pity or comic relief. This, a revitalised distinction through contempt as if the ‘popular’ gains of the 1960s and 1970s had never happened was deployed against a backdrop of increasing poverty and declining social mobility marking the passage of appropriation of working class culture to its overt demonisation.

In the first few years of New Labour, and despite the denigration of the terminology of class in favour of ‘inclusion’ and ‘social mobility’, food and indeed working class corporeality re-emerged as a main arena of social distinction (Cheng, Olsen, Southerton and Warde, 2007). The term ‘obesogenic’ became current to describe social and environmental factors that pointed to what in 1995 the UK Low Income Project Team described as ‘food deserts’ where poverty led to diminished access to sources of healthy food (Colas, Alejandro, Levi and Zubaida, 2018: 197). Indeed, Will Atkinson and Christopher Deeming (2015: 878) suggested that it was clear within the contemporary sociology of food that not only “particular orientations [continued to be] grounded in possession of resources” but that for a large section of

¹⁵⁵ Accessed at <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=203>

the community - and despite Richard A. Peterson's (1992) suggestion of a growing 'omnivorousness' - "[T]he heavy, the substantial, the functional, the cheap, the sugary/salty ... [were] most closely associated with the dominated class, indicating a prioritisation of matter over manner rooted in particular conditions of existence..." (Atkinson and Deeming, 2015: 878, 886). In an ironic reversal of Gilray's satirical cartoons from the late eighteenth century, it was the working classes that were now likely to be fat but the attachment to a behavioural and especially moral perspective of this was still prevalent. Once again, the working class culture and body, regardless of circumstance, was perceived as deficient.

The Blair years increasingly saw within culture a retrenchment of 'ironic', politically incorrect satire that mercilessly parodied the working classes. These drew on much older stereotypes of criminality, fecklessness and miscegenation and came to re-project bourgeois disgust back onto an 'ordinariness' that only a short time before they had culturally valorised. Its widescale application might be seen as a class revenge on the gains of proletarian popular culture of the previous two decades. Imogen Tyler (2008: 31) succinctly points to the role of laughing at the poor as "boundary forming" to situate them as 'lower' and 'othered'. Food and its signalling was a prime battlefield.

Whilst the New (Labour) Establishment ate at Granita and the River Café ("... a very expensive restaurant where you eat peasant cuisine and drink out of cheap beakers"), it proclaimed meritocracy and equality of opportunity.¹⁵⁶ For the neoliberal managerial and corporate classes that now held cultural ascendancy across the political spectrum, those that concentrated on "getting fed" and focused on the "here and now" were deemed insufficiently aspirational (Atkinson and Deeming, 2015: 878). Within this formulation and Blair's advocacy of a 'European café culture', middle class denial was contrasted with "working class excess... [that was] represented through vulgarity" (Skeggs, 2004: 102).

Congruent to this language, the celebrity chef Jamie Oliver, perhaps the era's epitome of 'Cool Britannia', lambasted parents, who, for whatever reason, failed to sit

¹⁵⁶ De Lisle, Leanda. "New Labour, same old snobbery" *The Guardian*. July 8, 1999.

around a table to eat dinner as "what we have learnt to call 'white trash'".¹⁵⁷

Anticipating the contemporary so-called 'culture war' by two decades, Oliver linked the economic choices of millions to a moral judgement. As Katie Beswick (2020: 82) has stated, these crude representations of working classness became "totalising narratives" increasingly damning those whose identities had been formed around, for example, pie and mash shops and the original communitarian culture they represented.

The broad brush strokes of derision painted by a Third Way bourgeois evangelism however failed to articulate a London-specific context of an increasingly global city with its concomitant cultural transmission where a cockney might well now not be white nor simply the clichéd shaven headed 'white-van man'. More, it failed to articulate the delineations (and indeed confusions around definitions) within and around the London working class itself. It was not uncommon and remains the case as Nicola Ford suggested of the pie and mash shop where she works in Harold Hill, that one might see "a Jag or a Roller" parked outside a pie shop, it's owner revisiting his (or her) past food heritage.¹⁵⁸ Robert Cooke regularly sees in his Chelmsford pie and mash shop "... bricklayers from Brentwood... wearing Rolexes"¹⁵⁹ Indeed, the owners of both the Cooke's and the Manze's dynasties always had a penchant for expensive cars and large houses, emblems of their extraordinary wealth.¹⁶⁰

Cockney was always about, as Dick Hobbs (1988) has it, "entrepreneurial proletarianism" and some had done as Ian Dury sang, "very well". It wasn't that the cockney working class was necessarily antithetical to contemporary gustatory fashion (or 'posh food') rather they relied on a memorialisation and self-valorisation of a food that was based on comfort, and which held within it its origin story. Indeed, initially Blair as an heir to Thatcherism had largely carried the conservative, aspirational working class cockney, historically suspicious of the state, expounding dreams of home ownership, enhanced individualism and financial opportunity. The

¹⁵⁷ O'Neil, Brendan. "Roasting the Masses" *The Guardian* 27 August 2008.

¹⁵⁸ Nicola Ford. Interview by author June 12, 2022.

¹⁵⁹ Robert Cook. Interview by author, September 10, 2021.

¹⁶⁰ Graham Poole. Interview by author September 16, 2021. At his prime before the Second World War, Michael Mansi, the founder of the Manzi dynasty had fourteen businesses and a collection of Italian cars.

image of the 'welfare scrounger', a well-designed folk devil as articulated by Stuart Hall, was (and remains) very appealing to the cockney working class. Here potentially was a place where 'Mondeo Man' and 'White Van man' could meet. However, the (alleged) initial championing of working class culture and its subsequent demonisation was, I argue, an early trigger point for the beginning of a rebellion against the project of what became to be seen as an over-educated, remote, metropolitan liberal elite. As Streeck (2017: 10) succinctly puts it, however this was "a cultural struggle of a special kind, one in which the moralisation of a globally expanding capitalism goes hand in hand with the demoralisation of those who find their interests damaged by it."

When Blair declared the class war over in 1999, a statement confirmed by subsequent Conservative governments, he accelerated a de-coupling of class and vote and indeed ushered in the emergence of "class non-voting" (Evans and Tilley, 2017: 193). Here perhaps was a start of a nostalgia for a pre-globalised world, a disillusionment and rage at what became to be seen as 'cartel parties', succinctly noted in an Essex pie shop as "...all these pricks, the politicians... [with their] ... general elections and fucking bye-elections and all the rest of it... fuck 'em they're not worth it."¹⁶¹ Here perhaps were the hazy beginnings of a polity that opposed so-called 'experts' that would lead eventually to an age of 'post-factual politics' (Katz and Mair, 1995).

For the cockney, distinction, the denigration of class habitat and a cuisine of comfort was entirely significant: it meant that despite the fact that many had become wealthy during the previous decades, they were still largely unable to join the 'respectable' table. The cockney East End turned increasingly to Essex down the A13 carrying with it a "freight of memory" (Sinclair, 2004: 58) that would become "a key political signifier in contemporary British culture" (Dave, 2006: 152). Here it would combine and synthesise with older, reimagined, fluid but contested polyphonic memories of what cockney culture was and 'should be' creating an odd simulacra of that which Sinclair (2004: 95) suggests "used to be jellied-eel London."

¹⁶¹ Ken, (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 20 May 2022.

The sustained attack on working class corporeality, food and wider culture that began under Blair but continued under successive Conservative governments was in no small way a starting point for both the contemporary indignant populism evidenced amongst some sections of the London working class and its allied, multivalent, reinscribed and performative nostalgias. This populist anger saw its fruition in the vote for Brexit.

The Brexit narrative significantly correlates to the constituency of reactionary populism that can be found within the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops, especially in Essex. As Danny Dorling (2016) has conclusively shown, only 24% of social classes D and E and voted to leave the European Union giving lie to the statement that Brexit was simply a cry from the economically impoverished, 'left behinds'.¹⁶² Rather the vote united two significant contemporary trajectories congruent to a modern cockney identity.

The first was an Empire nostalgia valorised largely amongst an ageing post-war demographic birthed within the security of a national economy that significantly ignored (or more succinctly I suggest, were never taught) the projects' colonial past (Virdee, Satnam and McGeever, 2018). The second, the result of a continued cultural demonisation of the working class and the politics of austerity following the 2008 crisis, led to the resurrection of a dormant, racist Powellite English nationalism framed within the politics of white working class victimhood (Ware, 2008). This had (very long) roots within a significantly earlier inculcation of a racialised national identity by the elites within the working classes that started after the defeat of Chartism. This had been periodically deployed over generations by the State through one of the many subsequent cockney identities as the 'defensive trench' of Empire. This fusion of a 'whitened' working class into an Imperial Britain was historically a Conservative project but had been sustained by a Labour Party historically loyal to the State. When Thatcher declared that there was no such thing as society, let alone class, a new social contract predicated on race had to be built to consolidate the nation (Barker, 1981; Gilroy, 1987). Now,

¹⁶² The National Readership Survey classifies social classes D and E as the unskilled working class and the non-working (state pensioners, casual low-grade workers and the unemployed claiming benefits).

race became the modality in which class [was] lived, the medium through which class relations [were] experienced, the form in which it [was] appropriated and 'fought through' (Hall, 1980: 341 in Virdee, 2014: 163).

Significantly, the defeat of traditional working class political structures, including those of anti-racism during the 1980s, led to a realignment of the forces of the nationalist right that seeped across mainstream political parties and the press to form an emergent consensus.

After the 2001 riots, largely framed as racial, Maurice Glassman's Blue Labour faction, in pursuit of 'traditional', largely right-wing Labour voters, championed the social conservatism of 'flag and family' against the now Muslim 'other'. This was aligned with a growing discourse against multiculturalism, the nebulous 'political correctness' and for immigration controls (Virdee, Satnam and McGeever, 2018). After the 7/7 bombings in London, a narrative grew that "Muslims were the beneficiaries of a weak state and a misguided liberal multicultural policy" (Rhodes, 2010). In 2007, the Labour MP for Barking, Margaret Hodge deployed the language of the BNP to decry "the legitimate sense of entitlement felt by the indigenous family overrides the legitimate need demonstrated by new migrants."¹⁶³ The following year the BBC screened the notorious 'White Season' that in part reintroduced and 'beatified' the ideas of Enoch Powell (Bourne, 2008). This was as Bottero (2009) suggests, nothing less than the construction of a new and excluded 'cultural' minority - the white working class.

Between 2005-2010, despite the financial crisis, immigration was deemed a priority by the electorate (Evans and Chzhen in Sobolewska and Ford, 2020: 163). The concomitant national 'sovereignty' narrative, confined so long to the fringes of the Euro-sceptic Right, re-emerged within the mainstream of the Conservative Party. Indeed, "[I]n domestic elections UKIP was mobilised in the same kind of voters, with the same kind of concerns, as the BNP" (Ford and Godwin in Sobolewska and Ford,

¹⁶³ Hodge, Margaret. "A message to my fellow immigrants", *The Observer*, 20 May 2007.

2020: 167). This trajectory was adjacent to Nigel Farage's allied UKIP rhetoric around the elite's benefit from neoliberal globalisation against the 'common man'.

In 2005, David Cameron an old Etonian married to an Astor had become the leader of the Conservative Party. Formerly the Director of Corporate Affairs at Carlton Television, Cameron fitted well Farage's subsequent populist jibe about voters being "fed up to the back teeth with cardboard cut-out careerists in Westminster".¹⁶⁴

Cameron, at heart a social liberal, attempted to steer his party away from its growing libertarian right wing and the burgeoning grassroots Eurosceptic insurgency of UKIP. These he had previously described as "fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists".¹⁶⁵ On becoming Prime Minister in 2010 as part of a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats, and despite his attempts to mollify the right of his party with plans for a new immigration and asylum policy, Cameron found it increasingly difficult to quieten Farage's triangulation of identity politics, patriotism and working class opposition to globalised mass immigration.

In 2013, to placate his Eurosceptic backbenchers and win back Tory defectors to UKIP, Cameron promised an 'in' or 'out' referendum on membership of the European Union if he won the next election. This did not entirely appease his distrustful backbenchers nor UKIP voters whose "primary demand was immigration control" (Sobolewska and Ford, 2020: 185). Re-elected in 2015 with a Conservative majority he selected the 23rd of June 2016 as the date for the referendum on whether the UK should remain within or leave the EU. Cameron campaigned for Remain with 'Britain Stronger in Europe', a cross-party lobbying group whilst Boris Johnson, a populist politician, journalist and former London mayor recently returned to the Commons, became one of the figureheads of the Vote Leave campaign. The subsequent slim victory for Leave led to Cameron's resignation. He was replaced by Theresa May whose 'hostile environment' strategy became the cornerstone for ongoing immigration policy. Her premiership, dominated by the Brexit withdrawal agreement was ended after a vote of no confidence in her negotiations with Brussels. She was succeeded by Johnson in 2019 with the populist mantra 'get Brexit done'. His victory

¹⁶⁴ Accessed at <https://www.ukpol.co.uk/nigel-farage-2013-speech-to-ukip-conference/>

¹⁶⁵ Carlin, Brenden. "Off-the-cuff Cameron accuses Ukip of being 'fruitcakes and closet racists'". *The Daily Telegraph*, 5 April 2006.

symbolised the annexation of the Conservative Party by a libertarian faction wrapped in a flag of xenophobic nationalism.

What became known as Brexit did not however happen overnight but was rather a culmination of decades of coalescing forces. Growing public distrust of a political class recruited increasingly from a professional, managerial background was felt especially (but certainly not exclusively) amongst older, less well-educated working class communities. In addition, a re-racialisation (Schwarz, 1996) of British politics from the immediate post-colonial era had been revived in an age of neoliberal precarity. Apparently ‘Enoch was right’ after all. This focussed working class anger especially onto recent Eastern European immigrants and the murder of Arkadiusz Jozwik in the Stow shopping centre in Harlow, Essex in 2016 “encapsulated the febrile summer of the European referendum” (Cowley, 2018: 128). Much of this was articulated by the radical right’s UKIP messaging of ‘Brussels plus’. This succeeded in channelling the deep post-war racial disaffection of a generation that had additionally lived through the legacy of deindustrialisation and saw a memorialised way of life slowly fading. In this sense, the EU simply “came to represent all of the ills of modern society” (Ford and Godwin, 2014: 275).

Reflecting largescale demographic changes around class, income, education and ethnicity, 59% of London voted to remain in the European Union.¹⁶⁶ Two of the UK's five districts with the highest percentage of people which backed Brexit were in Essex.¹⁶⁷ London had irrevocably changed for the cockney who nostalgically identified with a mono-racial, post war landscape. For some who had made the Great Trek eastwards, Essex was now a place for those like ‘Brian’ where “We've got our own kind down here... and you do try to hang on to it.”¹⁶⁸ Eels, pie and mash had increasingly become a comforting link to a mythologised East End past.

¹⁶⁶ <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/elections-and-referendums/past-elections-and-referendums/eu-referendum/results-and-turnout-eu-referendum/eu-referendum-results-region-london>

¹⁶⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36617396>

¹⁶⁸ Brian (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 14 May 2022.

5.2 “Nothing tastes as good as the past” (Serematakis: 1996: 1)

“Sometimes emotions are stirred into food and become what you feel.”¹⁶⁹

As the anthropologist Daniel Miller suggests in *The Comfort of Things* (2008) the objects that we value help form a bridge between ourselves and the people we love. Food is one such object and it is central to understanding how the eel, pie and mash shops and wider cockney culture are memorialised. For some this is simply a meal that reconnects them with their past, their family traditions and historic geographic location. For most people like Tommy B, “pie and mash was the food you went for because you couldn’t afford to go and have other stuff... it sort of encapsulates everything about the East End.”¹⁷⁰ For John Bradley it remains a central part of a cockney identity and “about the people that are here, you go to the shops and ... you can hear the [cockney] voices.”¹⁷¹ For others however it has, concomitant with the rise of identitarian politics, become a symbol of -

“... an ordered past in which they were exploited and pauperized, but nonetheless knew who they were [rather than] to a chronically chaotic present in which even those limited certainties have been stripped away by the new corporate mandate of interminable, regressive change.” (Gilroy, 2005: 109).

Pie and mash for some I contend, conveys well the linkage of the personal to the political (Radstone, 2010). Its humbleness evokes the melancholy of a romanticised poverty and the rituals that surround it speak to the soothing but unreachable routines of mid-century working class life. It’s eating is a comfort for an imagined past that can never be recaptured. This absence is the cockney saudade.

Indeed, food, and the eating of it, is rarely just about the food itself. What we eat, how we eat it and crucially how we remember it is, as Lupton (1996:6) proposes, “... mediated through social relations ... [and] a thick layer of meaning is accreted around every food substance, and a physiological dimension of food is inextricably

¹⁶⁹ Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight’s Children*. Mehta, Deepa. 20th Century Studios, 2012.

¹⁷⁰ Tommy B. Interview by author 25 March 2022.

¹⁷¹ John Bradley. Interview by author 25 May 2022.

intertwined with the symbolic.” These cultural ‘meanings’, these ‘interpretations’ of the truths of the exterior world, are however primarily experienced as involuntary and largely invisible sensory perceptions through the biological body.

For C. Nadia Serematakis (1996: 5-6) this is a reciprocal and dialogical process between the individual’s “inner states... [and] the socio-material field outside of the body... [where] sensory interiors and exteriors constantly pass into each other in the creation of extra-personal significance.” What she calls “social aesthetics” are “embedded in, and inherited from, an autonomous network of object relations and prior sensory exchanges” which are beyond language and crucially fluid so that sensory memory is not “mere repetition but [a] transformation which brings the past into the present as a natal event.” This exchange with what Rhys Taylor (2017: 4) calls “wider cultural significations” likely results in the ‘performance’ of gestures and embodied acts which are “elicited by externality and history as much as ... from within.” Serematakis (1996: 9) further offers that each sense perception is rendered as a “re-perception” - the result of the activity between “co-implicated sensory spheres” and material objects which further places memory within time. The prosaic eating of a plate of eels, pie and mash is in this way an extraordinarily powerful sensory mnemonic experience for the cockney because it contains a multitude of sensory meanings overlaid in a matrix of culturally and temporally mediated transactions that is crucially (if subtly) flexible and changing.

Memory is the landscape of the sensory cultural transmission of food between the personal and the political. The plotting of the co-ordinates of its flexible conductance will enable us to chart both how it is memorialised and subsequently why. I identify three central sites on which this transmission takes place. The first is childhood.

As Maureen Mahoney and Barbara Yngvesson (in Lupton, 1996: 58) suggest, the child engages in a process of creating meaning with its primary caregivers. This predates language and rests on the bond between (usually) mother and child whereby intimacy triggers emotions via sensory touch, smell and sound. Here, it becomes clear that food memory is more often than not principally located within gender. Lupton (1996: 39) notes that it is the woman’s primary (expected and traditionally socially normative) role in the nuclear family to provide some sort of

emotional stability for the group and acculturate children into appropriate behaviour including the conventions of their eating habits. More, women are largely responsible for feeding and nourishing infants and in this way throw a kind of “*cordon sanitaire*” around the infant mediating what is allowed into (and policing what comes out of) the child’s body (Murcott in Lupton, 1996: 40). As Holtzman (2006) attests, the collective memories that pass through these arenas are inevitably “quintessentially gendered” and cockney culture is, as both Young and Willmot (1957) and Cohen (2013) suggest, matrifocal and matrilinear.

Within this panorama, the family kitchen is a central location for nurturing, and according to Carol Counihan (2013) a place where memories are stored. However, the externality of the East End street also provided an arena for the development of the child and the concomitant historical absence of cooking facilities also likely meant that the eel, pie and mash shop became in some senses an expedient and proxy ‘home from home’ further solidifying significant memorialisations. Even in the contemporary period this ‘homely food’ is brought into the house as a substitute for home cooking.

It was like one of those foods when your nan says ‘I can't be bothered cooking’ ... me Great Nan ... I used to take her pie and mash on a Saturday morning... I was only like five or six ... they give me the pie an’ the mash and the eels (from the shop) sent me round her house. We used to have like, half a lager and lime together and I was only little, so I was out me nut... and we used to watch the films on Saturday afternoons...”¹⁷²

The space of the pie shop remains subject to similar restrictions as the domestic home: a rule-based hierarchy of manners often ‘overseen’ by a (usually) male figure that sets a ‘tone’ for service, language and indeed atmosphere. Both casual and formal, the shops are a microcosm of a domesticity where men are almost always the central artisanal figure and women take on a largely service role.¹⁷³ It is in this

¹⁷² Johnny Griffiths. Interview by author, 5 December 2021.

¹⁷³ Of all the contemporary pie shops, I can think of no woman cooking, and the only female owned shop is Harrington’s in Tooting. The Cooke’s shop in Hoxton Market does employ a female cook but she is largely supervised by the owner, Joe Cooke.

way that Sarah Pink (2015: 44) concludes that "... experiences of place - and its social, physical and intangible components - are inextricable from the invocation and re-investment of memories." People expect the shops to be gendered in this 'traditional' way. "... normally when you go in it's like 'hello darling, all right?'... they're like that with everyone and they've got time for people and that adds to the atmosphere ..."¹⁷⁴

Within this context it is almost a rite of passage for a cockney child to be weaned in a pie shop by his or her mother on a combination of either blended pie and liquor or simply liquor and mashed potato. As Nicola Ford recollects, "... my mum couldn't wait to spoon feed it to my babies - literally - I remember her pureeing [it]... the pie and mash and feeding it literally ... [it] put the smile on her face."¹⁷⁵ Johnny Griffiths concurs that "Me nan says it was the first thing you cut your teeth on, a bit of pie - like a pork bone."¹⁷⁶ Rita Arment similarly recalls the pie shops of the 1940s and 1950s which "in those days had a 'baby bowl' - that was 4d - mash with liquor over it and babies seemed to love it."¹⁷⁷

Lupton (1996: 6) links the memorialised bond between mother and child as a symbiosis of sensual pleasure from infancy because of the close human contact with the food provider; the maternal link of bodily security a seedbed of memory. "[T]he bodily warmth, the touch of the other's flesh, their smell, the sounds they make - and the emotions and sensations aroused by this experience." Some mothers chew pies and spoon tiny pieces of it to their infants whilst others will test the heat of the dish with their own tongues before giving it to their babies. Visser (2015: 312) has suggested that "already chewed food, mixed with saliva is polluted... [and] is an anathema in polite society." However, Serematakis' (1994: 24) account of her own grandmother's feeding ritual is instructive.

¹⁷⁴ Adam Boutall. Interview by author October 19, 2021.

¹⁷⁵ Nicola Ford. Interview by author, 6 June 2022.

¹⁷⁶ Johnny Griffiths. Interview by author, 5 December 2021.

¹⁷⁷ Rita Arment. Interview by author, 20 November 2020.

Grandma used to mash with her fingers carrot, potato, macaroni and feel it with her lips and even her tongue and then give it to the child... When the food was hard, such as a bread crust, the old women would soften it with their saliva.

The sharing of food and saliva can, in this way stow within the child a “sensory acculturation and the materialization of historical consciousness” (Serematakis, 1996: 37).

The Taiwanese film *Eat, drink, man, woman* (in Lupton, 1996: 49) features a character who suggests “my memory is my nose” linking the olfactory sense to the eliciting of memory. Sutton (2005: 304) has it for the Greeks of Kalymnos that even “[A] flowerpot of basil can symbolise the soul of a people better than a drama of Aeschylus.” For Londoners, the smell of eels, pie and mash or indeed the odours of the shops themselves can bring to the fore a cacophony of memorialisation. As Rhian Atkin (2020: 83) suggests of the Portuguese *refogando*, its meaning “is contained in its smells and the memories that smell evokes.” For Rita Arment, the “lovely warm smell” reminded her of walking into her husband-to-be’s pie shop in 1957.¹⁷⁸ For Anthony Bradley, “the smell of the meat pies ... and the stale penny cakes we used to buy afterwards” every Saturday growing up on the Hackney Road is a direct path to his childhood and his late older brother.¹⁷⁹ The food is a memory pathway that cuts backwards in time and can recreate past experiences and resonate with different levels of consciousness.

However, not all children were socialised into eel, pie and mash through weaning and their senses appear to have compensated with memorialisations from different memory periods. Anthony Bradley who has eaten the food all his life was sent off every Saturday morning in the late 1960s with his brother to a (long gone) pie and mash shop on the Hackney Road. He recalls that his mother “never had it ... no idea why ... she was born in Bethnal Green ... I don’t remember me Dad eating it either. I dunno why us kids started eating it because normally you eat what your parents give you...”¹⁸⁰ His memory script involves the food *in spite* of weaning experiences.

¹⁷⁸ Rita Arment. Interview by author, 20 November 2020.

¹⁷⁹ Anthony John Bradley. Interview by author, 25 May 2022.

¹⁸⁰ Anthony John Bradley. Interview by author, 25 May 2022.

Eileen Errol went to school in Leytonstone in the early 1960s but lived in Hainaught and started eating pie and mash in her teens with friends. Hers was a classic act of rebellion against her family's ideals. "... [We] moved to Hainaught because my Mum said that she heard that people (in Dagenham) kept coal in the bath".¹⁸¹ As Lupton (1996) reports, this classically disaffected behaviour may occur when a child's feelings, in the context of eating, are embodied. This appears, according to Julia Brannen *et al* (1994), to be a more prevalent behaviour amongst young women than men as they may have fewer arenas in which to exhibit frustration. Indeed, even now Errol says she cannot mention pie and mash to her sister who sees it in very negative terms. "My sister is like Hyacinth Bucket (a working class snob who featured in a BBC TV sitcom). They've gone up in the world and she would *die* if I ever mentioned pie and mash [and] how lovely it is... they're a bit fine dining... they've worked very hard..."¹⁸² Ken, an ex-docker born in 1938, came from a family who were "a little unusual in the East End as they had an upstairs bathroom." He ran away from his parents and married at 19. His wife's family were 'on the stones' (casual dockworkers) and because dock work was almost entirely hereditary, he entered the profession with their help. He also encountered eels, pie and mash from his wife's family which became a "life-long habit".¹⁸³

These memorialisations based within sensory artefacts give an intriguing insight in the micro-class divisions within London's proletariat throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. More, they situate the dish within previous memories of the very poor and of a casual, largely unskilled working class. These memorialisation are themselves a likely reverberation of early Victoriana with regard to notions of propriety, manners and who valorised the food as both fuel and comfort.

Eels, pie and mash are also memorialised and remembered through the everyday rhythm and ritual performances of working class life. Paul Connerton (1989: 4, 25) implies an *incorporating memory* within ritualised ceremonies where a kind of 'sediment' is generated via what he refers to as "habit memory". These ritual performances are psychologically encoded and can be both verbal, visual or beyond

¹⁸¹ Eileen Errol. Interview by author, 22 October 2022.

¹⁸² Eileen Errol. Interview by author, 22 October 2022.

¹⁸³ Ken, (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 20 May 2022.

language but leave behind traces that are perceptible to the senses. In the pie shops, one might mention the accretion of meaning around *evolving* human interactions, performative gestures or slang but also the worn floors, the chipped tiles and the dented utensils. In the newer shops (for example) in Essex, the physical environments wait expectantly for memories to accrue in the materiality of new tiling, pristine kitchens and spills and scuffs on the unspoiled floors where “prescribed bodily behaviours” and the “choreography [of] an identifiable range of repertoires” automatically implies continuity with the past” (Connerton, 1989: 44, 74).

The challenge for these contemporary shops, as what one might euphemistically be called ‘traditional’ is articulated by Connerton (1989: 51) in his idea of “historical position”. Here, ritualised behaviour is not necessarily understood in isolation but in affinity to past events and “thus [crucially] susceptible to a change in their meaning”. Indeed, although Sutton (2001: 19) is critical of Connerton and his “fairly inflexible” approach where these “limited gestures” have to be repeated exactly “like a spell”, this is entirely apposite to the process of ossifying “formalised” ritual meanings into the new generation of eel, pie and mash shops away from their historical geographic and class roots.

Luce Giard (1998: 183) suggests that eating as an everyday practice “solidifies particular modes of relations between the person and the world that form the foundations of landmarks in space-time.” Indeed, although the ways people behave in the newer shops are a “cognitive memory of a communal lexicon” that lexicon is within a subtly changed material and temporal environment.¹⁸⁴ Largely gone are the childhood memories of mothers coming together with their children after a lengthy march around almost disappeared hyper-local street markets enmeshed in a matrix of known, formal and informal obligations. Increasingly (for example) Essex eel, pie and mash shops are sites for more general meetings and partially sketchy remembrances of how a previous generation might have acted or ordered or eaten. They form and will continue to form in their more recent guises, future memorialisations in the “constructions of [newer] worlds” (Sutton, 2001). They are the site of overlapping temporalities creating hybrid memory.

¹⁸⁴ Connerton, 1989: 88.

Lastly, we might gauge how memorialisations of the eel, pie and mash shops are formed through this temporal focus analogously to how Serematakis (1996) describes the role of coffee as a *sintrofia* (a friendly companion). She narrates how the taking of a Greek villager's coffee is essentially a pause in the day and how it "generates a moment of meta-commentary in which the entire stenography of present and past social landscapes are arrayed..." (1996: 13). Eels, pie and mash and the spaces that serve them also have narratives that are "frequently non-synchronous with the immediate continuum of socially constructed material presence and value" (Serematakis, 1996: 12). The shops in this way become a similar temporary portal (Serematakis would describe them as "islands of historicity... in stillness") that can act as an interruption and an interval in the everyday through which the cockney can breathe within his or her own evolving culture. Like the villagers' coffee sips, the pie shops and their food in this way might be seen as a temporary intermission on a neoliberal street "where micro-practices leak through the crevices and cracks of official cultures and memories"(1996: 13).

Increasingly however as the shops, both traditional and contemporary, are by demography, age and fashion themselves slowly divorced from long-established patterns of work, leisure and usage they are increasingly used for non- and neo-traditional purposes but still act as an (imperfect) aide mémoire to a partially invented historical past.¹⁸⁵ It is within this space that the cockney, like the Greek villager, may experience the mixing of temporalities, where the present and past meet in experiential, performative and sensory dialogue. The food of the pie shop is like the partaking of this Greek moment in that as a 'friendly companion' it generates, in its consumption, a conversation and commentary on for example, the weather, the family, how the local football team are faring and often, via social media and reminiscence, 'ways of doing things'; how London 'used to be'. Within this interlude and within the recent past, an extraordinary gustatory nostalgia has evolved around the eel, pie and mash shops. As Hasia Diner (2009: 366) has suggested, "as hungry people found food within their reach, they partook of it in ways which resonated with

¹⁸⁵ Some shops become bars at night and the Cooke's shop in Chelmsford regularly becomes a comedy venue. Older, more traditional shops are frequently used as backdrops in films or editorial photoshoots.

their earlier deprivations. How they remembered those hungers allows us to see how they once lived them, and how they then understood themselves in their new home without them.”

It is to those formulations and crucially nostalgic re-constructions of the eel, pie and mash shops in a critical political sense that I now turn.

5.3 Don't mention the War...

“Memory is ... a complex cultural and historical phenomenon constantly subject to revision, amplification and ‘forgetting. Memory is, therefore, a construction.”
(Bromley, 1998: 1)

There are now only a handful of eel, pie and mash shops that remain within the traditional cockney areas of inner London, but pie and mash is currently thriving with many new shops opening in the zones of white working class diaspora (especially) in Essex and the Medway towns. As these exodic memoryscapes, themselves the result of previous palimpsestic remembrances, travel beyond their original locations they merge with older solidarities and memorialisations brought with earlier decampments.

The worn wooden benches of London's oldest remaining shop, Manze's on Tower Bridge Road might evoke the memory of mid-Victorian class comradeship, itself buried beneath a trace of Victorian music hall cheerfulness. More likely, the memory of a meal savoured in gratitude after an air raid all-clear might still be experienced within the touch of the shops loose brickwork.

As Aleida Assman (2010: 97) suggests, each generation stands on the shoulders of its predecessors whose “... knowledge they can reuse and reinterpret.” Yet these new incarnations of the traditional shops and the culture that they signal to are contested and reveal fault lines that disclose less about the historical past and much more about the contemporary cockney identity.

In spats fought largely within closed networks on social media, seemingly trivial but essential debates centre around location, the rituals and intricacies of how and what the shops serve and what those memories mean. The central question for this dichotomy is whether the new shops are an extension of the original establishments, a simulacra or part of a new culture? This is really a struggle over whose memories will define the future of the shops and how the cockney as both a character and an idea will maintain. More, they signal to a larger contested narrative of white working 'classness' that perceives itself to be in existential crisis.

Joe Cooke's eel, pie and mash shop in Hoxton market is, as he unswervingly puts it, "absolutely traditional" and he sees himself "as very much a sort of a caretaker of a dynasty, or a culture and a tradition... that is a big part of the history of London and of the East End."¹⁸⁶ Although the actual shop was refashioned from a Victorian bank in the 1980s the styling and the menu are exactly as his great grandfather would recognise. Cooke's panorama of wooden benches and marble tables is as Bromley (1988: 4) suggests, "a coded sentimentality [that has a] "stabilizing and conciliating function." As Cooke sees it, it is impossible for eel, pie and mash shops to be anywhere else than the East End of London because they are so intimately tied to that city's past and cartography. As Phil Baker (2012: 279) suggests, "The feeling of place is inseparable from the meaning of place, often within personal cartographies that have their own landmarks."

For Johnny Malone however, an Essex native who has just opened a pie and mash shop in Southend, this isn't strictly true. Malone used to be a bricklayer but a shoulder injury at work meant that he was looking for something new to do. He had "sometimes" eaten pie and mash and admired the "... humbleness of it... it's a simple food that fed a lot of people back in the day, when it was tough, for not a lot of money."¹⁸⁷ His knowledge of the culture came to him largely from "the memories of me great nan and grandad... they were original Londoners...from Hackney." He admits that for him, "there's a few [personal] memories of it [but] what I got from my great Nan was a glimpse ... there'd be people out in the streets playing a piano ... it

¹⁸⁶ Joe Cooke owner of F. Cooke Pie Shop, Hoxton. Interview by author, 16 September 2021.

¹⁸⁷ Johnny Malone owner of Brickie's Pie Shop, Southend. Interview by author, 15 June 2022.

was a different world to what we live in now.”¹⁸⁸ Malone caters to working class people, many who have emigrated from London or who have visited in a traditional ritual to the seaside on holiday. He says that his shop is full of the stories of these people reminiscing about their own pasts and their favourite London pie shops – “...someone came in yesterday with a story and that’s what I love about it... With some of these Eastenders... you’ve still got a nan that’s telling a story.”

Jan Assman’s (2010) two-fold concept of memory is useful here. He defines a ‘cultural’ memory of rites and texts crystalizing collective experience that reacts to, and dances with, a ‘communicative’ memory, limited to a more recent generational past, encapsulating the informal transference of autobiography. Yet between these two is what Vansina (in Erll, 2011: 28) has called a “floating gap” (originally theorised through oral remembrances) that moves with the passage of time and between generations. For the pie shops, the contestations around what they are and will be is contained within this gap: an interregnum where the stories of Malone’s customers crystallise and become accepted and foundational to the modern cockney community. Indeed, although memories appear to change by ‘consensus and canon-building’ it’s more likely that they change by moulding along social fractures engendered by this volatile gap (Olick, 2003). The fissures are in part the work of hegemonic memory groups invading and capturing the memory landscape by selectively narrativizing and reconstructing their past (Bell in Bond, Craps and Vermeulen, 2016: 3). Because the cockney identity, especially its manifestation within the eel, pie and mash shops is largely absent from mainstream cultural texts it has been relatively straightforward as much as through a process of omission and exclusion to reify certain aspects of the culture and denigrate others. Sometimes these changes to ‘common sense’ are part of internal community machinations and sometimes they are responses to external pressures and ‘programming’. Either way, historically these ‘social fractures’, like the cockney character, have emerged parallel with, and reactive to, the passage of modernity itself (Legg, 2005).

The contemporary transmission of the cockney identity and the concomitant history of the eel, pie and mash shops are in a large degree, captured by these social

¹⁸⁸ Johnny Malone owner of Brickie’s Pie Shop, Southend. Interview by author, 15 June 2022.

fractures. Today, remembrances of the shops are, within living memory, significantly constructed via the memorialisations of a post-war generation that recall as children the legacy of wartime privation, mass colonial immigration and the turn towards post-Fordism. Fundamentally, this thesis argues that it is this generation's sketchy memorialisations and political framings of the Second World War - of which they played no significant part - that holds the key to much of the structure of contemporary politics and by extension, the identity of the cockney and the eel, pie and mash shop.

The seeds of this re-memorialising of the Second World War were sown a generation or more ago. Apposite to Hall's (1973) notion of encoding/decoding (especially in terms of the cockney identity construction in music hall), Bromley (1988: 17) suggests that the Thatcher government "selectively plundered" the conflict to lever a "romantic nationalism" based upon a "selective revival of particular symbols... constructed specifically from 'stories' of war and the interwar period." As Wright (2009: 41) added several years later, war had been declared again, but this time against the post-war settlement. Paul Gilroy (2004: 96-97) points out that the reappearance of the War, the Blitz and rationing were all "obsessive repetitions... anxious and melancholic" - part of a "need to get back to the place or moment before the country lost its moral and cultural bearings".

For obvious reasons, these wartime valorisations were especially resonant to a cockney audience soaked for several generations in a military nostalgia of the dying embers of an Imperial state - these notions seamlessly complementary to the background noise of war films, TV situation comedies and children's comics during the *Trente Glorieuses* and of a generation 'playing soldiers' in the schoolyards of a 1970s East End and new town Essex. These constructions around the Second World War (and later the Falklands) and its colonisation within popular memory had, to echo Gramsci, become something that had 'always' been there. The flag became adjuvant to working class support for a Conservative government that lauded the proletarian entrepreneurship of the cockney whilst simultaneously selling-off the council housing that supported the solidarities of the white working class in London. A decade later, Blue Labour attempted to use the flag in an appeal to memory whilst seeking white working class votes by using the Blitz to beguile the 'forgotten tribe' of

white cockneys (Collins, 2004) whose NHS and Welfare State was being 'swamped' by immigrants.¹⁸⁹

Yet pie shop customers would recall in bitter terms the moment when the formerly heroic cheerful Tommy had become an impediment to 'progress' when "white working class communities had become an embarrassment to New Labour" (Beider, 2015: 18). As Andreas Huyssen (2003: 3) says of this period, "... the 1990s seemed to be haunted by a trauma as dark as the underside of neoliberal triumphalism." Once awakened, this military zombie of English identity within cultural memory has refused to die. Its recent resurrection in contemporary reactionary politics that surround Brexit where the war and contestations of empire are central have become as Peter Mitchell (2021: 66) suggests, a "metonymic stand-in for whiteness, patriarchy and a generalised national chauvinism."

The memoryscapes that coalesce within both the London and Essex pie shops are numerous and I refer to them as polyphonic. I suggest that the pie shops in both locations hold simultaneous memories that are distinct but synchronous: all playing - like the cockney barrel organ - at the same time. These are the partial reminiscences of a marooned, largely elderly precariat who still inhabit the dwindling stock of social housing in the fading penumbras of traditional cockney areas of London. They are also the exodic transmitted and transmuted memories of their contemporaries and scions in the pioneering townscapes of Essex and beyond. Within these voices are captured innumerable and incalculable modifications; other palimpsestic memoirs of individualised personal memory epochs largely valorising a lost landscape of a post-war period of gain and stability. They are legion but not simply a "matter of personal recall" (Bromley, 1988: 4). They all however point to a predominantly white, monocultural and inevitably 'better' past and share a 'geography of belonging' (Hodgkin and Radstone, 2003: 169) with a melancholic and often furious sense of loss.

¹⁸⁹ The term 'swamping' in relation to immigration was first used by the Far Right in the 1970s then repeated by Margaret Thatcher, first in a Scottish television interview and then on *World in Action* in 1979. Thatcher, Margaret. 27 January 1978. *World in Action*. Granada Television. <https://www.margarethatthatcher.org/document/103485>

That sense of loss was apparent to Pierre Nora (1989: 7) who has suggested that we now speak of memory so much because “there is so little of it left.” For Nora, we no longer live within a previous (utopian) era of *milieux de mémoire* (‘environments of memory’) and within modernity, its attendant democracy, mass society and more recently, globalisation, that there now remain only, “... *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory.” He postulates these symbolic sites, these *mnemotechnics*, capture in a shorthand, necessary ideas and memories. For Nora these sites can be “geographical locations, buildings, monuments and works of art as well as historical persons, memorial days, philosophical and scientific texts, or symbolic actions” (Erl, 2011: 3). Here, “memory crystallises and secretes itself” (Nora, 1989: 7). They could be a plate of warm eels in liquor, the tang of white pepper on a pie all condensed in the steam of a pie shop window.

The traditional eel, pie and mash shops in London can themselves be seen as *lieux de memoire* but crucially in a dual sense. For the very few historical ones that endure, they encapsulate a physicality. They are both a sanctuary and a place of excursion that is only reinforced by their sensoriality; their ability through gustation, to imprint upon the bodies and senses of those that eat there. Additionally, they encapsulate a dimension where, through the rituals contained within them and the slang spoken around them, they exhibit what Nora (1989: 19) refers to as a “symbolic aura”. In this way, the shops, as structures of feeling are an articulation of a ‘classness’. They contain symbolisms that break “a temporal continuity” by reaching backwards and forwards within memorialisations to both the past and the present (Erl, 2011: 24). These structures are unstable yet “collectively constructed and reconstructed in the present rather than resurrected from the past... the product of mediation, textualization and acts of communication” (Rigney 2008: 13-14).

Because the pie shops are de-facto working class arenas and because for very specific historic reasons there is scant scriptural memorialisations around them, the memories evoked by them I suspect are more able to be moulded to the present notions of what the past was. In this way certain memorialisations become more consequential for specific groups. Indeed, Ann Rigney (2008: 346) implies that Nora’s *lieux de memoire* are part of a mnemonic process where memory sites are

being constantly reinvested with memory and become a “self-perpetuating vortex of symbolic investment.”

In recent years these symbolic investments have been calcified in a very specific way through innumerable biographies that have sought to chart and celebrate the difficulties of London’s post war generations. Located in the laudable New Left tradition of ‘history from below’, titles like Gilda O’Neil’s *My East End: Memories of Life in Cockney London* (1999), Sally Worboyes’ *East End Girl: Growing Up the Hard Way* (2006) and Melanie McGrath’s *Pie and Mash down the Roman Road* (2018) have narrated a specific sentimentality, largely without wider contexts, that have tried to entrench an orthodoxy of a particular East End that speaks to conformity and the change between the individual, the emergent neoliberal state, manual labour and the challenges of a working class divided by precarity. This has much to do with a “post-war reconfiguration of the built environment that ruptured everyday patterns of life” (Waters, 1999) and can be seen as an attempt to “...slow down information processing, to resist the dissolution of time in the synchronicity of the archive... [and] ... to claim some anchoring space in a world of puzzling and often threatening heterogeneity, non-synchronicity and information overload (Huysen, 1995: 7).

More prosaically though, they can be seen as part of an overtly political reconstruction of ‘ordinariness’ since the mid-1970s came to view the social memory of the ‘other’ in terms of the ‘undeserving’ poor. Crucially as Ben Jones (2012: 124) suggests however, these historical accounts, “were the work of men and women whose own mobility rendered problematic their relationship with the communities they had left behind.” This as much as anything reveals the contestations between working class memory groups within the eel, pie and mash shops not only between London and Essex but between an inter-class division of those who have ‘made it’ and those who have not. More however they have become part of an archive of conservative emotions and patriotic signifiers. Raphael Samuel (2012: 163) conceded as much when he suggested that the project of history ‘from below’ might have actually spurred on the ‘whimsy’ of austerity.

The memorialisations that enmesh the eel, pie and mash shops have sought to mediate and set the agenda for future acts of remembrance within society (Erlil and

Rigney, 2009: 3). This is part of an active process of recollection and retrieval that is largely dependent on the aims of the dominant, hegemonic memory group.

Crucially this might mean that other less influential memory groups, those that for example remember eating with knives (as opposed to spoons) or more presciently those that have more varied multicultural memories of the shops might learn to identify, as Halbwachs (1997: 35-37) has suggested, with the memories of others if that is expedient. These days it is a brave soul that might question the online bullying that surrounds contestations of say, South London's best shop or whether the liquor served was how an emigre to Essex might remember it from his childhood ("I wouldn't serve that to my dog"... "only with a fork and spoon"... "not proper"... "you're not a real cockney").¹⁹⁰ As Robert, a fifth generation Cooke and the owner of the recently opened F. Cooke in Chelmsford, Essex explains if "someone was to come up and say in person 'you've got to turn your pie over' [to eat it]... they'd probably get a slap in the face... my family's been going one hundred years and my granddad never taught me that... it's ignorance... He's probably not from the East End, his Dad probably took him to West Ham, and he's probably been to Maureen's once, right?"¹⁹¹

In this way Rigney (2008: 346) indicates that that once a site has emerged as a focus for remembrance it pulls in a great deal of allied memories. Yet this may still not be enough to heal the rupture between that past and the present and into this void rushes the spirit of nostalgia.

5.4 We've had our jellied eels and our glass of beer

"We escape the trauma of history we happen to be living through by entering the mythic time of the history we didn't." (Mitchell, 2021: 23)

¹⁹⁰ This reproduces the bitter sense that many messages within several Facebook groups evidence around contemporary experience.

¹⁹¹ Maureen's pie shop now associated with West Ham football fans after the demise of Nathan's that was close to the old Upton Park ground.

In the late seventeenth century, a Swiss physician sought to classify and medicalise an affliction that had struck down, amongst others, Swiss mercenaries fighting far from home. Johannes Hofer joined two Greek words, *nostos* (to return home) and *algai* (a painful condition) to give a name to a longing for home that no longer (or perhaps had never) existed (Davis, 1979: 414)

Svetlana Boym (2001) suggests that this 'medical' condition of nostalgia was linked to a changing conception of time itself. Those afflicted by this nostalgia were caught between a largely personal, local conception of time that obeyed the rhythms of the natural world and an imposition of a universal capitalist time that signalled to a teleology of progress. Within modernity, the 'past' became for the first time a quantifiable notion that was "unrepeatable and irreversible" (Boym, 2001: 13). Nostalgia was a mental pause or even retreat from the acceleration of this new temporality.

By the close of the eighteenth century the notion of nostalgia had been overlaid by Romanticism. Here, the emotion of the individual and a cultural longing for nature was set against the dawning of the rapacious machine age. By the middle of the following century, the bourgeoisie had colonised and relocated the centre of this yearning from the individual to the nation and in doing so codified appropriate emotional responses to the extraordinary temporal changes that capitalism had attended. It achieved this partly by parasitically assimilating the pre-industrial *weltanschauung* of the peasantry (and its partial adoption by the landed elites) into an expedient ideology of *real politik* thus colonising and regulating the past as heritage (Boym, 2001: 14). In this way, Trollope ([1875] 1992: 64) could have Mr Cadbury lament that "... we belonged to a newer and worse sort of world." Tennyson however could engage simultaneously in a melancholic nostalgia within a fantastical, folkloric British history and concurrently valorise the achievements of a ravenous, brutal and mechanised Empire.

As the century progressed, one section of the ascendent bourgeois (as one half of the schism within British liberalism) came to view this nostalgia as an impediment to progress, part of a wider degeneracy associated with "defeatism and anti-modernity" (Pickering and Keightley, 2006: 920). The other, what might be called the 'peace,

economy and reform' section of Gladstonian liberalism appeared more sympathetic to the plight of the toiling masses. The character of the largely music-hall constructed cockney identity was partly captured within the divide of this framing. Its historical precursor, the violent abyss figure of middle class alarm, both of the atomised criminal and swarming mob, was reimagined as a cheerful and resilient casualty of inevitable class structure, the collateral damage of the machine age. This notion of nostalgia, coetaneous with modernity and now largely adjacent to the idea of nation was also crucial to how the cockney viewed itself and continues to do so.

Here was a community of largely self-employed, proletarian entrepreneurs striving to scrape a living against a backdrop of brutal poverty and destitution. Inevitably inward-looking, the cockney community had their own largely obscure, selectively hidden customs and traditions but were partially accommodated within capital as reward for their fealty. The archetypal late Victorian cockney was therefore a figure of both pity and (self) respect but also a creation transmuted into a patriotic servant of Empire. This was how the malnourished slum-coster could simultaneously be roused to fight the Boer with a rendition of "Goodbye Dolly Gray" (1897) and weep at the sentimental truth of their own inter-war destitution, "Underneath the Arches" (1932), without necessarily connecting the political linkage behind both that concealed, to paraphrase Fisher (2009), 'the horizons of the possible'.

Loss was always a central motif of the cockney. From the mid-nineteenth century clearing of the streets to *fin de siècle* waves of precarity and the 'moonlight flit' to the destructions of the Blitz to *Steptoe and Son*, the cockney was always a cultural foci for both spatial and temporal deficit. The fragmentary telos of modernity left few spaces for dealing with this loss but nostalgia like a remedial salve, was there to offer comfort. Nostalgia, not always the contemporary saccharine meme could also be an interruption to the present where "memories of past belonging can be used to create a sense of belonging *in* the present if not *to* the present" (Pickering and Knightley, 2006: 921). It could also be called upon in a curative sense to "... provide what the present lacks" (Bal, 1999: 72). It could be found in the singing around the pub piano, the cheer of the football crowd and in the warmth of the pie shop. It can still be found for Mark Wincott who uses the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops

when he's feeling fragile for "... a bit of banter ... talking shit for an hour with other people." ¹⁹²

Cockney nostalgia is realised well within Stuart Albert's (in May, 2017: 402) notion of a 'temporal comparison process' which moves back and forth through time to create "a culturally appropriate sense of a coherent self." In this way, the cockney might find consolation in multiple, palimpsestic nostalgic temporalities: the Victorian father-figure, the wartime Tommy or the sharp-suited Mod. Here, as Stuart Tannock (1995: 456) suggests, nostalgia functions as a search for continuity.

Nostalgia could also map a cockney cartography of the city in a particular and secure way. This was the metropolis invisible to most but layered with glimmers of personal landmarks in a similar way that Georges Perec's 'Places' describe locations in Paris associated with a former girlfriend thus imbued with hidden meaning. These, like the sites of closed pie shops, gentrified pubs and now privately owned council flats, "turn[s] the city into a personalised memorial" nostalgically commemorating what Perec refers to as "dead places that ought to survive" (Bellos in Baker, 2012: 277).

Yet nostalgia is also manipulative, reinforcing the romantic assumption that the cockney's lot was inevitably to suffer. This was the cockney fatalism of the Blitz or the low horizons that some still valorise as part of their heritage. As David H. suggests, "We know what we like, we know what we're used to ... there's not normally anything wrong with tradition, it's when they try to change it..."¹⁹³ In this way the cockney remains simultaneously nostalgic but also trapped by the forces of a nostalgia which had historically viewed it as either a Mrs Mop or a Kray twin cliché. These were the days when you could leave your door open or control "the bad behaviour of children simply through knowing who they were and where they came from" (Watson and Wells, 2005: 26). Yet these were also the days when people often kept their cultural and political preferences hidden for fear of ridicule or ostracism.

¹⁹² Mark Wincott. Interview by author 16 May 2022.

¹⁹³ David H. Interview by author 14 April 2022.

This community nostalgia is shaped by what Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer (2002: 256) call 'postmemory', that is a nostalgia-mediated link to, in Stefan Zweig's (1942) phrase, a lost "world of yesterday" largely transmitted from their parents. Although their work concerns memory traces and nostalgia within the Jewish diaspora after the Holocaust their note that children of exiles and refugees "have very peculiar relationships" to the places from which their families were removed is entirely apposite to the exodic parental transmission (culturally and sensorially) of the landscape of the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops.

In that sense the present-day cockney has been historically marooned between their traditional London and diasporic identities because modernity leaves little room for how the past may "*actively* [my italics] engage with the present and future" (Pickering and Keightley, 2006: 920).

Boym theorises and distinguishes two types of nostalgic tendencies. Firstly, a *restorative* nostalgia which emphasises *nostos* and "recreates the past as a value for the present" (Boym, 2001: 49) and secondly, a *reflective* version which abides in the longing of *algia*, lingering over "... ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time" (Boym, 2001: 41). Whilst the latter points to whimsy within individual (and cultural) memory, the former signals to political action. The latter is painfully captured by Collins (2017: 7) who tells of journeying back to the Southwark streets where he grew up and now walks like an 'ex-pat' to seek out "familiar relics on return trips... to remind ourselves we once existed on streets we now walk as ghosts."

Collins' traditional white working class cockney London has not declined as such, but it has migrated. South London now extends to the Kent coast and The East End stretches far into the bucolic countryside of Essex and sometimes to the flatlands of Norfolk. This displacement has created a real sense of what Tuan (1974) referred to as a rich 'topophilia'; a strong love of place that is imbued with and crucially, reinscribes a cultural identity. Cohen's (2014) interrogation of this cockney diaspora evidenced a dual class trajectory; the 'upward' a 'self-made' entrepreneur who has 'escaped' from the working class by his own volition and the 'downward', exhibiting

what a 'poor whites' syndrome' both valorising with the East End with its former glories.

These diasporic nostalgias are now largely recited in both physical and psychic pilgrimages to sites of former East End life largely buried within the landscape of the neoliberal city which John Clarke (1976) presciently referred to as a "magical recovery of community." The most significant pilgrimage is via that other great consolation of Victorian proletarian life, football. Here, fans travel back into former class territories and visit places affiliated with their club, be that pubs or cafes or eel, pie and mash shops. This is, as (Fawbert, 2011: 181) suggests is community persisting as "communion" through performative re-enactments of cultural tropes like pie and mash before the game.

Ronald Ranta and Yonatan Mendel (2014) submit a group identity may be constructed both around the foods of a particular diet and "the manners and methods, in which [that] food is prepared, commodified and consumed..." The eating of eels, pie and mash as a pre-match ritual has become performative cultural re-enactment of a selective memory-scape based largely within the post-war era, both an historic nod to Bourdieu's 'food of necessity' and, especially with jellied eels, as a 'food of ordeal'. Millwall fans generally congregate at Manze's on Tower Bridge Road and, as did their forefathers, still serenade their team onto the pitch with, "We've had our jellied eels and our glass of beer..." Eels, pie and mash here are revealed as what might be described as a 'local patriotism' (Tuan, 1974: 101) with a national 'referent'. They are of 'Enger-land' but they remain specifically of 'London' - although not necessarily the London of gentrification nor the tastes of multiculturalism in the same way that Catherine Palmer (1988) suggests food cultures can also articulate the boundaries of groups in opposition to the nation in competition to the dominant group. Here, the cockney is cast as a sort of Ulster Unionist in that they on the whole *desire* to be part of the national narrative, continue to evidence their uniqueness and historic loyalty to the nation but remain largely irrelevant to elite culture and the approbation and recognition that may bring.

This trend could be initially evidenced in the violence of West Ham hooligans known as "The Pie and Mash Firm" in the 1990s amidst and against the first flourishings of

the multicultural, managerial, 'audit society' politics of the first Blair government (Power, 1998). Their ironic calling cards advertised their meted-out violence to rival fans as 'liquoring'.¹⁹⁴ This pie and mash iconography built on earlier recruiting by the National Front in the 1970s and the British National Party in the 1980s on the terraces of football grounds across the country. This was evidenced as "... a deep racist sentiment... partly borne from a sense of grievance and perceived betrayal of post-war local authority promises, particularly with regard to housing policies" (Fawbert, 2011: 181).

For some, whiteness had become a badge of a true cockney and "conferred some sort of guarantee and entitlement" (Ware, 2008). Recently fascist groupuscules like the so-called 'Pie and Mash Squad' claim the meal and its surrounding culture as an appellation of whiteness.¹⁹⁵ Birthed from an earlier incarnation of violent football supporters known as Casuals United, they arose as a response to perceived Muslim 'extremists'. More prosaically, 'pie and mash' is a well-known phrase in so-called cockney rhyming slang for 'fash' - fascism. Whilst the vast majority of those that eat and work in the pie and mash shops are certainly *not* racists, it is undeniable that the shops themselves have been associated with and sometimes symbolically arrogated by those who are.

In this way, cockney memory has situated eel, pie and mash within the frame of what DeSoucey (2010: 433) termed, 'gastronationalism'. This was originally theorised as state-level lobbying against a globalising food policy but has also come to signify a grassroots opposition to the forces of gentrification identified by their victims as being "associated with foreigners or out of touch liberal elites who not only do not understand, share or respect local culture and traditions" (Ranta, 2018).

Mennell (1985) suggests that 'national cuisines' coincided with the formation of nation states in the late fifteenth century and the key ingredients of the foods that the eel, pie and mash shops serve have both a national and international perspective. The importance of British beef allegedly goes back to at least the sixteenth century

¹⁹⁴ These calling cards are essentially business cards left with or on the body of a beaten victim. See - <https://www.instagram.com/p/CPJJmwvDezm/?hl=en>

¹⁹⁵ See - <https://www.searchlightmagazine.com/2017/06/a-second-warning-for-antifascists-thousands-on-the-streets-of-london-as-far-right-reorganises/>

and the beef in pies was and remains a nostalgic motif: a connection with the *terroir* of British soil (Rogers, 2003). Menno Spierling (2007: 35) suggests that beef was about “Protestant honesty and simplicity” yet it was also tied to “war, sacrifice and liberty.” These significations became entangled with bourgeois concerns of freedom and in this way, beef could be interpreted by all classes as a coded if ‘banal’ nationalism (Billig, 1995).

This has become so ingrained that, as Jon Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss (2008: 540) contend, “... most of the time, the nation is not something ordinary people talk *about*; rather, it's something they talk *with*.” For the customers of the eel, pie and mash shops it's something that they talk *through*.

The shops were always a foci for displays of cockney loyalty with images of royalty, but this trend became increasingly evident through the years of the Cameron government's policy of austerity with the increasing ‘mundane’ patriotic flowerings of the Union flag and allied symbols of national patriotism (‘Help for Heroes’ badges and poppy collection boxes). As Joanna Tidy (2015: 224) has suggested, this tendency rehabilitated the British military through a “nostalgia that encompassed war, domesticity ... through the commodified discourse ... for all things vintage”.

Indeed, the shops and cockney itself have since this period become situated within a more undisguised narrative of right-wing populism: the food valourised on social media as simultaneously British and London-specific. Online advertising for takeaway delivery from the eel and pie shops with events like St Georges Day and the Queen's Jubilee link opportunities to perform the ‘local’ nation.

5.5 The pie shop archipelago

“Fantasies of the past determined by the needs of the present have a direct impact on the realities of the future. (Boym, 2001; xvi)

As a continuing response to the 2008 financial crisis, the coalition governments of 2010-2015 implemented severe economic austerity policies that had a devastating

effect on public services and the standard of living for most working people (Lupton and Burchardt, 2016).

Owen Hatherley (2016) characterised the attendant cultural response to this as an 'austerity nostalgia' which sought to reclaim post-war privation as an aesthetic liniment to the neoliberal economic assault. This was a partial repetition of the "coded sentimentalities" (Bromley, 1988: 4) of the Second World War used by the Thatcher administrations to anchor the country to an alternative historical reality where the struggles of class, whiteness and empire had never developed. Yet the memories valorised were not simply of the Blitz nor the misty nostalgias of the post-war baby-boomers but those of their parents or even their grandparents. This surreal reconstruction of the hardship of those years was made to 'haunt' the present, deployed as a non-synchronous temporality obscuring a modernity in what Fisher (2014) had referred to as the "return as rupture". Television shows like *Downton Abbey* and *Call the Midwife* extended the Thatcherite siren-call of *Brideshead Revisited* in celebrating even more distant eras where the working classes knew their place.

These yearnings were in a sense a more successful replay of the battles between *The Movement* and *The Angry Young Men* generations within British's pre-and post-war culture. This was a conservative revenge for working class gains during the *Trente Glorieuses* and was, for the cockney, a character desperately unsure of its role within modernity, akin to a "nostalgia for the state of being repressed" (Gilroy 2004: 96-97). The paternal, pubic-spirited authoritarianism of 'we're all in it together', was entirely attractive to the stoic cockney as a historically utile conduit of capital.¹⁹⁶ Adaptive slogans such as "keep calm and eat pie and mash" increasingly appeared to chime with a re-remembered cockney 'common sense' that valorised its own precarious historical frugality and drew a direct (but entirely inappropriate) economic line between 'prudent' domestic budgeting as a patriotic act and national spending.¹⁹⁷ Online advertising for takeaway deliveries coinciding with events like St Georges Day linked opportunities to perform the 'local' nation.

¹⁹⁶ Cameron, David. "Full text of David Cameron's speech". *The Guardian*. 8 October 2009.

¹⁹⁷<https://twitter.com/GoddardsPies/status/1240566210724540416?s=20&t=2bLFygfYhQ0gG372FLP> Sg.

In this reading the eel, pie and mash shops could be seen as reassuringly traditional, cheap and simultaneously patriotic - revived palaces of identitarian comfort and consolation for cockneys steadily relocating to Essex or the Medway towns - an archipelago of East End encampments on the capital's borderlands.

The regressive aesthetic was further simultaneous with a genre of reality television shows like *Benefits Street* that continued to demonise precarious sections of the working class with an increasing moral priority that welfare should be the responsibility of the self-sufficient individual or family, not the community. These notions taken together began to form what Mike Savage, *et al* (2010: 612) had presciently recorded as "... a remaking of British national cultural preferences."

Continuing austerity might also have been seen within the continual necessity of cost-cutting, an enduring narrative of loss. This was a loss of hope, a feeling that had been growing for decades that the political establishment had converged ideologically and no longer spoke to ordinary peoples' experience. This was a vicious circle where "...disenchanted voters become even more cynical about politics and... ever more reliant on markets, debt and the audit to undergird social life" (Davies 2020: 17). Into that void started to drip "volatile forms of political identification" (Flemmen, Magne and Savage, 2017: S235). The form of this was a populist 'common sense' and an insular conservatism predicated on ethnic identity and race.

Historically, as Ruth Levitas (1986) had suggested, the right, unable to access Powellite repatriation had accepted assimilation through the idea of unchanging Englishness. In the 'Seventies this was an imperfect but largely 'bottom-up' process for example, political 'blackness' and grassroots Trades Union activity with social solidarities taking deep roots within popular youth culture. As an interviewee in his 70s who moved from Deptford to Essex recalled about West Indians, "... you got used to 'em because they're with you and I've grown up with 'em... If they treat me alright, I'll treat them alright".¹⁹⁸ Those social structures were broken by the politics of

¹⁹⁸ Name withheld on request. Interview by author 15 May 2022.

the right in the 1980s, replaced by a different kind of top-down multiculturalism more concerned with 'managing' communities rather than shared political struggle (Hall in Proctor, 2000). In the London exit polls for the European elections in 2004, UKIP won two and a half million votes on a platform that Britain was 'full' and 24 per cent of respondents said they might vote for the BNP (John and Margetts, 2009).

After the 2011 (London) riots, the Conservative Prime Minister, David Cameron claimed that multiculturalism as a state policy had "failed".¹⁹⁹ The following year, Theresa May, the Conservative Home Secretary told a newspaper that she wanted to create a "really hostile environment" for irregular migrants.²⁰⁰ This policy, championed by an increasingly emboldened right wing populist press, essentially deputised immigration control "by erecting barriers to healthcare and undermining equality and social cohesion through encouraging xenophobia and racism" (Griffiths and Yeo, 2021; 538). This shifted the conservative discourse of 'race as culture' to 'race as cultural identity' and increasingly fixed all Muslims as the new 'enemy within' (Kundani, 2012). By 2016, nearly four out of ten voters would name immigration as one of the key issues facing Britain (Blinder and Richards, 2016).

Against the global backdrop of the 'War on Terror', *The New East End* (2011), a book based on the classic yet problematic *Family and Kinship in East London* [1957] was published by a New Labour Think Tank. It took the simplistic view that the white working class was being 'bred' out of their traditional home by Bangladeshi Muslims. It was a view that was widely accepted. According to John G. who now eats his pie and mash in Essex, "... they took Bethnal Green and Whitechapel off us... we was the last line."²⁰¹ David H. similarly suggested that he moved to Essex during this period "... because of the blacks... [they] was all moving in and fucking taking over... They were a noisy lot... they smelt and whatever... that's why we wanted to get out."²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ "State Multiculturalism has failed" *BBC TV News*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12371994>

²⁰⁰ Kirkup, James and Winnett, Robert. "Theresa May interview: 'We're going to give illegal migrants a really hostile reception.'" *The Telegraph*, 25 May 2012.

²⁰¹ John G. Interview by author, 5 December 2021.

²⁰² David H. Interview by author, 14 April 2022.

This policy tack sought to tap into a growing populist right conservatism that had allowed Collins (2004) to talk of a ‘forgotten white tribe’ still largely defined by accent, taste and tradition. Whilst the spatial and temporal confusion of the white East Ender, pushed and squeezed by the forces of late capitalism, may have been understandable, it ignored the colonial legacy of migration and the everyday convivialities (Gilroy, 2004) that continual immigration had brought to London (which included the Irish to whom many cockneys trace lineage). It also ignored large-scale, white middle class gentrification of the area, partly the result of Eastenders selling their council homes to move to London’s borders. More, it re-imposed a hierarchy of belonging and the contestable notion of ‘tolerance’ (Wemyss, 2006) that could be withdrawn at any time by the white working class that remained.

Crucially the process started to reinforce a homophily: a connection to cultures that look like ‘us’ and turned a national gaze from Europe to an Anglophone version across the Atlantic (Savage, Wright and Gayo-Cal, 2010: 612). When Teresa May in 2016 spoke about powerful “citizens of nowhere ...in thrall to international elites... who take on cheap labour from overseas...” she conflated conspiracy and immigration and showed that the New Right had understood and used working class frustration.²⁰³

The mood also played into a growing English obsession with Europe posited in a metaphoric phagophobia (fear of swallowing) that surrounded British food identity. Spierling (2007: 44) charts how the EU had allegedly been ‘chipping away’ at British food and recounts regular scare stories in the popular press about Brussels bureaucrats attacking ‘traditional’ British ‘fry-up’ breakfasts with regulations, so “...the Englishman is no longer eating but being eaten (Spierling in Wilson, 2007: 44).” In this way the nostalgic cockney was used as a bulwark against European bureaucracy but also to make sense of white loss and “phantasms of home” (Boym, 2001: 13).

However, it needs to be stated that some of the East End, specifically Bethnal Green as well as Shoreditch and Stepney, had historically been the centre of “racial

²⁰³ <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/full-text-theresa-may-s-conference-speech>

exclusionism” and a “laager” mentality in the form of earlier antisemitism directed towards “alien costermongers” (Husbands: 1982). From the British Brothers League in 1901 to the National Front in the 1970s, the area uncontestedly demonstrated a lineage of far-right vigilantism because it always had been a site of ‘super-diversity’.²⁰⁴ These areas were generally the most deprived in East London and for workers the most precarious with any additional labour at the behest of a changing capital, undercutting wages. They were also areas with large unofficial economies and coster social structures that were relatively weak in the traditional architecture of political, though crucially not cultural, solidarities.

As James Malcolm (2014: 654) suggests the area had become a site of memory “as ‘practice’ - as opposed to memory as fact or essence - history” ignoring the process of colonial whiteness and the fictions of autochthony that blended the Blitz and morality. These palimpsestic nostalgias for a ‘golden age’ traced over each other forming a diasporic memory that continues to link the East End to Essex in a self-perpetuating closed conversation of ‘how it really was’. One of the contemporary sites of those conversations are the new eel, pie and mash shops relocated to the capital’s edges. Here some, but certainly not all, residents talk of how their ‘old’ East End has been ruined by European regulations or how “all the original butchers shops, oil shops, pie and mash shops all got pushed out because of the Asians.”²⁰⁵

By the twenty-tens several simultaneous national processes also converged within the cockney landscape. Firstly, the changing age demographics that were starting to emerge across Britain began to de-link those that were born before the 1970s who grew up with an absence of tertiary education from those who grew up later and who were “dramatically more highly qualified and ethnically diverse” (Sobolewska and Ford, 2020: 22). A further separation was evidenced by a post-war generation with pensions and property who eulogised their own meritocratic rise at a time when the attempts to link economic inequality to neoliberal ‘striving’ had started to degenerate.

²⁰⁴ The BBL had 45000 members stretching from Hackney, Bethnal Green, Shoreditch, Stepney and significantly, Roydon in Essex. For figures see - Husbands, Christopher T. "East End Racism 1900-1980 Geographical Continuities in Vigilantist and Extreme Right-wing Political Behaviour." *The London Journal* 8, 1, 1982: 7.

For ‘super-diversity’ see - Vertovec, 2019: 125-139.

²⁰⁵ Ken (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 20 May 2022.

Against these seemingly intractable differences, one of the few frames of reference for many of the older white working class was a nostalgic return to the securities of the Empire (Satnam and McGeever, 2018). This was now additionally aimed against the free flow of migrant labour from Eastern Europe, allegedly ‘swamping’ and abusing the NHS and Welfare State. This narrative was the result of what might be called identity competition and as Gilroy (2020) would suggest, this particularly post-empire English anxiety stemmed from a realisation that they no longer knew, “... culturally speaking who they are.”²⁰⁶ Brexit, the political machinations to ‘remove’ Britain from globalised influence and re-establish a world that looked very much like the mythologised memories of the generations of the 1950s, became the context of all of these issues. The landscape of this for the cockney was Essex.

For a section of the populist Right, desperate for its vote, Essex became a symbol of an allegedly ‘left behind’ proletariat and indeed every area in Essex voted ‘leave’ and sixty-two per cent of the county backed Brexit.²⁰⁷ Yet, the reality of a singular Essex working class is more complicated. The Essex cockney diaspora is actually evidenced by a dual class trajectory. The ‘downward’ as Cohen (2008) suggests, exhibits the ‘poor whites syndrome’ negatively symbolised by the stereotype of the ‘chav’ and ‘the Essex girl’. The ‘upward’ is the ‘self-made’, self-employed entrepreneur who has ‘escaped’ from the working class by ‘hard work’.

However, for the Essex cockney, these classifications were a contradiction. In May 2019 The Campaign to End Child Poverty calculated that in ten Essex towns almost half of children lived in poverty and in 2020, Basildon was the joint fifth most unequal town in the UK.²⁰⁸ ‘Working class’ was simultaneously a memorialised badge of honour even for the new wealthy whose East London palimpsestic memories gave their own lives and rituals (like eels, pie and mash) validation yet additionally for those ‘who had made it’ (and even some who hadn’t), a mark of shame associated

²⁰⁶ Wade, Francis, “Whiteness just ain’t worth what it used to be,” *The Nation*, 28 October 2020, <https://www.thenation.com/article/culture/paul-gilroy-interview/>

²⁰⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36617396>

²⁰⁸ [https://www.basildon.gov.uk/media/10297/Basildon-Council-Draft-Economic-Growth-Plan-BEGP-2020-24/pdf/Basildon_Council_-_Draft_Economic_Growth_Plan_\(BEGP\)___2020-24.pdf?m=637395816147700000](https://www.basildon.gov.uk/media/10297/Basildon-Council-Draft-Economic-Growth-Plan-BEGP-2020-24/pdf/Basildon_Council_-_Draft_Economic_Growth_Plan_(BEGP)___2020-24.pdf?m=637395816147700000)

with cultural atrophy and welfare. As Gareth Millington (2016: 273) notes, Essex was historically London's "dark place" where the media's fear of an unrestrained, brutish capitalism could be observed and satirised. Here were Simon Heffer's 'Essex Man' caricature of the neo-Neanderthal City boy and Marks and Gran's simpleton consumers, Sharon and Tracey.²⁰⁹ In that sense, Brexit's 'Basildon Man' was simply the latest iteration of that as a ventriloquising of the middle classes' darkest fears. Constant signalling over decades and the hegemonic cultural enveloping of Essex eventually made this myth, compounded by the growing urban deprivation of the New Towns, into reality for many Essex people themselves. This was an acceptance of Brexit within the framing that the cockney had been abandoned by the 'educated elites' and might as well vote in spite; an echo of David Low's 'Churchillian' "Very Well, alone" cartoon. As 'Brian' reported, "We never thought we'd get ... out for all the posh bastards and all the government... but the working man came through."²¹⁰

The myth-that-became-reality was also signalled by the way in which class had been re-interpreted during the 80s and 90s across a post-Fordist, increasingly 'de-aligned' landscape. This led to a growing self-ascription of class (Savage, 2015) within an increasing framing of emotion and morality crucially "marked by memory, place and experience for each generation in a particular moment" (Biressi and Nunn, 2013:16). The Essex cockney largely valorised his 'working classness' within a culture that was defined to a large extent by a whiteness predicated on the created nostalgias of the monoracial East End. During the Brexit campaign, which contrary to assumptions, was not largely a working class revolt (Dorling, 2016), the media used the Essex cockney as "the mechanism by which a defence of nation could be spoken" (Biressi and Nunn, 2013: 148). This was a valorisation of Brexit by the Essex cockney as a popular revolt against 'multiculturalism'.

Here, in the narrative of a popular uprising, 'the people' were "a monoracial singularity" (Begum, Mondon and Winter, 2021: 223). In fact, Essex although still largely white, it is increasingly home to ethnic populations migrating from London.

²⁰⁹ Heffer, Simon. *Sunday Telegraph*. Heffer, Simon. "Maggie's Mauler: profile of Essex Man". *Sunday Telegraph*, 7 October 1990.

Marks, Laurence and Maurice Gran. *Birds of a Feather*. BBC TV, 1989-1998.

²¹⁰ Brian (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 14 May 2022.

Yet as Stephanie Lawler (2005: 430) has suggested, the working class has become “*emblematically* white even if this is contrary to its lived complexity.” In this reading non-white members of the working class are valorised by the “liberal, cosmopolitan elite (Hobolt, 2016) revealing a “deep sense of a loss of prestige” (Virdee and McGeever, 2018: 1811) amongst the *indigene*. This increasingly underpins claims of white victimhood (Begum, Mondon and Winter, 2021) evidenced by ‘Tony’ from Romford who “has worked my whole life, so if anybody tells me I’m privileged, I’ll just spit in their eye because it’s...woke nonsense.”²¹¹ As ‘Ken’ attests of Wickford where he has lived for twenty years since moving from the East End, “We’ve got our own kind down here... We’re probably trying to recreate what we had. Without all the blacks and all the others spoiling it.”²¹²

The borders between the East End and Essex are fluid: many people who now live in Essex commute into the capital to work and may have relatives who still live in their areas of origin. Some towns like Basildon though are, as Mark Wincott who still lives in Poplar observes, “...third generation Essex... pie and mash is a comfort for them [and] the only time they have it is when they go [to] West Ham.”²¹³ This is cockney identity based on a “simultaneous presence and absence” (Watt, Millington and Huq, 2014: 127). The diaspora cockney, I assert, is created through a kind of ‘call and response’ (Gilroy, 1993) where identity can be lost and found again and eel, pie and mash forms part of what calls *adhaan*-like from that lost re-imagined land.

These however are not totalising narratives: most white people in the East End or Essex are certainly not racists but the politically expedient narratives created around them fix them in ways that they are defined by their ‘lack’ (McKenzie, 2015). Most, like Jean in her 70s in her Bethnal Green flat *do* bemoan that “everything down Brick Lane is all Bengali” because it is historically a repository of poor immigrant communities that is culturally different to hers. But of her Bengali neighbours, she says, “You know, they’re really nice... when it was Ramadan, they was always

²¹¹ ‘Tony’(real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 25 May 2022.

²¹² ‘Ken’ (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 20 May 2022.

²¹³ Mark Wincott. Interview by author 16 May 2022.

sending food in and everything”.²¹⁴This is the real ‘conviviality’ of modern London in which different metropolitan groups might dwell in diverse contexts (Gilroy, 2004).

This emergent contemporary conviviality is however increasingly and inevitably modifying the language of cockney itself. According to Paul Kerswill and Eivind Torgesen (in Hickey, 2017), until the late nineteenth century, most migration had been from the south of England and linguistic changes resulting from contact were difficult to find. According to Eva Sivertson (1960), even mass Jewish immigration around the turn of the century did not much disrupt the cockney dialect, merely adding some additional Yiddish words. Yet, post-war immigration, largely from former British colonies like Jamaica, meant that by the 1980s, a discernibly new street sound was evidenced and “young Afro-Caribbeans [like the artist Smiley Culture] could clearly code switch between patois and local English. The local English itself ... [was] ... very much of its time, a mainstream *variety* [my italics] of cockney” (Sebba in Cheshire 2011: 160).

Linguistic adaption however has accelerated enormously in the intervening thirty years. Traditional cockney areas for example, Hackney, largely as the result of immigration from the wider Developing World, is now home to speakers of at least eighty-nine different languages.²¹⁵ In areas like this where there is a large linguistic pool to draw from language changes and mutates constantly.

Sali Tagliamonte and Alexandra D’Arcy (in Cheshire, 2011) suggest that it is the late adolescent age group that selects and edits language in a largely informal way according to their friendship groups often “using forms resulting from their imperfect learning of the target language.” Certainly, the resulting linguistic patchwork owes much to black youth culture evidenced through commercially successful genres of rap and hip-hop and is referred to by sociolinguists as Multicultural London English (MLE).²¹⁶ As Jenny Cheshire *et al* (2011: 164) have it, “the vernacular baseline has changed from one which was largely cockney in the 1980s to a variant of MLE today.” Indeed, Paul Kerswill (2013: 133) suggests that London children do not

²¹⁴ Jean Sanchez. Interview by author, 17 May 2022.

²¹⁵ <https://hackney.gov.uk/knowning-our-communities>

²¹⁶ See - Fox, 2015.

“straightforwardly acquire the localised ‘cockney’ vernacular, even if their parents might be speakers.”

Recent research (Cole, 2021) into phonetic variation in the Essex town of Debden, site of the original relocations from Bethnal Green, has indicated that cockney, as a speech pattern, has become less popular among the children of the Thatcher generation. According to her study, older Debden residents still largely ‘speak’ and identify as cockney whereas younger people see the identity as geographically rooted in *East London*. Crucially, they consider their accent to be ‘Essex’. The author suggests that this is potentially because of cockney’s association with “low social status” and that ‘improper’ speech has been seen as an impediment to “social evaluation[s] and... greater social mobility” (Cole, 2020: 259-260). This would indeed be congruent to an increased valorisation of a specific modern Essex character that takes its cue largely from celebrity and consumerism. My own interviews, specific to eel and pie shops across both London and wider parts of Essex would seem to indicate a more mixed picture yet undoubtedly, there is a conflict around the notion of what cockney, both as a linguistic form and an identity, currently signifies; what it was and what it will become.

The axis of that is certainly age and amongst younger people, a partial turn from whiteness and a partial re-identification, after the 2008 financial crash and widespread gentrification, with the idea of class.²¹⁷ Indeed, in a recent video for his latest single, *Blessings*, the cockney rapper Tommy B, 25, is seen performing in the newly opened F. Cooke’s pie and mash shop in Chelmsford, Essex. In it, he woos a mixed-race girl with a cockney peppered by (largely) Caribbean patois inflections common to contemporary, *Grime* music. He is also seen (ironically) at the wheel of the iconic three-wheeled van from *Only Fools and Horses* accompanied by a stereotypical ‘Essex girl’. For him, as a young, modern cockney, age, class and race are linked.

²¹⁷ For a discussion of the re-evaluation of class in contemporary politics amongst the young see - Milburn, 2019.

I think that our generation is totally different. If one of my pals is being racist, I'm like, that's just backwards... it's outdated, it's expired... for me I realise that I have much more in common with a black boy that's come from fuck all than with fucking 'Sebastian' who is white and has grown up with a great life. Same thing with the Eastern Europeans or the Asians... and they're all working class people.²¹⁸

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to show how the personal, sensory memorialisations of the cockney have become synchronous with larger cultural and political ones. Always meaningful as *de facto* working class spaces of pride and community, their role in the past few decades has changed concomitant with the cockney's problematic procession into modernity.

Through its historic demonisation by New Labour and growing rage at its long, slow cultural disintegration the traditional cockney, for so long the loyal hostage-servant of the elites, has come to represent what Gilroy (2005: 132) noted at the tail-end of Empire were the "widening fissures in British society".

The eel, pie and mash shops have become both a sanctuary and anchorage for their culture and a key signifier for memories deeply entrenched in the East End subconscious. These spaces for the ritual invocation of working classness are uniquely powerful because they rely on personal sensory memorialisation of a food based on comfort which holds within it the cockney's origin story.

The shops have become a palimpsestic enticement for multiple and myriad memories of London working class life whose contestations into a living, performed script change and settle according to the needs of the contemporary memory epoch.

Currently, this landscape is largely dominated by the memorialisations of a post-war generation whose cultural compass is fixed to a nostalgic embellishment of wartime

²¹⁸ Tommy B. Interview by author, 25 March 2022.

austerity concomitant with a hegemonic signalling of a particular kind of monocultural conservatism. Some of these memorialisation are fabled within the mythscape of a multi-era cockney from the registers of a 'jellied eel London' (Sinclair, 2004). They are rosy depictions of poverty from unreliable autobiography and the confluence of "glimmers" of working class authenticity (Beswick, 2020) found in kitchen-sink dramas and gangster films.

These problematic recollections have been re-created throughout the cockney diaspora in pie shop simulacra's that are, in effect, *lieux de memoire* (Nora, 1989). Here a new cockney is being birthed, fed from memories from simultaneous temporalities with contestations around multiculturalism and age within the neoliberal city.

6. Conclusion

“Nothing becomes romanticised so much as memories, both individual and collective, about food and drink” (Mathias, 1967: 17)

6.1 Overview

This thesis has for the first time explored and examined the unwritten history of London’s iconic but fast-disappearing eel, pie and mash shops and additionally interrogated their cultural conduit, the changing and concomitant notion of the cockney identity. In doing so I have addressed an absence in research around these spaces and the communities that use them who, in turn, have been largely forgotten or ignored but whose contested memories and identity I argue have great contemporary political and cultural resonance in an age of populism and Brexit.

My work has excavated a tracing around these absences in historical literature, synthesising existing scholarship and applying new research to extend their relevancy. I have utilised memory theory, sensory ethnography and semi-structured interviews to explore the shops and those who use them as temporal anchorages within the neoliberal city and the Essex hinterlands. This thesis has contextualised the shops’ development, not within any contemporary family dynasty as is commonly held, but as part of a much earlier historical process centred around the greater mobility of labour during early modernity, concurrent with the ideological and cultural accession of a bourgeoisie whose rise was a synchronous dance with an emergent London proletariat.

6.2 Summary by chapter

My first chapter proves that these enterprises were part of an earlier, established trade than previously recorded. I link for the first time within them a simultaneity to suggest that they were synchronous to both the dying breath of an older, popular

street culture, of which the roving pieman was part, and to the withdrawal of the middle classes from areas that came to be dominated by the urban poor.

The exact fare and presentation of these early shops remains somewhat unclear, and I argue that they became increasingly defined by the class-demotion of their clientele that mirrored the changing cartography of the city. By the mid-nineteenth century the pie shops were no longer places that gentlemen might frequent. Rather, depending on their hyper locality, the shops were feeding tradesmen, the petit bourgeois and some of London's market-adjacent poor. By the turn of the twentieth century the now pie and mash shops have become a cultural cornerstone of those who almost exclusively identify themselves as working class.

In describing this process, I have employed the biological notion of a taxon to illustrate their evolution in tandem with other lower class eating places as increasing responses to hunger, precarity and the changing work-discipline of industrial capitalism (Thompson, 1967).

I argue a new London working class culture, defended within dual notions of freedom and respectability and centred largely around unofficial markets and desperate resistances to poverty, came into conflict with bourgeois attempts to physically and ideologically control the capital's streets. It was these populations, contributing to the emergence of a distinct and unique London character that became integral to the customer base of the emergent eel and pie shops. By the early twentieth century the (now) eel, pie and mash shops had become numerous but, I suggest, were confined within largely matrilineal, hyper-local social solidarities based around micro-class divisions of work and codes of propriety that remained largely impenetrable to outsiders.

My second chapter defines the eel and pie shops through the contested evolution of the character that became known as cockney. I trace its pre-modern roots to suggest that it became a metaphor for the interplay between the powerful and the powerless.

During early Victorian modernity, I argue the performativity of the cockney was both an escapist pantomime that simultaneously aped, celebrated and satirised the

appearance of the elites and a dramatic identity informed by street commerce (Jankiewicz, 2014). This identity I suggest was a consolidation of an older, carnivalesque street culture and a new London-specific working class personality, re-inscribed as both comic and criminal within the moral framework of bourgeois morality. I relate the fascination and fear of this character within the twin nodes of Victorian liberalism that sought to meld the potentially revolutionary cockney of the 'abyss' into a figure of imperial incorporation and suggest additionally that the eel and pie shops became central to a hyper-local and largely shielded culture of working class consolation (Steadman Jones, 1974). I utilise Hall's (1973) work on hegemonic messaging to clarify the creation of a particular type of 'ordinariness' through a bourgeois theatrical ventriloquising of the coster community and this I argue continues to be periodically valorised according to its usefulness to capital at times of political stress.

My third chapter continues to chart the trajectory of the cockney and the culture of eel and pie shops beyond the rubble of the Blitz but returns to the era of New Imperialism to contextualise the cockney identity within the notion of whiteness and empire. I argue that the reframing of the nation as a racial singularity (and the eventual franchise extension) marked a fundamental shift by the elites from overt repression to a more consensual vision of hegemony. Further, I suggest this signalled to subsequent 'entitlements' of East London's white population (especially) around the gains of the Welfare State and a national economy. I argue that these entitlements are memorialised in the contemporary imagination of a largely mono-racial, hyperlocalism to which the eel, pie and mash shops are, to a large extent a spiritual refuge.

I link the destruction of traditional cockney territoriality by zonal redevelopment, gentrification and exodus to the allied decline of social structures simultaneous to the identity's contested relationship with modernity. I further argue that housing and its allocation was central to the *ressentiment* towards mass immigration and the hastening of the transmission (and simulacra) of the cockney identity outward towards (especially) Essex and its 'dual class trajectories' (Watt, Millington and Huq, 2014). The delineations of these I suggest are central to cockney's internal, inner-

world contradictions and negotiations between its working class and petty bourgeois nodes.

Rather than the suggestion that the cockney disappeared in the post war period (Stedman Jones, 1989), I argue that the identity simultaneously continued its role as a nostalgic conduit to capital but evolved multiple valences that spoke to an increasing emphasis on popular culture, age, choice and individuality (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2018) further complicating its continued existence as a palimpsestic construction.

My fourth chapter examines the sights, sounds and smells of a contemporary eel, pie and mash shop utilising a sensory ethnography.

I clarify the shops as a unique site of hyperlocal, working class territoriality that utilises ritual as a zone of resistance to the modern neo-liberal city. These rituals I suggest have, through the senses, become mythologised and coded and part of the 'true archives' (De Certeau, 1998) of the remnants of a working class city. They link hospitality, conviviality and memory which have been inscribed within and upon and the bodies of the customers (Connerton, 1989).

I argue that the formulation of the food served in the shops is unique and antithetical to the 'rules' (Douglas, 1975) of a British working class meal and that the eel is now largely the object of demographic, age and class-based notions of disgust relevant to the changing notions of cockney which sees its limited consumption as a 'food of ordeal'.

My thesis suggests that the shops are arenas of a specific and historic working class respectability and a temporary refuge from dominant forms of cultural production. I argue that the shops contain and generate their own notions of taste and are a negotiation with the hegemonic culture. I offer that the shops are a unique insight into the changing notions of taste, class and inter-class contestation within the convivialities of a closed, almost secretive heritage of proletarian culture.

My final chapter interrogates the complex memories that populate the shops and the communities that use them.

I suggest that these memorialisations are myriad inscriptions that partly derive from the historic specificity of London and potentially include early capitalist notions of conviviality as well as the faint cultural mnemonics of nineteenth century working class privation, defeat and accommodation which led to them as zones of consolation. I argue that the shops and their memorialisations are additionally complicated within the simultaneous remembrances of a separate owner and customer class which meld around a notion of an entrepreneurial proletarianism. This includes a largely white precariat who valorise their historic social solidarities within a hyper-local cartography against a backdrop of immigration, globalisation and the forces of gentrification. In addition, these accompany the re-imagined, performative and simulacra-like memorialisations of the so-called cockney diaspora (largely) within Essex. I refer to these multiple, simultaneous and competing memories as polyphonic. The memory scripts that are performed within the eel, pie and mash shops, allied to the palimpsestic cockney identity and its cultural and geographic dislocation, are overwhelmingly nostalgic and melancholic. I argue that these narratives and reconstructions of the past are and remain concomitant to the needs of capital.

Currently, I suggest, these scripts fall between a cultural and communicative memory (Assmann, 2010) of a post-war generation that dimly recall as children the legacy of wartime privation and mass colonial immigration. It is, I argue, this generation's sketchy memorialisations and political framings of the Second World War, that now sit with a melancholia around the loss of the fantasy of a British omnipotence crystallised as a post-colonial nostalgia. Here, I offer, a bitter confusion at the ending of the *Trente Glorieuses* (and the part enabling of a neoliberal embrace via Thatcherism) and a monocultural conservatism reified as a 'common sense', hold the key to deciphering much of the structure of contemporary 'populist' politics, the contestations of Brexit and the so-called 'culture wars'.

6.3 The unseen

“There are certain areas of London that I suspect retain their integrity and beauty only by becoming invisible” (Moorcock, 2000: 180).

Underlying this thesis has been the question of why these spaces and the culture contained within them been rendered near historically invisible. I have in the introduction, suggested that part of that unseeness is the result of both the class positioning of those who have tried to tell the story of London’s working class but also a defensive habitus which surround the shops, the result of historic cultural repression. Elsewhere, I have also pointed to what I suggest is a lack of exchange value in the shops and their fare for a gentrifying bourgeois audience which contrasts to the treatment of spaces like public houses (so-called gastro-pubs), the upmarket selling of dishes like fish and chips and also the ‘traditional’ comfort food and décor of re-imagined ‘working man’s’ cafés. All of these have been concomitant with either renewed historical interest or re-mapping of these enterprises to suit more middle class tastes. The eel, pie and mash shops, often linked with insular communities associated with unfashionable attitudes to cultural change and historically demonised in mainstream culture have, however, remained unassailable and untranslatable outside of their class habitat.

This unseeness may also have its partial roots in the evolution of the cockney communities themselves. The shops and their food, long associated with proletarianism, parents and pastness, increasingly sat uncomfortably with an upwardly mobile, aspirational generation ironically birthed within the working class modernity of the ‘fifties, ‘sixties and ‘seventies who became (partly) valorised by the neoliberal retrenchment from the Thatcher project onwards. In that sense, the shops retain something of the comic, performative origins of the Victorian cockney often reproduced in mainstream culture as an object of anachronistic derision. I argue that for many to whom the shops were an inevitable class heritage, these factors combined to form a kind of complex embarrassment.

More, the shops and the food were historically contained within a distinct collective habitus formed through historical work forms and associated patterns of community

life that have been largely destroyed. The melancholic valorising of this is a central contradiction at the heart of the cockney identity.

In recent years, largely synchronous with the privations of austerity, the notion of class has strongly reasserted itself within Britain. This has been additionally concomitant to a 'populist' political reaction against both a breakdown of a two-party class-aligned political system and a managerial-professional class largely associated with 'progressive' values centred around the EU and 'centrist' politics.

For many, the pie and mash shops that held traditional class allegiances have become somewhat of a symbol for opposition to this hegemony and have been increasingly celebrated, via selective memorialisation, especially on social media, as arenas of reasserted, traditional 'working classness'. Whilst the ascriptions, subtleties and confusions around those who claim to be (historically) working class are beyond the scope of this work, it is incontestable that as the handful of London's traditional pie and mash shops fade and close, the numbers relocating or indeed appearing for the first time in Essex and other places of London diaspora as simulacra, are multiplying.

6.4 The palaces of comfort and consolation

This thesis has argued that the eel, pie and mash shops are a crucial but historically unexamined arena of London working class life.

These spaces I have argued, remain an unmitigated, unpretentious, authentic loci of a culture born of the need for sustenance and conviviality; the food served within, a code for a complex but contested ordinariness.

Central to these spaces is the allied but equally contested identity of the cockney recollected through what I have referred to as polyphonic memorialisations. These I suggest are not merely palimpsestic in a linear sense but rather the result of multiple junctures of memory and identity traces that may be usefully illustrated by Michel Serres' (1995: 60) concept of the handkerchief. This speaks analogously to an image of 'pleated time' - a multi-temporality of history where an ironed handkerchief, once

flat (representing definite and stable historical co-ordinates) is crumpled rendering historically distant points "... close, or even superimposed". In this way cockney, by the mid-twentieth century, consisted of (amongst many others) mediaeval notions of urbanity, eighteenth century assumptions around developing petit-bourgeois ascendancy, nineteenth century Irish immigrant entrepreneurial anti-authoritarianism and late Victorian propaganda around race and empire.

The contemporary cockney, no longer defined by a traditional territoriality, race or even necessarily dialect is, I offer, a reservoir of identities. These might be mixed and matched according to personal need, historic cultural obligation or contemporary political requirements.

The polestar of this identity, especially for the diasporic cockney, remains a recently reinvigorated cultural symbol: the final taxon of a nineteenth century feeding station, frozen in time, hidden in plain sight and largely forgotten. A space inscribed by responses to hunger, conviviality and early working class notions of respectability forged in a culture of consolation.

In this way, cockney is now I propose more akin to a structure of feeling, an affective but contested landscape of emotion and evolving cultural signifiers caught between past certainties of a largely monoracial, national identity and the challenges of a globalised world.

This is a complex identity, perilously mapped. It is culturally working class but increasingly held in tension with an aspirational, interstitial and precarious petty bourgeoisie respondent to the nostalgic populism of a reimagined post-war landscape.

Cockney is an identity haunted by a melancholy and phantasms of a time which has passed, its eel, pie and mash shops are as Cynthia Cruz (2021: 58) suggests, "filled with the aura of what previously defined them".

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Appendix



Fig.1. Shepherd, Frederick Napoleon. "View of building in Fleet Street, with Blanchard's premises and figures on pavement".



Fig.2. Olive Malvery serving in a cheap coffee house, early 1900s.



Fig. 3. Kennington, Eric. "The coster mongers" 1914.

Interviews

Name	Location	Position	Date of Interview	Location of Interview
Arment, Rita	London	Pie shop owner	20/11/2019	virtual
Arment, Roy	London	Pie shop owner	16/11/2019	virtual
B, Tommy	London	Customer	25/03/2022	virtual
Boutall, Adam	London	Customer	19/10/2021	virtual
Bradley, John	Essex	Customer	25/06/2022	virtual
Burrows, Tim	Essex	Author/Customer	15/06/2022	in person
Brian (alias)	Essex	Customer	22/06/2022	virtual
Camp, Greg	Essex	Pie shop owner	10/05/2021	virtual
Clunn, Chris	Wales	Customer	17/02/2022	in person
Cole, Amanda	Essex	Academic	05/04/2022	virtual
Cooke, Chris	Warks.	Pie shop owner	17/11/2020	in person
Cooke, Joe	London	Pie shop owner	01/03/2020	in person
Cooke, Kim	London	Pie shop owner	07/03/2020	in person
Cooke, Robert	Essex	Pie shop owner	10/09/2021	virtual
Errol, Eileen	Essex	Customer	22/10/2021	in person
Ford, Nicola	Essex	Pie shop worker	12/06/2022	virtual
Furnham, David	Sussex	Director	21/02/2022	virtual
H, David (alias)	Essex	Customer	14/04/2022	virtual
Kelly, Paul	Essex	Pie shop owner	15/12/2020	in person
Ken (alias)	Essex	Customer	22/06/2022	virtual
Malone, Johnny	Essex	Pie shop owner	15/06/2022	In person
O'Carroll, Steven	Essex	Customer	22/06/2022	virtual
Poole, Graham	London	Pie shop owner	16/09/2021	In person
Sanchez, Jean	London	Customer	25/10/2022	virtual
Sanchez, Johnny	Kent	Customer	01/11/2022	virtual
Wincott, Mark	London	Pie shop owner	05/11/2022	virtual

The Palaces of Comfort and Consolation -

The Pie and Mash shop as a performative space of a contested
London working class memory.

Stuart Freedman

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of
Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2023

Abstract

This thesis seeks to interrogate and clarify the history and culture of London's traditional but fading and largely forgotten eel, pie and mash shops. In doing so the work examines their cultural conduit, the adjacent and evolving identity of the cockney whose contested memoryscapes have, I suggest, great contemporary political and cultural relevance in an age of populism and Brexit.

The work excavates a tracing around the shops' absences in historical literature. It situates their establishment within the dying breath of an older, popular street culture and the birth of a new London working class, centred around unofficial street markets and in a synchronous dance with the ideological accession of the bourgeoisie.

The thesis employs the biological notion of a *taxon* to illustrate the shops' evolution largely defined by the class-demotion of their clientele that mirrored the changing cartography of the city. By the late nineteenth century, this work argues, the eel and pie shops had become a pillar of a respectable London working class culture whose hyper-local solidarities revolved around micro-class divisions of work and negotiated bourgeois codes of propriety as part of a 'culture of consolation' that has remained largely impenetrable to outsiders.

The study explores this concomitant cockney identity which became, partly through bourgeois theatrical ventriloquising, a figure of imperial incorporation. This eventually came to represent a particular type of 'ordinariness', subsequently reconfigured around the gains of a Welfare State and a national economy that continues to be periodically valorised according its usefulness to capital at times of political stress.

Utilising sensory ethnography and memory studies the work explores the landscape and territoriality of the contemporary eel, pie and mash shop. It interrogates the rituals and complex, often competing and polyphonic memory inscriptions which memorialise a largely post-colonial nostalgic melancholia around the loss of fantasy

of a British omnipotence. The thesis argues that the shops and their simulacra-like reincarnations amongst the cockney diaspora in the Essex new towns offer an insight into the changing notions of taste and class within the convivialities of a unique but broadly closed heritage of proletarian culture as a zone of resistance in the neoliberal city.

Contents

Contents	iii
Acknowledgements	vi
Author Declaration	vii
Definitions	viii
Methodology	x
Introduction	1
Overview	1
1.1 A walk down the Broadway	2
1.2 (uncharted) History from below	4
1.3 Co-ordinates	8
1.3.1 History	8
1.3.2 Identity	10
1.3.3 Food Culture	13
1.3.4 Memory	15
1.4 Chapters	17
Chapter 1. Origins	22
Introduction	22
1.1 Monstrous Wen	24
1.2 “What has become of the pieman?”	26
1.3 Through a plate glass window of respectability	33
1.4 Food as cipher	41
1.5 Hunger and the ‘Great Unwashed’	44
1.6 Eating out and translatable spaces	49

1.7 Defeat and the culture of consolation	54
1.8 Cat's meat and glue for the gravy	56
1.9 Modernity, space and identity	59
Conclusion	62
Chapter 2. The Theatre of the Cockney	65
Introduction	65
2.1 The cockney in history	67
2.2 Dickens and the descent of the cockney	73
2.3 The Music Hall as distorting mirror	76
2.4 The coster confusion	79
2.5 The character refined	82
2.6 The character reflected back	84
2.7 The Pearlies	87
2.8 Modernity, ordinariness and the first decline of the cockney	90
2.9 The cockney keeps calm and carries on	97
2.10 Disillusionment and the spoils of war	100
Conclusion	105
Chapter 3 The Defensive Trench of Empire	108
Introduction	108
3.1 The 'whitening' of the London working classes	110
3.2 From the terrace to the tower block	119
3.3 The kids are alright	129
3.4 The unmodern	138
Conclusion	146
Chapter 4 Tastes and Space of Resistance	149
Introduction	149
4.1 Resistances from a stubborn past	150
4.2 No mate, this is a pie shop...	156
4.3 Too heavy to steal	162
4.4 The lower classes smell	164
4.5 The eel and the East Ender	169

4.6 A Regime of Disgust	174
4.7 A Working Class Taste and Space	178
Conclusion	184
Chapter 5 The Cockney Saudade	187
Introduction	187
5.1 “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are”	189
5.2 “Nothing tastes as good as the past”	202
5.3 Don’t mention the War...	210
5.4 We’ve had our jellied eels and our glass of beer	217
5.5 The pie shop archipelago	224
Conclusion	235
Conclusion	237
6.1 Overview	237
6.2 Summary by chapter	237
6.3 The unseen	242
6.4 The palaces of comfort and consolation	243
Bibliography	246
Appendix	309

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To my three parents, I hope I've done you proud.

Thanks to Joe and Kim Cooke and all the shop owners and customers who generously allowed me to interview them and record their thoughts and memories here.

I hereby declare that all of the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Stuart Freedman, 11 April, 2023

Definitions

This thesis contains some problematic terms which I will briefly define.

White Working Class

I use this particular descriptor because I can find no suitable alternative. This simple designation in physical terms on the one hand refers to the historical constituency of the eel and pie shops that I write about. On the other however, I realise that it has become a very loaded term. It is increasingly a code for a 'forgotten white tribe' (Collins, 2014) that concentrates on race rather than class position and plays to the latest narrative that multiculturalism has 'failed'. More it seeks to erase those members of the British working class that are non-white, falsely pitting them against those who are. This ignores the overwhelming evidence that inequality is a complex matrix of simultaneous social, economic and structural disadvantages and that ultimately, as my thesis recounts, the British working class were 'made' white to reframe the nation as a racial singularity (Bonnett, 1998, Virdee, 2014). In all of this is the resurgent nostalgia for empire and at its heart the fear of miscegenation and loss of identity.

Bourgeois/Middle Class

I use these terms interchangeably throughout the thesis and follow Raymond Williams' (1983: 45-49) difficulty in employing the notion of 'bourgeois' in a British context of 'upper', 'middle' and 'working class'. However, my usage coincides with his in pointing to the idea that bourgeois is a cultural distillation of an ideological hegemonic ruling class that came to dominate Britain in the nineteenth century.

Popular Modernity

This derives from Mark Fisher's (2014: 23) work on culture. It refers to a dialectic that sits between the current and the experimental. Although Fisher usually employed

this critically in terms of popular music, I use it more widely to capture the cultural moment from the 1960s until its defeat by the forces of neoliberalism in the 1980s, that saw elements of the British working class emboldened by post-war educational gains to make culture and to valorise that culture as 'ordinary'.

Saudade

This Portuguese word signals to a nostalgic longing for something that is lost. I use it to partly describe the contemporary memory script of the cockney, always I suggest a nostalgic creature in its late nineteenth century music hall iteration. There seems to be no English word that captures this kind of longing, but many other cultures have this concept, notably the Welsh with their notion of *hiraeth*.

Methodology

Given the almost complete absence of historical and sociological work concerned with London's fading eel, pie and mash shops, I decided early on to employ what might be called a panoptical approach. This was an attempt to address the subject matter from several simultaneous disciplinary angles in order to identify and clarify the significance of the shops, both in terms of their origins but also their contemporary meanings. My compass points were largely but not exclusively historical, sociological and (sensorially) ethnographic utilising extensive field work and a core of semi-structured interviews from different shops and customer communities that reflected the geographic spread of the enterprises.

The first objective in my research plan was to excavate the historical processes that led to the emergence of the shops and placing them in wider cultural and social contexts. I used existing scholarship (Thompson, 2013 *et al*) to trace the process of change in class structure, emanating from transitions in clientage, to delineate an interstitial class of London traders revealed in the role of pastry cooks that catered to a changing city.

I used numerous contemporary accounts of the city from this period (Heine in Stigand, 1875; Pückler-Muskau, 1832; Smith, 1857; Sala, 1859 *et al*) and contemporary scholarship (Bailey, 1997; Spang, 2001; Mennell, 2003; Tames, 2003; Winter, 2013; Assael, 2018) to contextualise and chart the evolving culture of the city.

However, at the same time I wanted to address the accepted and conventional narrative of the beginnings of the shops in the popular imagination. All of the meagre, contemporary, 'populist' writings on the shops (Clunn, 1995; Smith, 1995; Hawkins, 2002) seemed to (incorrectly) suggest that a venture owned by Henry Blanchard at 101 Union Street in Southwark and opened in 1844 was the primogenitor of all the current enterprises in an unbroken gustatory tradition.

My primary source work utilised *Kelly's Post Office Directories* and *Pigot's Trades Directories* at the London Metropolitan Archives which merely ascertained that this was indeed the first shop 'recorded' as an eel and pie house. The vagaries of the listings of eating places in the directories have been well documented (Assael, 2018) and indeed an image in the London Metropolitan Archives main print collection (see Fig.1 in appendix) clearly showed a Blanchard's pie house in the more salubrious location of Fleet Street in a watercolour that dated from 1835.

I made extensive use of the British Newspaper Archive at the British Library to examine newspaper texts and crucially, advertisements that predated the Kelly's entry by several years. I used these figures to suggest the rents referred to, suggested a capital investment achievable only by a strata of the lower middle classes. I utilised this resource to exhaustively chart mentions of pie shops and their concomitant identity within emergent cockney culture until the early twenty-first century.

I further used census material (both via London Metropolitan Archives and Ancestry online) to excavate Henry Blanchard's family records and additionally retrieved similar records for the Cooke, Antinks and Manzi families via resources from British History Online, part of the Institute of Historical Research at the University of London. Booth's Poverty maps were accessed via the LSE digital library.

In terms of food history and adulteration I researched, via the British Library, contemporary journals (amongst many others, *The Caterer and Hotel Proprietor's Gazette*, *The Hotel Review and Catering & Food Trades Gazette*, *The Coffee Tavern Gazette*, *The Journal of Food Thrift* and *The Anti-Adulteration Review, Food and Sanitation*). I utilised several modern PhDs (via the LSE, the University of East London and Essex Libraries) to chart the city's gustatory and linguistic histories and interrogated the Bishopsgate Institute and The Hackney Archives for fragmentary references to the shops.

I utilised period literature (especially Dickens) and modern scholarship (Stedman Jones, 1971, 1974 and 1989) to chart the city's changing identities, interrogating the historical cockney as well as its relationship to the music hall.

I focussed especially on two periods of literature: that of the Cockney Novelists and the post-war London novel to chart a cockney modernity as well as the more recent writing of Sinclair and Moorcock. I drew on a wide variety of filmic cultural products (from cockney 'kitchen sink' dramas to documentary) for which I extensively utilised the British Film Institute Library. For artworks, I utilised London Picture Archive, the London Metropolitan Archives and the Réunion des Musées Nationaux (Paris).

My experiences during the course of this research were crystallised within a sensory ethnography contained within the F. Cooke shop on Hoxton Street over numerous and extended visits. The work has been additionally informed by my own personal memorialisations around the culture from which I come and my own past memorialisations of several (now largely closed) shops. Additionally, I drew on one my own previous books about the shops (*The Englishman and the Eel*, 2017).

I have extensively used social media, especially Facebook (especially groups that centre around London memory communities including Bethnal Green and pie and mash), Twitter and Instagram to interrogate contemporary memorialisations of the culture that surrounds the shops and the evolving identity of cockney.

Finally, the cornerstone of this thesis has been interrogations of personal history and memoryscapes that capture real, working class voices for the first time in relation to the shops and their culture. I conducted field visits and semi-structured interviews with more than thirty contemporary eel, pie and mash shops and their owners who generously shared genealogies, reminiscences and historical artefacts from their pasts. I interviewed dozens of customers from a diverse age range and from both London and Essex. From this I drew from a core of twenty six comprehensive interviews.

I additionally interviewed the photographer Chris Clunn and the film maker David Furnham.

Because of Covid-19 many of these interviews were conducted using internet telephony.

Introduction

Overview

Militant nostalgia is on the rise across Britain.

For London's traditional working class communities this trend is synchronous with the closing of the city's once populous eel, pie and mash shops.

These spaces, largely forgotten and often seen by outsiders as anachronous, are however vital repositories of largely undocumented but increasingly contested communal memories whose physical buildings, food and rituals speak of identity and authenticity.

In this thesis, I examine and attempt to clarify the largely unwritten history of these, London's first working class restaurants. I attempt to situate the shops as temporary private spaces within the neoliberal city and examine them as sensory repositories of historical and contemporary significance, contextualising them within ideas of food culture, gastro-nationalism and a post-colonial melancholic haunting.

In doing so I examine the communities that use the shops (and eel eating) as theatres, temporal anchorages and totems of authenticity in a constructed, performative but increasingly retrograde ritual culture, largely closed to outsiders.

In this way I interrogate an evolving working class London identity and examine the changing notion of the idea of 'Cockney'.

1.1 A walk down the Broadway

In January 2020 the Cooke's eel, pie and mash shop in Broadway Market closed its doors for the last time.

Opened in 1900 by Robert Cooke, it had been one of East London's most iconic pie shops. Double-fronted in glass and marble (renewed after the Second World War due to the Luftwaffe's close attentions) its interior tiling was a delicate yellow picked out with sky blue detailing. Up until its closure its floors had always been freshly covered in sawdust, its large distinctive mirrors regularly polished and behind the long marble serving counter on the right, a poster still advertised the John H. Stracey fight at the Royal Albert Hall in 1972. The shop retained a gas mantle on its wall. Now shuttered and empty, it looked sad and desolate surrounded by fashionable coffee shops, artisanal bakeries and an organic supermarket. Cooke's was a place out of time.

Standing outside the shop on that freezing morning brought me back to my own Hackney past of the 1970s, where the streets were still navigated by corrugated iron hoardings, rough pubs and the fading technicolours of greasy spoon 'caffs'. In those days, I'd sometimes walk past the shop after school. I remember it as always busy. Steamed windows. Warmth. My family weren't customers but over the years with friends, I'd visited this and the Cooke's family's other shop in Dalston - a grand, cavernous cathedral of a working class eatery opened in 1910. The spaces of these shops felt Victorian. Safe but staid and strict; a place where everybody knew the rules and each other.

The Broadway and London Fields, the area that it served, was at this time an almost forgotten part of the capital. Once a thriving working class street market it was now a shadow of its former self. Most of the shops were closed and boarded and only a handful of stalls sold fresh vegetables or tinned food at reduced prices. Vandalised cars littered the streets. Its desolation seemed to represent a wider landscape of urban working class London at the time. Cockney London. Jelled eel London (Sinclair, 2004: 95).

Squeezed between the enduring semi-criminal poverty of Bethnal Green and the unreachable wealth of the City, Hackney had been the site first of steady Jewish migration out of the Whitechapel *shtetl* and then wholesale Caribbean settling from the 1960s onwards. During the 1970s Hackney was a culturally contested zone full of vandalised Brutalist tower blocks but also decaying Victorian terraces. A space caught between the National Front and the Angry Brigade.

David Furnham's neglected documentary film, *Noted Eel and Pie Houses* (1975), captures the devastation of the market during this period. The Broadway, desolate, broken, but clinging to life. Yet inside the Cooke's shop, it's lively and full of people chatting and eating: the space a portal to a previous generation, its memories and its rituals and customs.

The large light industrial base of the city and its concomitant working class population of the inner city areas had, by the early 1970s, been mostly lost and along with it the certainties of the post-war paradigm of job security and the promise of decent housing for all. In 1972 The Housing Finance Act introduced by Heath's Conservative government replaced the requirement for councils to charge tenants 'fair rents' with those of 'reasonable' rents linked to the private sector (McCulloch, 1982). Pandering to the "myth of the over-subsidised council tenant" (Sklair, 1975) this legislation required local authorities to make a profit from their properties and reduced government subsidies. In practice it meant that poor inner-London boroughs like Hackney could no longer afford the considerable upkeep of its (largely ancient and substandard) housing stock and this fell into further disrepair. Hackney, like much of inner London, was a post-industrial zone divided between blue collar workers, a precarious self-employed workforce with a "relaxed attitude to convention and legality" (Medhurst, 2023: 181) and an increasing proportion of its labour force "working in financial and business services" (Hammett, 2004: 2).

In this interstitial period between the end of what became known as the *trente glorieuses* and the neoliberal ascendancy, Hackney had become an arena for earnest, middle class gentrifiers (Raban, 1974) and the squatting movement (Proll, 2010). The Broadway and its surrounding streets became home to some of these newcomers, legal or otherwise. Locals looked on aghast at some members of this

strange tribe walking around barefoot through the market. Beads. Tie-dye. Odd-shaped French cars. Co-ops and vegetarian food. These squatters, these 'do-gooders', wanted to live amongst the working classes as an act of solidarity rejecting "consumerism... the suburb or luxury flat" (White, 2008: 65).

As part of a 'long march through the institutions' (Dutschke) some of these newcomers became teachers, some social workers, others, artists. They brought with them notions of a different kind of community and one not solely built around the iconography and memories of Empire and the last war that still loomed large in popular culture.

The presence of these newcomers and their new convivialities (Gilroy, 2004) as part of an emergent culture were simultaneous (Koselleck, 2004) to the temporalities of a residual, older proletarian culture and were a portent of the changes and challenges that Hackney and indeed much of working class London would evidence in the coming years. Their residence coincided with a longer-term process that came to be known (colloquially but problematically) as 'white flight' and between the censuses of 1971 and 1981 nearly 10% of the total population of Greater London had decamped to the Essex new towns or the Kent coast (Champion and Congdon, 1987, Medhurst, 2023: 160). Those that hadn't or couldn't move away made the dwindling number of pie and mash shops like Cooke's increasingly defensive spaces that would eventually become code for a certain type of working class Londoner: white, generally poor, and increasingly out of time with the coming neoliberal order and its modernity.

1.2 (uncharted) History from below

I came to this thesis because London's eel, pie and mash shops are seemingly invisible. Until very recently the shops seemed to have disappeared almost entirely from London's cultural texture and its high streets. Forgotten, ignored or avoided. Mentioned only when one of their dwindling number permanently closed; a local newspaper would invariably write an article bemoaning the loss of another part of London's great 'heritage' and repeat the same half-truths and hearsay about the shops' opaque origins and fare.

Yet this *unseenness* is not new. These working class spaces once ubiquitous at the *fin de siècle* and the start of the twentieth century, like the culture they contained, were, my research evidences, hardly ever cited, explored or critically examined. Virtually unknown outside of the capital, they were part of a *common* knowledge of working class Londoners, but they were only ever fleetingly seen or referred to tangentially in cultural texts. Although there have been several notable documentary pieces like Norman Cohen's psychedelic *The London That Nobody Knows* (1967), and Furnham's already mentioned *Noted Eel and Pie Houses* (1975) that feature them, all centre on the shops' *pastness*, always asynchronous with the present.

During my research, I have been unable to locate more than a handful of references to the shops in post-war literature or on film. Only Franc Rodham's *Quadrophenia* (1979) lingers at any length in the (inevitably now closed) A. Cooke's shop in Shepherd's Bush. The scene regards the pie shop where Jimmy meets his 'greaser' friend Kevin as an ordinary, unremarkable space within a contemporary working class temporality as part of a 1960s popular modernity. This treatment contrasts to myriad proletarian spaces reclaimed as 'cross-class' like cafés, fish and chip shops, public houses or bingo halls. These are sites of 'pleasure and leisure' (Langhamer, 2007) retrieved and celebrated by bourgeois interest and academia in the name of 'resurrectionism', 'retro-chic' (Samuel, [1996] 2012) or simply 'heritage' (Wright [1985] 2009). Even football, that most working class of London's sporting life, became the site of widespread bourgeois cultural colonisation in the 1990s.

A central question that this work addresses, then, is why have London's eel pie and mash shops remained largely unexplored? The thesis suggests several intersecting conclusions that stem directly from issues of hegemony and Bourdieusian class 'distinction'. However, one enveloping explanation lies at least partly within historiography: the way that the lives of those that are owners and customers of the shops have been recounted (or ignored). And crucially, by whom.

Until perhaps the second half of the twentieth century in Britain, history and its telling was charged with the description of great men, monarchs and governments oblivious to the encounters of Marx, Durkheim or Weber. Although Lucien Febvre, the founder of the French *Annales* School along with Marc Bloch, used the notion of 'history from

below' in the 1930s it wasn't until the Communist Party Historians Group of amongst others, Eric Hobsbawm, Edward Thompson, Christopher Hill and Raphael Samuel sought to uncover the revolutionary tradition of a 'people's history' in post-war London that British historiography turned to examine in detail the lives of the ordinary and the everyday. Enjoined by the Society for the Study of Labour History (1960) and then The History Workshop later in that decade, the British working class entered contemporary historiography through what became known as 'social history' at roughly the same time that its post-war victories and popular modernity began to be undone by the forces of late capital.

From the 1970s onwards, in line with wider questions about the changing social landscape, postmodern and post-structural concerns, and the identity of oppressed groups especially in terms of race and ethnicity, historians increasingly wrote about the British working class not as 'revolutionary agents' but as objects of study on their own terms. Many were seemingly disappointed that the British proletariat had not fulfilled its radical role. Class, as Ellen Meiksins-Wood (1986) suggested, became 'de-centred'.

Although the 'cultural turn' in history opened the door to some working class historians, the pie shops appear to have remained liminal spaces. Seemingly untranslatable, they have I suggest been guarded by a "dense, inward-looking" (Stedman Jones, 1974: 499) defensive habitus born of an historical cultural repression. However, these are zones that through their insularity and partly perhaps because of London's specific artisanal working class heritage, have in some measure, resisted the delegitimising attempts of bourgeois culture.

Neither Gareth Stedman Jones nor Raphael Samuel, whose historical investigations into East End life are central to my work, include any systematic interrogation of these spaces that were a *loci* for the communities that used them.¹

¹ There are several brief but inconsequential mentions of eel stalls in Samuel [1981] 2016.

The pie and mash shops were, and in some senses remain, markers of an historically significant but closed territoriality and culture that at one time thrived in hyper-local street markets and loyal, tight-knit (but now largely romantically mythologised) communities. The shops, encased in neighbourhood ritual and lore, made more mysterious I suggest through the process of wholesale demographic change, have become additionally concealed in plain sight. They are however I propose, a partial gateway, somewhat obscured by contested memorialisation, that allow us to view a largely lost and marginalised culture and, in that way, pose significant questions around class and identity.

This work is the first rigorous academic research into the history, culture and significance of London's eel, pie and mash shops and seeks to explain and contextualise the popular conjecture, assumptions and myths that surround them. The thesis seeks to provide a comprehensive history of the spaces, the food served, and the etiquette and rituals held within. It additionally attempts to sketch the contours of that music hall caricature of the London working classes, the cockney that is so central to the story of the shops.

The thesis further seeks to examine both the contemporary and historical eel, pie and mash shops at the turn of the twenty-first century and in doing so to discover not only their uncertain origins but also their recently renewed political, social and cultural significance. It does so through the interrogation of dozens of shops between London and Essex and by way of their spaces, their sights and their smells. It does so by archival research and numerous semi-structured interviews with patrons and customers that interrogate memory as well as a sensory ethnography informed by my own past.

The approach of this thesis is then an intersection of the personal and the political. My own upbringing and now interstitial class position offers, I believe, a unique insight into the textures of the pie and mash shops and the changing culture that envelops them.

1.3 Co-ordinates

This thesis charts the eel, pie and mash shops around four compass points. I utilise the locations of history, identity, food culture and memory in a panoptical approach to excavate the subject.

1.3.1 History

Because of the paucity of historical literature around the eel, pie and mash shops and the working class culture which they contain, it was necessary to find co-ordinates that would lead me into their absence. In this way I have synthesised existing scholarship, with my original research to extend our understanding of the circumstances of their origins.

My work is bounded by a largely Marxian analysis and delimited by the broad contours of the Nairn Anderson thesis (1962). This argument, honed throughout the 1960s and 1970s offers that British capitalism's development was rendered incomplete by its precocity and the continuing presence at its core of elements of the *ancien regime*.

Rather than initially link the emergence of the shops to the efforts of one particular nineteenth century family in isolation as custom has it, I place their evolution concomitant with a much earlier contestation within England's proto-industrial landscape. In this I largely use E.P. Thompson's scaffolding which charts the contestations of cultures between those of the elites and the poor that emerged during the eighteenth century. Here, economic rationalisations engendered by a rising mercantile middle order challenged the paternalist bonds of the 'old corruption'. Wage labour became freer, more mobile and "concentric rings of clientship" (Thompson [1980] 1991: 39) began to break away from the orbit of the great houses. Significant amongst these for this thesis were pastry cooks many of whom in time would themselves become small masters in London's pie trade. This in itself, although beyond the immediate bounds of this study, is a noteworthy and

under researched arena of the capital's food history that was simultaneous with the growth of the city and increasing urbanity.

I link this development to the new and self-conscious urban identity (Olsen, 1976) that was beginning to emerge in the dying days of Georgian London. This identity was concomitant with the accession, ideologically and culturally, of a middle class whose rise I chart as a synchronous dance with an emergent London proletariat. It is the latter's demonisation that I suggest is a significant factor in the defensive culture of the contemporary eel and pie shops. In this I use Pierce Egan's writings to explore the ending an older popular culture that was a dwindling asymmetry (Burke, 1978) between the elites and the poor.

Henry Mayhew's mid-century navigation of the capital's fluid, poverty-stricken street communities records the final traces of this culture amongst the penniless roving street pie man whose livelihood had by now been decimated against a backdrop of unemployment and continuing (mostly Irish) immigration. I link the pie man's changing customer base with an emergent bourgeois culture of *laissez faire* that equated poverty and morality but also with rigid attitudes to outdoor eating.

In that vein, the thesis links for the first time, work on the contestations around the early Victorian street that I contend encouraged the emergence of settled pie shops. This complicated process connects Stedman Jones' (1971) work on casual labour, James Winter's (2013) work on street culture with recent scholarship (Kelley, 2019) on London's traditional markets around the idea of modernity and nascent consumerism. I suggest that the process of the 'clearing' of London's streets and the subsequent attempts to force the city's myriad trades to 'move inside' was a simultaneous moral crusade against the 'old, popular culture' (Golby and Purdue, 1984) and a negotiation around a new rational planning directive that had its roots in a Lockean ideology based on cementing property rights for rentiers. I offer that this 'internal' urban enclosure was linked to, and was the culmination of, a process started much earlier in the English countryside. Further, my thesis proposes via Stedman Jones ([1971] 2014) that these attempts to control the crowd (Rudé, 1964) evidenced a developing working class culture influenced by those forced to leave the street trades (Jankiewicz, 2012) and exhibited, emergent class solidarities (Brodie,

2001). These populations would I conclude, form the customer base of the new eel and pie shops that were suffering a problematic class descent as the bourgeoisie retreated from the city's centre.

My thesis reconfigures the history of the eel and pie shops and proves that the accepted notion of the first recorded pie shop is erroneous. My research, by interrogation of sources, establishes a much earlier date to these enterprises and refutes the earliest formulation of the shops' fare held within the traditional lore of one the oldest pie shop families. Further, this work casts doubt upon the accepted notion that the shops exhibited an unbroken gustatory tradition and suggests that this is an echo of the invented conventions (Hobsbawn and Ranger, [1983] 2017) of the *fin de siècle*.

My thesis further significantly utilises the biological notion of a *taxon* to describe the myriad of London eating places, that would eventually contribute to the final, classic late nineteenth century eel, pie and mash shop. I employ Rebecca Spang's (2001) work on the restaurant and utilise Brenda Assael's (2018) writing on London's culinary specificity to examine eating for the city's working classes based initially around the new temporalities of capitalism. Eventually I advance that this emergent proletarian culture became based around street market hyper-locality, and synchronous with entertainment and the opportunity to demonstrate and perform respectability. This aligns with David Harvey's (2004) notion of "pacification by spectacle" and Stedman Jones' (1974, 1982) notion of consolation within the 're-making' of the working classes.

1.3.2 Identity

Underpinning much of this thesis was a realisation that an excavation of the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops would be incomplete without examination of the historical identity of the cockney. This figure was simultaneous to the development of the shops and ultimately formative in their 'classic' late Victorian incarnation. It is a version of this cockney that is valorised within the contemporary spaces of the shops.

Because it became increasingly clear that the cockney of the pie shop was a constructed creature born of a palimpsestic identity coterminous with London's urbanity, I sought firstly to historically contextualise its origins within early emergent tensions between forces of capital in towns and older feudal forms of rural power. In this way I again use Thompson's ([1980] 1991) wider framework of eighteenth century class negotiations between the 'patrician and the plebian' and, along with the cockney's particular and direct spatiality traced the evolution of its specific 'cant'. Stedman Jones' (1989) delineation of this emergent identity of modernity as an interstitial (specifically London) class of trade and commerce was central. Cockney at this point I argue was a lived and geographic pivot that evidenced the coexistent struggle between the bourgeoisie and those beneath them: between those with authority and those without. I use Gregory Dart's (2012) work to audit the literary cockney of the late Georgian period and Charles Dickens' reportage (and fiction) to clarify the cockney's subsequent class demotion. This was parallel to the simultaneous rise of the lower middle class consumerist dandy of the 1867 franchise extension and the youthful 'counter-jumper' - at this time some of the likely eel and pie shops customers.

My thesis examines the demonisation of the informal street economy in this period as part of a complex cultural shift in which the landscape of the costermonger, who would inherit the sinking cockney moniker, became subversive and largely tarred with the notion of the residuum.

In doing so I explore the dual bourgeois fascination and revulsion for a London proletariat more and more defined by a cartography that circumscribed a zone of exclusion - the 'abyss' of the East End. This was increasingly delineated by a moral formulation surrounding the subversive (cultural and political) potential of dirt and disease.

My narrative argues the cockney was ingested into a national project during the New Imperialism to constrain potentially explosive domestic social forces and this was done largely through coding transmitted by behavioural forms of popular song in the music hall (Scott, 2002), public houses and the eel and pie shops that draws upon Stedman Jones' 'culture of consolation' (1974). To examine the process, I utilise

Hall's (1973) work on the dissemination of hegemonic messaging as a guide to the 'encoding' of patriotism in the creation of a sanitised, sentimental cockney plastered on top of previous layered incarnations.

This thesis argues that the cockney henceforth became periodically useful to its hegemonic creators as a motif and a warning siren that a certain type of Englishness was under threat. Crucially I suggest that the co-option of the cockney's alleged stoicism in the face of the Blitz is the basis for a contemporary memoryscape and the haunting of the present day austerity nostalgia.

Once I have established the historical co-ordinates of the cockney identity, my thesis returns to the late nineteenth century to contextualise the 'whitening' of the Victorian working class (Bonnett, 1998) as a defensive trench of empire (Cohen, Qureshi and Toon, 1994, Schwarz, 1996) which underscores the character from this point forward. I locate the contemporary identity within the contentious frame of a new ethnic group (Jones, 2011).

I argue that the cockney did not die during the immediate post-war period with the Mrs Mop character as Stedman Jones (1986) suggests but was responsive to and simultaneous with an ongoing popular modernity and national economy birthed within the Welfare State. In this I suggest that the cockney, rather than simply fade away, continued its role as a nostalgic conduit to capital but evolved multiple valences that spoke to an increasing emphasis on popular culture, age, choice and especially individuality consistent with an historical 'proletarian entrepreneurialism' (Hobbs, 1998). In this, and synchronous with multiculturalism and an 'ordinary cosmopolitanism' (Gilroy, 2000), a new parallel multi-racial cockney has emerged around a 'structure of feeling' (Williams, 1961) that is a looser group identification of numerous cultural signifiers.

Finally, I argue that the contemporary reimagining of the cockney via a decamped East End in Essex has narrated the 'slow cancelation of the future' (Beradi, 2011) that is the neoliberal ascendancy through forces of the popular Right by appealing to race and their alleged cultural abandonment. The contemporary reimagining of the

eel and pie shops as a totem of a lost, white working class London is, I argue, anchored within this nostalgic haunting.

1.3.3 Food Culture

Although this thesis has food at its core it is not about food *per se*. Rather it quantifies food both as a signpost to a historically specific working class culture and cuisine and as an element that is “central to a sense of identity” (Fischler, 1988).

That said, historical surveys of London’s food within the period of study have been invaluable. Heal (1990) contextualises food and the rituals that surrounded it in early modern England and I have drawn heavily on Henry Mayhew (1851), George Dodd (1856) and George Sala’s (1859) work from the mid nineteenth century. In addition to primary magazine and newspaper sources, George Sim’s reportage (1889, 1902) was excellent background.

The unpublished work of D.J. Oddy (1970) and Katy Pettit’s (2009) thesis was crucial in mapping the working class diet and food landscape in the late nineteenth century as was Maud Pember Reeves’ (1913) early feminist work amongst the Lambeth poor. Olive Malvery’s *fin de siècle* journalism (1906, 1908) that contains her memoirs of working in an (unnamed) eel and pie shop were priceless finds that incidentally interrogated the cuisine and interior spaces of working class eateries. John Burnett’s work (1979, 2004) has been essential in delineating the hierarchies and type of eating places that Londoners used as have Stephen Mennell (1995) and Richard Tames (2003). James Vernon’s (2007) work on hunger was significant as was Lesa Scholl (2017) on Gaskell’s writing.

Scholarship around the specific constituent parts of the fare of the pie shop was less common but Peter Gurney’s (2009) work on potato consumption during the Famine of the 1840s was particularly useful. Additionally, Janet Clarkson’s (2009) very general history of the pie was helpful but Tom Fort’s (2002) work on the eel was essential in general, especially on its historic links to the diet of Londoners.

There is a certain amount of scholarship on what might be called the foods of multiculturalism and in this Panikos Panayi (2008) on foods of origins was useful as was Tony Kushner (2003) on the food of Jew and gentile in the East End. These however, like much from the academy, barely mention eels, pie and mash and so, this thesis is an attempt to address to that absence.

I chose to examine the lived textures of the contemporary pie shops for the uninitiated through a series of semi-structured interviews and a sensory ethnography. This methodology allowed me to relate intimate aural, olfactory and visual sensory experiences and correlate them to historical and cultural coordinates. My starting point was the anthropological vocabulary of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955) and Mary Douglas (1975) that described the classifications of food, much of whose 'rules' the pie shop meal ironically 'breaks'.

I used the sociology of Erving Goffman (1949), Ray Oldenburg (1999) and Anna Marie Steigemann (2017) to define these largely unexplored spaces within the performative register of retail and the restaurant but my main co-ordinate was the work of Michel DeCerteau (1988) in relating the obscure rhythms, rituals and rules of the shops.

In terms of sensory ethnography, a major coordinate was Sarah Pink's (2015) anthology of the discipline as was the work of Alex Rhys-Taylor (2017, 2020) that utilised Teichmüller's notion of the 'democracy of the senses'. I used the sense of smell to map a working class aroma and in doing so excavated several early to mid-twentieth century novels that described *taxons* of proletarian eating places and their dubious perfume. I use the sense of taste to examine the notion of disgust and the gustatory de-centering of the eel via Douglas (1966) and Deborah Lupton, (1996)

I use Daniel Miller's (2008) formulation that food is an object-bridge between ourselves and the people we love. In that way I use food as a link between personal and political identities (Radstone, 2010).

Pierre Bourdieu (1986, 2011) and his notion of classed taste and *distinction* was a crucial signpost in determining a working class taste and space. This I explored

largely through the work of Beverley Skeggs (2004, 2016) to loosely outline a working class arena that is the pie and mash shop. Here, class is defined through fluid and symbolic matrices that negotiate the limits of bourgeois meaning and accountability in the form of microresistances in manners and humour, limited in its field of exchange value.

Finally, I use the field of memory to interrogate the food of the pie shops utilising it chronologically in conjunction with New Labour's hysteria around working class eating and corporality during the early Blair years. This I cite as a trigger for political and cultural anger. In this I utilise the food-memory coordinates of Sutton (2001, 2005) but especially the work of Nadia C. Serematakis (1996) on sensory interiority and the dialogical and reciprocal processes of the socio-material field outside of the body. I interrogate childhood food memories in conjunction with matrilineity to show why a simple dish like pie and mash has such a profound sensual pleasure and link this with Paul Connerton's (1989) work on the bodily inscription of memory. Lastly, I utilise ideas of gastronationalism (DeSoucey, 2010) to link the *terroir* of pie and mash to what Yi-Fu Tuan (1974) refers to as 'local patriotism'.

1.3.4 Memory

Central to this thesis, in the relative absence of historical and cultural texts, is how the eel pie and mash shops have been memorialised, for what purpose and by whom.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, at the foundation of this theorising is Peter Bromley's (1998) notion that memory is an historical construction, subject to constant revision. This is echoed by Aleida Assmann's (2010: 97) conception that each generation stands on the shoulders of its predecessors whose "... knowledge they can reuse and reinterpret".

I categorise the myriad memoryscapes that coalesce within both the remaining few traditional eel and pie shops in London and their newer counterparts in Essex as polyphonic. I suggest that the shops in divergent locations hold simultaneous

memories that are distinct but synchronous and carry memories of several groups which use them as temporal anchorages (Huysen, 1995) within late capital.

I utilise Jan Assmann's idea of a 'cultural' memory of rites and rituals enshrined in performance within the eel and pie shops along with the idea of a 'communicative' memory, one that is based on the temporal dimensions of lived experience. I suggest that for the shops, the contestations around what they are and subsequently will be, are held between these two points in a 'floating gap' (Vansina, 1985) that moves with the passage of time and additionally between generations. Change within memorialisations is likely evidenced by the outlines of fissures within this gap (Olick, 2003). Appropriate to the contemporary contestations around the identities held within the shops, Duncan Bell's (2003) theorising around hegemonic memory groups invading and capturing the memory landscape by re-narrativizing the past has been particularly useful.

The shops act to stabilise a 'geography of belonging' (Hodgkin and Radstone, 2003) to a largely white, monocultural and inevitably 'better' past and combine with this a notable sense of loss. It is this deficit that was apparent to Pierre Nora (1989) in his notion of *lieux de mémoire*. In the absence of *milieux de mémoire* within modernity these are symbolic sites that are apposite simultaneously to the fading pie shops of cockney London and their simulacra created in the New Towns of Essex and beyond. They capture in shorthand places where "memory crystallises and secretes itself". Crucially as Astrid Erll (2011) offers, these sites can reach forward and backwards to the past and present in memorialisations which are the result of collective reconstructions in the here-and-now (Rigney, 2008). These reconstructions I contend are further evidenced in the spate of problematic and romantic 'recollections' from a post-war generation in autobiography and memoir that signal to palimpsestic, personal memory epochs largely valorising a lost landscape of Empire, post-war gain and national sovereignty. These are partly I believe as Andreas Huysen (1995) suggests, an attempt to "claim some space" within a confusing and increasingly accelerated temporality of modernity.

The shops and the territories that they once represented are in this way arenas of cultural defensive against globalisation, gentrification and historically, multicultural.

They act as sites of memory “as practice - as opposed to memory as fact or essence - history” (Malcolm, 2014). They become self-perpetuating vortices of “symbolic investment” (Rigney, 2008) inscribing and re-inscribing memories that pertain to a political reconstruction of ‘ordinariness’ revealing the contestations between working class memory groups divided between a precariat and those who partially benefitted from the Thatcherite project. However, the shops as sites of memory are unable to heal a rupture between the past and the present and into this void rushes the spirit of nostalgia. This, as Stuart Tannock (1995) suggests, acts as a search for continuity.

I use Svetlana Boym’s (2001) notions of both a restorative nostalgia that seeks recreation of the past within the present and a reflective nostalgia which whimsically lingers over the patina of the time to reflect on the cockney identity within the shops. Here I focus on the cockney diaspora which valorises hyper locality and the “magical recovery of community” (Clarke, 1976) evidenced through pilgrimage to the shops (Fawbert, 2011) linked to the other great working class consolation, football. These sporting allegiances largely mirror the hyper locality of the historical pie and mash shops delineating food-culture boundaries in opposition to the dominant hegemony (Palmer, 1988).

I suggest that these have become arenas of a gastronationalism (DeSoucey, 2010) allied to the reinvigoration of a populist, political ‘common sense’ Right which in some cases uses pie and mash as a symbol of a ‘forgotten white tribe’ (Collins, 2004). I link these memory concretions to a growing public distrust of a political class recruited increasingly from a professional, managerial background, an ‘austerity nostalgia’ (Hatherley, 2016), a partial re-racialisation (Schwarz, 1996) of British politics, the so-called ‘culture wars’ and Brexit.

1.4 Chapters

My first chapter addresses the absence of a satisfactory history of the enterprises that would become the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops.

I contextualise the shops' distant origins within the class exodus of small masters, especially bakers and pastry cooks who served the great houses, to the expanding and new urbanity of Georgian London. Here, some as roving pie men and others as settled shopkeepers participated in the last throes of an 'old' popular culture - the asymmetry of the 'great' and 'little' traditions of the elites and the common people.

I trace the shops' development adjacent to the ideological and political ascent of the urban bourgeoisie and the concomitant contestations over the capital's physical streets and markets. Here, London's working classes acceded to some elements of the new hegemony whilst creating a nascent culture based partly on earlier proto-industrial customs and responses to the new temporal discipline of capital.

I argue that the new pie shops adapted to the middle classes withdrawal from the city's centre by negotiating with modernity and consumerism and eventually becoming eating places for the city's 'respectable' poor within a penumbra of informal markets. These areas were dominated by the costermonger communities whose identity would become intertwined with and essential to the cockney culture that the shops would represent by the start of the twentieth century.

My second chapter recognises the centrality of this identity, eventually adjacent to the eel and pie shops, tracing its historical progression from early modernity to the Blitz. In this I argue that cockney became integral in not only defining the spatiality of a new kind of Londoner but one that exemplified an interstitial class tension largely as a label delineating those without authority. I argue that this was initially between older rural power and emergent urban capitalist forces but eventually delineated a grouping of the petit bourgeoisie in relation to the elites.

Largely through the works of Dickens, I trace the class demotion of the term cockney that came to define a section of the urban poor and in doing so chart its reproduction as a ventriloquised reflection of proletarian culture within the music hall by bourgeois performers. Here, the working class cockney was reified simultaneously as a figure both of good humour, honesty and criminality: between the respectable poor and the worthless 'other'.

The music hall I assert, as an effective hegemonic device (in tandem with popular fiction in late Victoriana) inculcated within London's working classes, bourgeois notions of racial and national superiority. The increasingly palimpsestic cockney identity was further conscripted into the imperial state through franchise extension and, along with popular song, public houses and the eel and pie shops formed a culture of 'consolation' that would become part of the English 'ordinary culture'.

My third chapter contextualises the cockney identity within the notions of whiteness and empire. I excavate how the middle classes classified the 'dark and dirt' of the London poor as part of a moral coding and extended the designation of whiteness to inhibit potentially explosive social forces so as to reframe the nation as a racial singularity. In this way, I argue that henceforth the cockney was periodically used by capital as a largely reactionary and patriotic force and that the eel and pie shops became a loci for this culture. I suggest that the Blitz cockney as a motif became central to the subsequent memoryscape and further into the twentieth century I trace how this was channelled, initially as opposition to American consumerism and an expanding EEC and then, in defence of its post-war welfarist gains, how the cockney was used to bolster the internal colonial frontier.

In the second half of the chapter, I explore the destruction of traditional cockney territoriality and trace, largely through a changing age demographic how the cockney, rather than dying out, developed multiple internal valances around the expanding horizons of choice and individuality via an expanding popular modernity. In this way I argue that by the 1970s the cockney began to simultaneously embody a vigorous low-cultured populism and an upwardly mobile conservative element receptive to and used by an emergent neoliberal right. An increasing internal instability within the identity allied to spatial and demographic uncertainties led to an exodus to the Essex and Kent hinterlands. Here, a simulacra culture had been incubating and it is within this culture that the pie and mash shops would evidence a new political and cultural significance.

My fourth chapter investigates a significant London pie shop primarily using a 'sensory ethnography' to chart the sights, smells, sounds and rituals found within. In this way I interrogate the coded sedimentation of gestures and largely unspoken

rules that link hospitality, conviviality and memory within and upon the bodies of the owners and customers. I explore the cuisine in reference to other British working class foods using archival reportage and contemporary theory. I place the ingredients of the meal within historical and cultural contexts and examine them especially within the parameters of distinction and contemporary notions of disgust.

In the second part of the chapter, I situate the shops and their fare within a nostalgically memorialised habitus of a changed London working class identity. I examine the culture of a performative working class respectability and the particular 'classness' of the shops. I argue that this reflects both a subtle deviation from the refinements of bourgeois dining as microresistances to neoliberal modernity but also inter-class contestations. I suggest that the pie shops might uniquely evidence inter-class differences and how a contemporary London working class might view itself. In this way I challenge the argument that class tastes have wholly declined with modernity.

My final chapter addresses the central role of memory within the shops and the cockney culture they contain. I argue that the memories inscribed upon the contemporary, palimpsestic cockney identity are largely tangled and hybridised, linked to historical hyper-locality and past class solidarities. I refer to these, the results of social dislocation and inter-class competition, as polyphonic. I argue that although cockney memories were largely mediated by each generation apposite to the contemporary hegemony, this process began to break down during the 1990s under a New Labour government that embraced globalisation and accelerated concomitant neoliberal reforms. I argue that the contemporary memory scripts of cockney, performed and reinscribed by a post-war generation, are a melancholia for the gains of the post-war period, an empire nostalgia and the loss of the fantasy of a British omnipotence. These nostalgias I argue are performed through a 'local' patriotism of which the pie and mash shops are a key symbol. I trace the course of this political/personal memorialisation to the under-theorised arena of food and the demonisation of working class corporeality assailed by a culture of distinction within an aspirational managerialism in the context of 'cartel' parties and concomitant to a Third Way and the End of History. Finally, I explore these largely constructed nostalgias adjacent to a 'geography of belonging', the reinvigorated politics of

whiteness and the 'new' cultural minority, the white working class in context of 'class non-voting', 'post-factual' politics, populism and the campaign for Brexit.

1. Origins

Introduction

In this chapter, I will chart and analyse the birth of London's iconic eel, pie and mash shops (as they would become) by placing their development firmly within London's emergent identity during its extraordinary nineteenth century expansion and in relation to its nascent, distinct but compromised working class culture.

Because of the relative paucity of primary material surrounding the evolution of the shops, I attempt to trace the contours of this absence so as to define the cultural, and political space into which they appeared.

The maturation of the shops was entirely concomitant with larger societal changes and was simultaneous to the negotiations with, and then attacks upon, remnants of what has been called the 'old' popular culture (Golby and Purdue, 1984) by an urban bourgeois hegemony. I use Mayhew's roving pieman to illustrate this initial contestation. The pieman's livelihood was just about contemporaneous with the dying breath of what Peter Burke (1978: 28) has called the asymmetry of the 'great' and 'little' traditions of the elites and the common people. Here the former often partook in the performity of the latter but not vice-versa. The pieman's decline mirrored a gradual withdrawal of the urban middle classes from areas delineated by the lives of the new industrial poor.

A major site of this contestation was the physical and ideological control of the capital's streets (Bailey, 1978). The 'clearing' of these streets and the subsequent (physical and metaphorical) 'coming inside' of London's working classes were framed by the elites in terms of modernity, morality and political necessity. They were I suggest, simultaneous to the demonisation (and simultaneous) valorisation of an increasingly impoverished coster class by the twin nodes of Victorian liberalism, itself part of a longer effort to 'civilise the crowd' (Golby and Purdue, 1984).

These efforts I argue were partly successful negotiations with an emergent proletariat that acceded to some elements of hegemonic control whilst creating their own culture on the remnants of a largely pre- and early- industrial way of life. This was based on notions of access to natural rights, conviviality, hospitality and communality, that had been broken by 'time, work-discipline and Industrial Capitalism' (Thompson, 1967). This new culture, held within dual notions of freedom and respectability, centred largely around unofficial markets (Kelley, 2019) and desperate resistances to economic hardship. These populations became integral to the customer base of the emergent eel pie shops.

My thesis suggest that the original owners of the early nineteenth century pie shops were largely the product of the breaking of the concentric rings of "economic clientship" (Thompson, [1980] 1991) that had radiated out from the great houses during the previous century. The evolving genius of the early pie shops was I argue by mid-century, a recognition and response to a new class of customer that synthesised an entrepreneurial reimagining of the capital's changing consumer culture against a backdrop of shortage and deprivation. This was coterminous during the next decades with the growth of places to eat outside the home for all Londoners, both out of necessity and choice.

I chart the shops' development throughout the nineteenth century as a taxonic evolution that encompassed different food choices, décor and service, part of a systematic commercialisation of the catering business (Tames, 2003) within an eventual accommodation of a partially successful *embourgeoisement* of nascent working class cultures. The evolution of the culture of the eel pie shops this thesis argues was synchronous with the class descent of its client base finally coming to rest in the notion of the 'respectable' working classes. In doing so, the shops eventually created a unique but defensive counter-public constructed around the evolution of a conservative working class community, taste and consciousness.

The evolution of the pie shops into the twentieth century mark an emergent definition and cartography of the social fabric of the capital informed by the forces of modernity and divergent class cultures.

1.1 Monstrous Wen²

In 1827 Heinrich Heine, the German writer and critic, wrote of his sojourn in London. “Everywhere wealth and quality stare at you... [but] ...poverty, pushed away in remote alleys and dark, damp passages, dwells there with its rags and tears” (Stigand, 1875, 1: 290).

Visitors remarked on London’s seemingly limitless docks, the bustle of its people, but also its dinginess, its fogs and its gloom. The German nobleman Hermann Ludwig Heinrich von Pückler-Muskau (in Fox, 1992: 13) found in 1826 that the “...whole City, ha(s) a repulsive sinister aspect, which almost reminds one of the restless and comfortless throng of the spirits of the damned.” He wrote to his wife the following year complaining that fog covered everything, and it was necessary to breakfast with lit candles.

London, now the world’s largest city, was a hard-edged place of commerce. It contrasted in stark terms with the culture of ‘Pantomime and Pageantry’ of the Regency then coronation of George IV (Cumming, 1992). Here was the very caricature of a profligate peacock of the *ancien regime* increasingly out of time with an emergent industrial, entrepreneurial capitalist age. In the first decades of the century, the city was still a mosaic of what had been and what was yet to come; a mixture of Tudor, Stuart and Georgian buildings, rambling dark alleyways and terrible slums competing with speculators’ haphazard attempts at a patchwork of solutions to overcrowding and squalor. It was noisy, with a “universal hubbub; a sort of uniform grinding and shaking, like that experienced in a great mill with fifty pairs of stones...” (Gray, 2015: 322). It was dark, without proper sewerage and its streets were dangerous.

London was an intriguing jumble of the refined and the inelegant, perfectly illustrated in the aging Gillray’s imaging of the bawdiness of the street and Pückler-Muskau’s disdain for the “coarseness and brutality” of the English theatre audience (Pückler-Muskau, 1832, 3: 126).

² Thomas Carlyle to Alexander Carlyle; 14 December 1824; DOI 10.1215/lt-18241214-TC-AC-01.

The 1820s in particular had seen the birth of a new and distinctive London character partly centred around George IV's 'picturesque' reordering of streets but also a literary landscape that "promoted a self-conscious urban identity" (Olsen, 1976: 38). These were the years of patriotic 'euphoria' between Waterloo and the Reform Bill (Olson, 1976). These were also the years when the West End was transformed: the Regent's and St James' Parks were created and monuments such as Trafalgar Square and the Hyde Park arch *et al* were established. The poor were removed but they were not yet objects of hysterical Victorian fear or sickly pity. In this fluid, transitional period, London was still a place where the wealthy might conspicuously attend working class dives in the East End. In Pierce Egan's monthly *Life in London*, Jerry the country gent is accompanied by his sophisticated cousin Tom around the poorer districts of London 'to see a bit of life'. They go to the working class *All-Max* in the East End and report that:

Every cove that put in an appearance was quite welcome, colour or country considered no obstacle ... The group was motley indeed - Lascars, blacks, jack-tars, coal-heavers, dustmen, women of colour, old and young, and a sprinkling of the remnants of once fine girls, and all jiggling together (Egan [1821] 2019: 263).³

They see ageing prostitutes and poor children in gin shops; they enter bawdy coffee houses before retiring to the more class-suitable Almacks. Crucially, they move freely between both worlds before the carefully delineated moral and cultural margins of a later Victoriana.

This kind of urban chronicle, still largely within an eighteenth century literary tradition, finds home in the burgeoning number of satirical magazines and scandal journals that begin to appear, whose readership were an audience of "... apprentices, shop assistants, clerks and other young men who were coming of age in the first Victorian

³ This appears to be one of the earliest uses of 'East End' - contrary to both Peter Ackroyd and W.J. Fishman, who place the place the term much later in the 1880s. See - Newland, 2008: 47.

decade of manifest political and social changes to ride them to new social identities” (Gray, 1982 in Nord, 1995: 30).

It is men like these, of similar class and background that will discover themselves in the mirror of the new publications. They identified with a London life that was alive to the modern and full of opportunity: a formulation of a new strata of the self-made who were both participants in, and beneficiaries of, a reconfigured coal and steam driven metropolis. This class, spectators to the privilege of the wealthy *by proxy*, was beginning to develop its own consciousness and gaining at least a partially invested possession of London’s streets. It is these men, part of the lower-middle classes and the upper working classes with access to employment and at least some meagre capital, who will be the customers and indeed owners of the eel and pie shops as the century progresses.

1.2 “What has become of the pieman?” (Smith, 1857: 201)

The Victorian painter and author J.D. Harding (1851,1:129) had suggested that “The Only true Republic / Is a crowded city street.” This space had always been a sphere for working class life, an open-air theatre of necessity for sustenance, romance and trade, but increasingly by the early Victorian period the street was becoming a contested arena of class privilege and preferential access. The emergent hegemony of the ‘industrious’ middle classes saddled work and productivity to an increasingly Christian probity and the street became a moral battleground. Prefigured by Wordsworth in his *Prelude* and Blake’s *London*, the city’s streets had started to be linked to a defiled physical and moral pollution: a loss of innocence, the horror of female sexuality, prostitution and venereal disease. This linked bourgeois men and proletarian women in an unspoken, secretive, hypocritical and decidedly unequal dance, the very word modified by the contamination of ‘street-walker’ and the notion of ‘woman of the street’ (Nord, 1995).

The Regency thoroughfare had been none too carefully calibrated between pedestrians and traffic, but by the 1830s convention seems to have it that the less salubrious pedestrians like beggars, prostitutes and touts would be literally ‘in the gutter’ whilst on the threshold of that murky realm - between the gutter and the

pavement - would be the 'almost respectable'. These would be the travelling self-employed, the so-called 'penny capitalists', the men selling from carts: the costermongers.

The 1832 Reform Bill had led to increased middle class influence over local government spending. By the 1840s a more utilitarian polity born of a dislike of the chaos and ostentation of the Regency city, a bourgeois fear of disease, the threat of Chartism and eventually Evangelicalism (Green, 1982: 143), sought to implement bylaws which guaranteed pavements as spaces for 'respectable' pedestrians. Symptomatic of divergent class cultures, those in the 'in-between world' were viewed simultaneously as dangerous yet useful; enviably free yet chained to their poverty.

Henry Mayhew's documentation of the emergent, fluid culture of the "urban nomads" who inhabited this realm foreshadows Booth's cartography by decades and his concentration on morality through fascination and fear in pseudo-racial terms is instructive. He carefully characterises the differences between "... the vagabond and the citizen... the nomadic and the civilised..." (Mayhew, 1851: 1). For him, the streets are populated by "wandering tribes" who prey on England's "settled tribes" and are far from the light of civilisation. The worst are distinguished by group physiognomy evidenced by "high cheekbones and protruding jaws", "a slang language" and "lax ideas of property" with an eagerness to "rebel at authority". For Mayhew and his class, despite some evident sympathy for their conditions, these working people are uncivilised and carry no "positive cultural connotations" (Stedman Jones, 1974: 463). The 'street folk', those who roam to sell their wares in this inter-zone and who have these traits in an exaggerated form are almost a "distinct race" in themselves that Mayhew suggests are potentially of "Irish extraction" (Mayhew, 1851: 2). The street is a dangerous arena and is a site ripe for control.

Among these tribes are the wandering piemen. Mayhew does us an enormous service by describing their number, trade and equipment. He calls them "one of the most ancient of street callings of London" (Mayhew, 1851: 195). We learn that they usually make the pies themselves in various guises of meat, eel and fruit and that they work the streets and public houses from mid-afternoon until late at night. Significantly, they are mostly unemployed bakers and they "number about forty in

summer and twice that number in winter” (Mayhew, 1851: 195). They are in steep decline, emblematic of the wider cultural and physical distances between the city’s middle classes and those they employ. After the Great Reform Bill and the New Poor Law (1834), the bourgeoisie increasingly started to abandon the city, its industrial areas and with it their street eating habits. The new Metropolitan Police now patrolled London and a recent class of aspirational, professional clerks increasingly availed themselves of more settled, interior eating places.

By the 1850s the piemen are little more than adjuncts of street gambling: they allow punters to toss a coin to see if they can win a pie or pay a penny forfeit and this seems almost their sole route to income.⁴ Mayhew reports a poor pieman relaying to him that, “Gentlemen ‘out on the spree’ at the late public houses will frequently toss when they don’t want the pies, and when they win, they will amuse themselves by throwing the pies at one another, or at me” (Mayhew, 1851: 196).

One of Mayhew’s interviewees reports an eight-and-a-half-hour day tramping the streets for “1s. 6d., ... and out of that I have to pay 1d for charcoal” (Mayhew, 1851: 196). It’s a far cry from the character portrayed in Hogarth’s 1750 print “March to Finchley” as recounted by *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* (3,15 August, 1851) almost exactly a century later. The writer of the piece describes how the historical pieman was:

... a prominent character in the highways and byways of London. He was generally a merry dog... (who) stands in the very centre of the crowd, grinning with delight at the adroitness of one robbery, while he is himself the victim of another.”

By now, he is a figure of scorn, taunted wherever he goes by animal noises repeating an old but entirely significant trope that his pie-fillings are likely to include old, rotten food - or cat (Mayhew, 1851: 196).

London, now a world city, was a magnet for immigration from Irish famine and from European revolutions. Street hawking was the only option for many of these new

⁴ Dickens regularly uses the tossing for a pie as part of street language - “‘Heads’ as the pieman says” - see Dickens [1836] 2020: 351 and again, Montague Tigg spins a coin “in the air after the manner of a pieman” - see Dickens [1842] 2014: 447.

arrivals, who swelled the ranks of the native urban poor even further during the periods of cyclical unemployment that dominated the British economy from 1843-1911. In this economic climate many piemen had fallen further down the social scale having “merged [with] a dealer in foreign nuts, fruits, and other edibles which barred the suspicion of sophistication” (*Harper’s New Magazine*, 3, 15 August, 1851).

By the mid-century, the itinerant pie-man’s days were largely done. As Meiksins Wood (2017: 67) has it, “... capitalist imperatives were imposed on traditional forms of work ... on artisans still engaged in pre-industrial production no less than on factory hands.” Those processes, that synchronously changed the nature of the street itself, meant that their business had been almost completely usurped by settled pie-shops. “These shops have now got mostly all the custom, as they make their pies much larger for the money than those sold on the streets” (Mayhew, 1851: 214).

The wandering pieman however was a dying subset of a much larger constituency of costermongers who, in turn, were part of a vast army of ‘casual’ labour. Their identity, location and trade would eventually become central to the establishment of the eel and pie shops.

The context of the costers was integral to understanding a London in transition and theirs, at this stage, was a “dwindling subsistence economy trapped within the expanding capitalist system” (Richards, 1990 in Jankiewicz, 2012: 394). Their precarity was structural (an advantage for capital as a residual, ever-present reserve army) and an “alien presence in the midst of mid-Victorian plenty” (Stedman Jones [1971] 2013: 14). Significantly for this thesis, bakers were also part of this precarious pool of labour and “surplus bakers could count on Friday night employment to meet the extra demand for bread” (Stedman Jones, [1971] 2013: 60).

During the first half of the Victorian century, the number of London’s street sellers rose faster than the general population of the city due to immigrants finding nothing other than casual work (Lummel, 2016: 33). Indeed, “[F]or most of the population flooding London streets, selling was a euphemism for begging” (Thomas, 1990: 41). Stephen Inwood (1998: 504 in Jankiewicz, 2012: 395) suggests that during this period perhaps a tenth of London’s labour was ‘casual’.

Some coster occupations were hereditary however, what Mayhew (1851: 3) calls “costermongers proper” and were further distinguished from both itinerant street sellers and the regular tradesmen by the fact that while the shopkeeper served even the humble bourgeois, the street seller almost exclusively provided regular services to the poor.

George Dodd (1856) reports that by the 1850s, largely the result of appalling hygiene and the disorder of busy streets, both the flower, fruit and vegetable market at Covent Garden and the fish market at Billingsgate were redeveloped (Smithfield’s cattle holding and abattoirs were transferred to Islington between the 1860s and 1880s). As the city expanded the poor found themselves located further from these markets which additionally had turned increasingly to the more profitable and efficient wholesale. The coster families had always bought their wares in bulk at these markets and had historically sold them on the move from barrows. Increasingly, they now came together in convenient locations to create local, unofficial markets. The London County Council (LCC) lists perhaps thirty such unofficial markets in the 1840s and Mayhew suggests thirty-seven in 1851 (Kelley, 2019: 1). By the later 1850s the LCC area has more than forty-two and sixty or more by the 1860s (Kelley, 2019: 24). These informal street markets were penumbras of expanding working class districts and the lists of street markets given by Mayhew would inevitably match the later “roll call of slum clearances” (Yelling, 2007: 120).

Vital to the poor, and in turn to the wealthy they served, they were further impediments to municipal attempts to modernise London’s food supplies with new market halls disrupting the “Liberal master-narrative of urban development” (Jones, 2016: 64). They remained a perceived threat to civic authority embodying a stubborn fragment of medieval carnival and performativity; their legal and spatial marginality entwined. As such they were the target of often brutal police enforcement actions (Jones, 2016). The Commissioner of Police, Richard Mayne (1796-1868) was accused of “waging a war on the costermongers” which possessed “all the malignancy of personal dislike” (*The Era*, 1 November 1863: 9). However, the necessity of some class interdependency and the belief in evangelism as a civilising influence likely meant that unlike the brutal, military demolitions of Hausmann’s

Paris, London's modernity was progressed largely "equivocal and piecemeal... based on a conjunction of the old and the new" (Nead, 2000: 6).

Even so, as the physical distance between the bourgeois and the poor increased concomitantly with fear and suspicion, so did the influence of arms-length benevolence with funding of missionary societies. This linked the enforced 'moving inside' (both physical and metaphorical) of the trades and life on London's streets with a simultaneous moral crusade against popular pastimes and amusements. By mid-century, gone were the tea gardens, cock fighting, apprentice rituals and street gambling of a previous age. The sanctions by the Common Council in the City, "under the prompting of its Methodist contingent" (Bailey, 2014: 32) against the famous Bartholomew Fair, dating from 1183, meant that it, along with other fairs closed by private bills, was dead by 1854.

This attempt to 'clear the streets' also constituted a culmination of a kind of internal, urban enclosure cementing property rights for rentiers on the basis of a Lockean ideological project started much earlier in the English countryside.⁵ The failure to 'improve' so-called 'wasted' land (or its commercial value) in this sense meant forfeiting the right to age-old liberties to live, graze, or as here, trade. Especially true of those that sold the watercress, chickweed, flowers or indeed sometimes eels that they sourced from age-old common land in London's greener extremities, these "challenges to their livelihood... [was also] a disruption of their social networks and a challenge to their dignity" (Jankiewicz, 2012: 404). Interestingly, the costermongers whose livelihoods were threatened were in many cases Irish immigrants, the victims of a related 'internal colonialism' practised by English landlords in Ireland.

The conventional view that street trading declined through this process is, however, untrue. The walking (or carrying) street traders like Mayhew's pea-soup seller and the hot-eel man, both of whose fare would, in one way or another be absorbed into the offerings of the nascent eel-pie shops, did eventually, by the later century largely

⁵ Locke follows the writings of Thomas More in his *Utopia* (1516) in expounding his theory of 'improvement' as the basis of property rights against communal, customary rights that interfered with capitalist accumulation. Locke's contention that if property (or land) was being used by 'indigenous' peoples, it could be legitimately colonially expropriated to 'improve' it is entirely concomitant with the reappropriation of market spaces by capital.

go the way of the roving pie seller.⁶ Street markets however, inevitably home to many eel and pie shops as their customer base became entirely working class, continued to grow into the twentieth century. Along with permanent shops these markets absorbed some of this former ambulatory retail business. In 1932, The London School of Economics' *New Survey of London Life and Labour* (an attempted 'update' to Mayhew) reported that stall numbers had grown by fifty percent since the turn of the century and Victoria Kelley (2019: 1, 6) suggests that markets had "reinvented themselves within a consumer modernity."

What appears to have occurred was a negotiation around what Kelley (2019) suggests was the notion of 'informality'. Although street selling remained a thorn in the side of the authorities and large sections of an outraged bourgeoisie, their utility was beyond doubt, and they were largely tolerated. I suggest that these negotiations were in no small part advanced by the costermongers themselves, initially aided (sometimes) by Mayhew's ventriloquising of their struggles (Herdman, 2021). Indeed, although beyond the scope of this study, costermongers, despite their later *fin de siècle* conservative associations appear in this period to have been active around wider issues of suffrage and Irish nationalism (Jankiewicz, 2012: 402). Certainly Marc Brodie (2001: 49) cites coster unions with governing committees that may have been absorbed within the New Unionism of the 1880s and suggests that they "quite consciously identified themselves and their causes with the working class... that was clearly recognised by politicians of the period, but which has been largely ignored since."

By sheer strength of numbers costermongers, as part of a developing working class culture, forced an accommodation with the forces of modernity and capitalism. This accommodation was not linear nor was it simply about how and where trade occurred but was more profound. Distinctive not only through their unique (and London-centric) economic formation but additionally subversive through what both Gertrude Himmelfarb (1995) and Stedman Jones ([1971] 2013) have suggested was a cultural and moral separateness, the costers, as part of a wider London working

⁶ John Thompson's camera captures much of the fading of these street trades in the late 1870s. See - Thomson and Smith [1877] 1994.

class, constituted a radical alternative to the strictures of bourgeois society “which probably owed something to the tradition of workers entering and leaving the street trades” (Jankiewicz, 2012: 405).

This culture perhaps additionally contained something of the solidarities and charity that Mayhew had noticed amongst the ‘Street Irish’ (Mayhew, 1851: 104) and also encapsulated the essence of the independence and individuality of what would become the late Victorian cockney. This complicated identity, a culture partly defined by precarity, nascent entrepreneurialism, early Victorian moral zoning and the largely failed hegemonic effort to create a working class in the image of the bourgeois, would be reconstituted as the customer base of the eel, pie and mash shops later in the century.

1.3 Through plate glass windows of respectability

Although *The Post Office Directory* appears to list the first Eel Pie House as a *shop* that belongs to Henry Blanchard at 101 Union Street in Southwark in 1844, it’s clear that there existed much older, taxonic institutions.⁷ In the mid-eighteenth century, eel pies were served in a public house (The Eel Pie House) on a small island south-west of Twickenham Ayt(e). Mentioned by Dickens, it became notorious for dog fights and duels.⁸ So popular did this become that the area subsequently became known as Eel-Pie Island. In addition, another public house, also known as The Eel Pie House, by the New River in Highbury (then) north of London, was cited by John Nelson in an 1811 book where:

So great is the resort of the lower order of people from the metropolis to the Eel Pie House, on Palm Sunday... that the host and servants are obliged to be on the alert at two o’clock in the morning to receive their numerous guests, who are none of the most gentle sort... (Nelson, 1811: 153).

In 1830, *The Morning Advertiser* (24 August 1830: 1) mentions another public house with the name Eel Pie House in an advertisement for coal barges. A pie shop in

⁷ Blanchard, Henry, *eel pie house*, 101 Union St. Boro’ High st. *Post Office London Directory for 1844*, Commercial Directory, *Post Office London Directory for 1844*: 574.

⁸ In the third Dickens novel, *Nicholas Nickleby*, (1838-9) Miss Morleena Kenwiggins goes to Eel Pie Island for a picnic.

Wardour Street that certainly sells eel pies is referred to in an article in *The Champion* in 1837 (16 April 1837: 24) whilst describing, with rather obvious glee, a fight between the shop owner and “four young shopmen” who are passing customers. The dialogue of the subsequent trial, reproduced as a patronising colloquialism, is instructive. One of the young defendants is quoted as saying “Heel-pies are only fit for snobs, give me a mince 'un.” The presiding magistrate gives an opportunity for the unnamed pie-shop owner to speak.

Heel pies, yer Lorship, as is chalked up a penny, is made of fish with their heads, and tails, and hinsides, and all in it, chopped up together. But sitch' pies as I sells aint only made with the werry best sand or silver eels, cleaned in three vorters...

The speech is cut short by the judge, but clearly the tradesman is making a distinction between cheap penny pies sold on the streets and his better fare. Also interesting is the idea of the pie as a food for the common man, whose voice is ventriloquised for comic effect. We might also note that the eel as an ingredient is held in traditionally higher esteem than simple fish and that is partly due to its heritage as a staple of Londoners diet for more than a thousand years (Fort, 2002).

In terms of these early taxonic pie shops, a painting by Frederick Napoleon Shepherd however conclusively proves that the listed Blanchard shop was not even the owner's first. Painted in 1835, the image clearly shows a Blanchard's eel-pie shop on the more central Fleet Street.⁹

We might conclude then that the pie *shop* was more common than the largely unreliable and erratic recordings of *The Post Office Directory*. We have, unfortunately, no documentary evidence of exactly how Blanchard sold his wares and whether for instance, he sold live eels as later pie shops would, or whether there were potatoes, soup or anything else on the menu. Blanchard's is not then, despite commonly held views the progenitor of the contemporary eel, pie and mash shop, merely a distant ancestor.

⁹ Shepherd, Frederick Napoleon. “View of building in Fleet Street, with Blanchard's premises and figures on pavement”, Watercolour, 1835, London Metropolitan Archives, Main Print Collection, Cat., No., q4029905. See Fig. 1 in appendix.

The listing of a business by its trading name is, up until this point, usually (although not exclusively) reserved for public houses. Assuming that the directory relies on the owner to define their own business, it seems likely that Henry Blanchard, who makes a great and expanding success of his venture through the coming century, may be the entrepreneurial author of his own commercial debut.

The waters are further muddied by two advertisements in the *Morning Advertiser* in 1846:

To be let - an Eel Pie House - low rent made by lodgers. For cards of address apply to Mr Clayton, Hairdresser, 2, Borough Road, near St George's Circus (*Morning Advertiser*, 11 April 1846)

And:

To be Let an Eel Pie House, *established six years* [my italics], in a crowded thoroughfare, doing a snug business - rent 30/. - let off for 24/. For further particulars enquire Mr Wellard's, 8 St George's-place, Walworth road (*Morning Advertiser*, 24 October 1846)

My research indicates that these are the first mentions of eel pie houses in the press not specifically referring to ventures in public houses, and the ordinariness and casual mention of the description certainly indicates a type of shop that was reasonably common.

In the 1841 Census, a Henry Blanchard in Union Street (although the street number is illegible or missing) is listed as pastry cook.¹⁰ He is also listed in tandem with his new shop in the same way in *The Post Office Directory* of 1844.¹¹ The following year, a second Eel Pie House is recorded this time in Lisson Grove in west London. The owner is John Fletcher. There is a listing for a baker called John Fletcher in the

¹⁰ Blanchard, Henry, *1841 Census for England*, Surrey, St Saviour, District 16: 13.

¹¹ Blanchard, Henry, *Post Office London Directory for 1844*; Confectioners and Pastry Cooks: 1003.

1844 directory who is also working as a pastry cook in Soho.¹² We can't be entirely sure that, as it would seem, these are one and the same man but given perhaps the success of Blanchard's venture, Fletcher might have taken his future and his trade skills into his own hands.

That both of these men were pastry cooks is entirely significant. During the progress of the eighteenth century, the ideology of rationalism, individualism and the free market came into direct conflict with the profiteering, patrician state (the 'Old Corruption'). With the increasingly vital role of manufacturing, the unequal relationships between the elites and the commercial and professional sections of society who served them, started to break apart. In tandem, the scale of manufacture began to erode paternal control over the life of workers, challenging class relations and evidenced "the growth of a newly won psychology of the free labourer" (Thompson, [1980] 1991: 37-38).

The bonds between the gentry, small masters and labourers (emboldened by an advancing radical ideology) weakened significantly. Among the casualties of this breakage was a "further concentric ring of economic clientship" radiating out from the great houses" (Thompson, [1980] 1991: 39). These were workers like dressmakers, coach makers, innkeepers, vintners and pastry cooks. It was this class, profiting from "the sweat of their own brow" (Thompson, [1963] 2013: 710) that took their skills to London, to serve the needs of a growing metropolis commercially dominated by the bourgeoisie. They were joined by those that the gentry had come to see as both idle and disorderly and who had withdrawn from social control: clothing workers, urban artisans and labourers (Williams, 1969). Both groups brought with them at least some vestiges of customs and rituals of a proto-industrial culture.

It is my contention that both of these groups would form a commercial relationship in the city as respectively owner and customer of the emergent Eel Pie Houses. With this synthesis of groups, late eighteenth and early nineteenth century London begins to facilitate a cultural negotiation around its own earlier, urban culture. This was one

¹² Fletcher, John, *Baker*, 12 Nassau St, Soho. *Post Office London Directory for 1844*; Confectioners and Pastry Cooks: 682.

in which “people took their pleasures in great gulps and were addicted to excitement and spectacle” like riots and cruel animal sports (Golby, 1984, 65). It was a culture that the Victorian bourgeoisie, unlike their Regency cousins Tom and Jerry, increasingly feared and associated with a danger to the new embryonically hegemonic social order. The association of work with respectability and its converse, idleness and leisure with chaos, was linked “in a self-conscious cultivation of respectability on the part of those of all classes who wished to emphasise their social superiority” (Golby, 1984, 65).

The control of the London street and the subsequent rise of the eel pie shop must be seen in this light. According to Winter (2013: 4), “neither common law or statute bestowed the right to set up a stall or put down a basket on the public way... [and] vestries received explicit powers to remove barrows and stalls from street markets in the Regency period”. Subsequently, the 1839 Police Act gave the new Metropolitan force powers, open to the discretion of the officer, to confiscate goods, barrows or stalls if they impeded traffic on the pavement or road. What this meant in practice was that the sellers had to keep moving and not, apart from within the act of making a sale, put their baskets down. This process of ‘improving’ the city was not linear however and was conditional on compromises between local government, private interests and tradition (Nead, 2000:5). Indeed, further legislation in 1869, (formally, *The Metropolitan Streets Act, Amendment Act, 1867*) provoked an enormous backlash from the coster community who had by now formed what amounted to a union around their evolving identity and culture (Ellis, 1923: 284).¹³ At a time of an essential appeal to a ‘one nation Toryism’, Disraeli’s government subsequently manoeuvred to amend the act by exempting all costermongers (defining them as traditionally those that traded in foods including fish and fruit and goods manufactured at home that had been exempted from previous licensing), itinerants and hawkers (licensed traders who, crucially, had their own street cries).

The commercial opportunity of the ‘coming inside’ for those able to avail themselves of it would be considerable. It did however require capital and business acumen. If

¹³ For the *Metropolitan Streets Act, Amendment Act, 1867* - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/31-32/5/contents>.

we take Blanchard's as a starting point for what we know will be a successful empire and contrast it with Fletcher's (which will not) we can see immediately that their physical locations are different. We might conjecture whether at this stage his shop in a prime location like Fleet Street is his only premises, but he opens a new concern in a Union Street that already has five Coffee Rooms.¹⁴ In Lisson Grove near Fletcher's shop, we find only one Coffee Room but two Dining Rooms in close proximity.¹⁵ Modern retail parlance would call this 'clustering' - a geographic concentration of interconnected businesses whose aggregation is said to increase productivity.

Yet Blanchard's new shop is in a solidly working class district whilst Fletcher's location is more mixed. Southwark, historically outside the jurisdiction of the City of London, had been seen as an area of license, entertainment and criminality for hundreds of years. By the time Blanchard opens, it is a mix of artisans, warehouse workers servicing the river and the very poor with one of the worst slums in the capital, known as 'The Mint' (Yelling, 2007: 21). Blanchard's is also very close to a street market and this juncture of shopping, work and refreshment would become crucial in the shops' mid-century iteration, enticing as it did a clientele increasingly defined by speed, necessity and an emergent consumer culture.

We might deduce that eels and pie and the businesses that sell them are now more commonly associated with the working classes as a food of convenience housed in a shop that has all the hallmarks of bourgeois respectability.

Because of the inconsistencies of City Directories and their categorisation of eating establishments it's difficult to accurately pinpoint the number of these new ventures but it seems that from Blanchard's opening in 1844, there are almost twenty similar establishments by 1865 and they clearly mirror the decline in street sales.¹⁶ If

¹⁴ Census and listings in the Post Office journal reveal that the Blanchard family subsequently owned a string of eel and pie houses in South and central London.

See listings for Coffee Rooms in *Post Office London Directory for 1844: 1099-1100*.

¹⁵ Burcham, Robert, 5 Lisson grove north. *Post Office London Directory for 1844; Coffee Rooms; 1099, Rutland, Chas, 4 Up. Lisson st. Lisson gro. Post Office London Directory for 1844; Coffee Rooms: 1117 & Matthers, William, 41 Lisson gro. Post Office London Directory for 1844; Coffee Rooms: 1117.*

¹⁶ Confusingly, Kelly's Post Office Directories initially only carried the categories of 'Dining Rooms' to refer to places that people ate away from home, but by 1850 the category of 'Coffee Rooms' changes to include a subcategory 'and also Dining Rooms'. During this period, *Eel Pie Houses* remain unlisted

Blanchard and Fletcher were outliers, however, this change in eating patterns was exacerbated by increasing industrialisation. With the Great Exhibition of 1851, London especially would witness the birth of an age of commercial entertainment and consequentially “a significant trend towards the systematic commercialisation of the catering business” (Tames, 2003: 31).

Again, a lack of exact historical record means that it’s difficult to conclude what these enterprises might have looked like or how they operated but an account in Charles Manby Smith’s *Curiosities of London Life* (1857) describes one of these mid-century pie shops. They are found “...especially in the immediate neighbourhood of omnibus and cab stations, and very much in the thoroughfares and shortcuts most frequented by the middle and lower classes” (Smith, 1857: 203).

The appearance of propriety is essential:

...but though the window may be of plate-glass, behind which piles of the finest fruit, joints, and quarters of the best meat, a large dish of silver heels, and a portly china bowl charged with a liberal heap of minced-meat, with here and there are a few pies, lie temptingly arranged upon napkins of snowy whiteness, yet there is not a chair, stool, or seat of any kind to be found within. No dallying is looked for, nor would it probably be allowed.

Yet the shops are certainly gendered spaces and working women a likely draw:

The customer of the pie shop is a man (if he is not a boy) with whom the penny is a penny, and a pie is a pie...Look at him as he stands in the centre of the floor, Direct as grenadier, turning his busy mouthful upon the living tide that rushes along Holborn... The assistants are women ... three or four good looking lasses, the very incarnations of good temper and cleanly tidiness, who

as a category in their own right. The ‘restaurant’ is a class-loaded term in this period, and it is for this reason I believe that they deserve a taxonomic qualification of their own. My statistical research is based on counting individual entries, keyword listed by ‘eel and pie house’ in the business title although it is clear from cross referencing mentions in newspaper and magazine articles of the period, this is not necessarily accurate.

For similar establishments, see - London Metropolitan Archives; London, England; *London, England, City Directories, 1736-1943* [database on-line] Commercial Directory.

from morn to night was busy as bees in extricating the pies from their metallic moulds, as they are demanded by the customers... they are without exception plain and healthy looking ... (Smith, 1857: 204-205).

Indeed, these descriptions echo in some ways the modish role of barmaids in the city's new public houses and gin palaces that were taking over from traditional taverns. The pie shops of this era were, it appears, analogously gas-lit and mirrored. Peter Bailey (1997) suggests that these kind of illuminated spaces provided a theatrical atmosphere which eventually accommodated a flirtatious 'knowingness' especially with a counter that heightened the allure of the unobtainable. This emergent 'managed' early Victorian sexuality, whilst beyond the scope of this work, signals to a customer base that understood the illicit potency of the "maid-manservant relationship" (Bailey, 1997: 168).

The shops are however not yet recognisable as the contemporary or even later nineteenth century Eel and Pie shop. They have no seating; they are not spaces to linger, and food seems served not on a plate but by hand. They appear a synthesis of an eighteenth century enterprise with a location-specific modern customer base, where artisans and clerks might rub shoulders with cab drivers. The elites are nowhere to be seen nor perhaps at this stage are the amorphous London poor. These are likely petty bourgeois enterprises largely catering for their own interstitial class and the more prosperous of the working classes. George Dodd in his *Food of London* (1856: 520) concurs that "... pie shops are now numerous in London - not only in the humbler streets, but in the leading thoroughfares where a high rental must be paid." He continues that "the modern commercial system has been adopted to its fullest extent; yielding an almost infinitely small profit on each, and, therefore, a large scale and efficient management are requisite." It appears that at this stage the shops are still likely an echo of the earlier, more traditional pie shop but are increasingly bifurcated along lines of location and client base.

Burnett's (2004: 42) comment that at this point there were "also specialist hot eel, pie *and mash* [my italics] cookshops which were beginning to take over from the street traders" without primary evidence seems hopeful at best but the taxon of eating places to which I will subsequently turn is likely significant.

1.4 Food as cipher

Food, its type and, crucially, the *manner* of its consumption, would become increasingly relevant as a code for understanding how British (and specifically London) society was developing in this period. With an ascendant politically powerful middle class, the early century would see “an increasing convergence of outlook between the middle classes and the aristocracy” (Stedman Jones, 1974: 462). It was to France that these upper classes had historically looked to enhance their gastronomic culture. This was a departure from the traditional roast meats that had come to define the English upper class diet largely unchanged since the mediaeval period. The class adaption of such food was crucial to the emergent prototypes of the eel and pie shop and their genius would be to serve such basic food in familiar pairings (eels, pies and eventually potatoes) and in contemporary surroundings.

The historical pie was likely a way to cook meat without burning and some suggest that the pastry was only eaten by the poor after the master had consumed the innards.¹⁷ By the early Victorian period, however, it was clearly ubiquitous as a form of mobile meal, as was the potato, usually served baked from a street seller (useful to warm the hands on but, as Mayhew records, also in decline). The potato itself in this period accounted for a huge 212.7 kg per capita per annum and was an enormously cheap item on which to base a new commercial venture (Lummel, 2016). The eel, a historical staple, was still immensely popular. At this point they were brought to the Thames by Dutch merchants and in 1851 “an astonishing 9,797,760 eels were sold in Billingsgate market”. Mayhew (1851: 63) records them being sold hot in liquor, hawked on the streets by costers. This is likely the culinary pedigree of the contemporary dish of eels and liquor.

Spang (2001) claims that Paris was the birthplace of what we now know as the restaurant and the term, from the sixteenth century, initially referred to a restorative consommé. In 1765, a man named Boulanger was sued by the caterers’ guild after they claimed his shop, selling such ‘restaurants’, compromised their monopoly (the English guilds had lost their own control over the catering trade almost a century

¹⁷ This commonly held culinary belief is however disputed by - Clarkson, 2009.

earlier). This brought him notoriety and other enterprising Parisians soon opened their own similar establishments.

Spang (2001: 11) cites Roze de Chantoiseau, proprietor of the *Champ d'Oiseau*, as the first recognisably modern restaurateur in the 1770s. Conveniently he also published a business directory allowing him to promote his cooking in a way that appealed to the elites' preoccupation with health and the growing fashion for *cuisine*. Crucially Mennell (2003: 250) suggests that this process of elite dining out was also developing, by exchange in London. Indeed, inns and coffee houses had prefigured the role of the restaurant by at least a century or more and there had likely been free mixing in inns between intellectuals, merchants and landed gentry especially when winter sittings in parliament had necessitated 'eating out' away from country estates. When the Revolution began, "Paris already had a hundred restaurants" and in a bloodier echo of the breaking of the bonds between the English elites and the small masters, Paris had a surfeit of cooks previously employed by the now depleted aristocracy (Mariani, 1991: 25).

After 1789 the new Jacobin class echoed their earlier English cousins by using dining spaces as political and cultural arenas that eventually contributed to an aesthetic of wider public gastronomy. According to Jürgen Habermas ([1962] 1989), restaurants became, like music and art before them, part of a bourgeois discursive and linguistic sphere, a public arena open to all 'private', rational individuals to debate and discuss. Participation was based on literacy, opinion, subjectivity and experience, not by dint of social rank or hereditary status.

Mennell (2003: 247) echoes Habermas' ([1962] 1989) notion of the dissemination of elite culture to the 'reasoning' public by the figure of the gastronome, a cipher who by his writing, eventually democratized this notion of elite taste. Mennell further suggests that the gastronome's role as an arbiter of taste and fashion might be analogous to that of the flamboyant Regency dandy whose challenge to convention signifies a moment of social flux in which it may be possible to cross "social grades" (Mennell 2003: 251-252).

By 1825, Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin in his *Physiologie Du Goût* recorded that all of Europe has imitated Paris and "...you may see here and there, some foreigners, especially the English, who stuff themselves with double portions of meat... (1970: 231). Crucially, for the French bourgeoisie and their English class-cousins, the emergent institution of the restaurant represented a distinctive and unique Parisian cultural landmark in similar ways that their earlier incarnations had for the elites on their Grand Tour. As the century progressed Spang (2001: 86) suggests, that the restaurant began to represent "... the translation of an eighteenth century cult of sensibility into a nineteenth-century sense of taste: the mutation of one era's social value into another's cultural flourish."

By the mid-century, London's population expansion is mirrored by a large increase in places outside of the home that they can eat. Assael (2018: 17-18) quotes the problematic listings in *Kelly's Directory* to show that in 1840 there were 106 restaurants in London. This rises to 570 in 1870 and then to 1147 in 1890. A good deal of this growth is contiguous to areas of commerce, transport and community activity.

Whilst middle class dining remained a leisure performance translated from elite circles and contained the opportunity to redefine societal manners in their own image, much expands into the daily arena of work. Now, "the heterogeneities in nature of London's public eating" was synchronous with the demands of the working day (Assael, 2018: 15). London cooks no longer represent the prestige of their previous aristocratic masters but serve food to a wider, although class-segregated, eating *public*. Towards the 1870s as trade grew in both rapidity and volume, food became cheaper and there was a rise in both disposable income and immigrant labour to service the sector. The London restaurant eventually becomes a foci for notions of the modern: for advances in technology, hygiene, manners and the creation of an identity of certain types of Londoners defined through their class and thus gustatory cultures.

For the urban poor, much food is still taken outside but some cook shops, analogous perhaps in some limited ways to later working class *caffs* started to provide limited seating for their customers to eat adjacent to the shop (Assael, 2018: 41). By the

latter half of the century, the expansion of cheap working class restaurants signify a democratisation of eating in the public sphere and the extension of urban social interactions. Eating as theatre was now not solely confined to the bourgeoisie and Assael (2018: 97) cites James McKenzie who relates of his childhood in the 1870s a local eel shop with “‘lady servers, standing behind a counter [who] wore cleanwhite [sic] aprons’ serving stewed eels from steaming containers. whose outside stall attracted crowds watching the eels being killed.” Later in the century, with the rise of the consumer society, the customer could increasingly choose to identify with types of food that expressed their own tastes and those of their contemporaries. The eel and pie shops would become hyperlocal emblems of a distinctive and emergent working class culture no longer based solely around work but synchronous with entertainment and the opportunity not only to demonstrate but also to *perform* respectability.

1.5 Hunger and the ‘Great Unwashed’¹⁸

During the first half of the century the diet of the poor people in the towns was bad. The greater part of their nourishment came from bread, potatoes and strong tea (Drummond and Wilbraham, 1991: 329).

If the period between Waterloo and the First Reform Bill had been exultant for the wealthy, it was much less so for the poorer residents of London. As Himmelfarb (1985: 356) remarks, the shock of their discovery by Mayhew and his urban explorers “was actually a shock of recognition.” They could be ignored for long periods, demonised even (as they certainly were), but as Tom Nairn (1964) suggests, the issue and problem of the working classes was inextricably linked to that of the English bourgeoisie because they developed in a synchronous dance.

Industrialisation and the machine age had meant a different development of the labouring classes in London. Unlike the mill towns of the north, many workers in the capital retained a limited stake in how production occurred and were not just the

¹⁸ Usually attributed to Edmund Burke, the first published use was by Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1830. See - Bulwer-Lytton, 1833: 49.

unthinking automatons conjured by the word 'proletarian'. Although these men likely supported the "ideology of economic independence and sturdy individualism" (Thompson [1963] 2013: 710), delineations in earnings were large between a labour elite like compositors and tailors, relatively unaffected by recent industrialisation, and the those like the silk-workers of Spitalfields, part of the urban casualty-mass of the same process. These divisions were to some limited extent closed within the early decades of the century by the erosion of artisanal independence in the workplace yet, market precarity meant that even skilled workers might be subject to periods of "prosperity and poverty" Burnett (1979: 52). However, it was sharp and unexpected food-price spikes that were most disastrous.

In the early part of the century, especially after 1815 and the introduction of the Corn Laws, bread prices especially were subject to regular and acute price fluctuations. These 'laws' or, more accurately, tariff restrictions, were initially introduced in 1804 to impose a duty on imported grain to protect the interests of British agriculture, a sector dominated by the landed aristocracy. Solidified in the Importation Act of 1815, the Liverpool government sought to exclude foreign-grown corn until the domestic price of home-grown corn exceeded 80 shillings per quarter. This led to rioting almost immediately and the following year climatic change (likely prompted by the eruption of Mount Tombora) exacerbated shortages causing famine across Europe. Disturbances around food prices and (the lack of) democratic change ushered in an era of draconian state repression. As Perry Anderson (1964: 31) suggests, the new English manufacturing class "

rallied to the aristocracy... [The whole era of] wars against the French abroad and repression against the working class at home marked the years of its maturation. Two decades after the fall of Bastille, it celebrated its entry into history by cutting down working class demonstrators at Peterloo.

Although there is debate about exactly how the economic situation affected working class nutrition patterns, what seems clear is that workers' wages (and thus purchasing power in relation to food) stagnated simultaneously with a rapid expansion of per-capita gross domestic product during a period of technological upheaval (Allen, 2009).

The ability to purchase food to consume was one (very significant) thing but where to consume it was quite another. In a Britain where one-fifth of the population was now living in urban areas there was a unique necessity for the provision of food and drink to be available close to work and home. This fragmentation of the social fabric in terms of location and activity, in addition to the cost and ability to acquire fuel, required working people to seek sustenance in new ways. The lack of storage, refrigeration or indeed general space at home was exacerbated by temporal changes to work, especially shift patterns and early starts. This meant that most working class men relied on transient coffee and food stalls in the street for sustenance. In parallel, traditionally gendered rural skills such as around cooking, baking and brewing declined. This had much to do with women that had entered the workforce either in factories or domestic service having less time to practice them and the changing (and smaller) urban living spaces (Burnett, 1979: 4).

In urban areas, eating outside had largely been the prerogative of those who begged. Workers had to shop outside too and did so largely from tiny stalls that sold small amounts of staples very cheaply and often on credit. Working patterns also meant that much of the shopping was done on a Saturday night and especially at the very late close of business when perishable items would be discounted for a quick sale. The markets would be,

Hives of activity, noise and bedlam. The stalls would be lit with naphtha flame lamps... It was... midnight before the noise ceased and then the Council workmen stepped in to clear away the debris" (Southgate and Philpot, 1982: 83-84)

Food that was bought had to be cheap, tasty and easy to cook. In tea and white bread, there was an ironic inversion and likely social imitation of the food of the previous century's elites. In comparison to seasonal, rural eating scarcely a generation previously, the urban poor's diet was monotonous, relatively expensive and contained much less nutritional value. Urban bread was now almost entirely cosmetically white, the result of 'high milling' that removed nearly all of the bran. It was taken with tea that gave crucial warmth, converting a meagre meal into the

appearance of a hot dinner. Thomas Wright was a worker who 'tramped' (one of many thousands who had no option but to seek seasonal employment) and he records the necessity of purchasing breakfast at street stalls usually on the edges of town centres:

The gleam from the hot coffee stall comes like a guiding star ... here you get warmth to your hands on the outside of the cup, and for the inner man from the liquid, which you get piping hot... (Wright, 1868 in Burnett, 2016: 33)

George Sala (1859: 13) describes one such common rickety stall in Covent Garden Market as "something between a gypsy's tent and a watchman's box."

Urban food was about cost, speed and palatability. Mayhew (1851: 174) likely has it correct when he states that "men whose lives are alternations of starvation and surfeit love some easily swallowed and comfortable food better than most approved substantiality of the dinner table." At regular intervals throughout the century and coinciding with price fluctuations or bad harvests, soup kitchens became a feature of London life and well-to-do women ventured like explorers into the jungle of slums to dispense lectures on the benefits of cheap and nutritious food - failing of course to answer issues around fuel-poverty or sheer exhaustion.¹⁹ Burnett (2014: 29) suggests that soup became for the working class a symbol of pauperism, reawakening terrible memories of the workhouse.

Food price instability and ultimately famine meant that the 1840s were characterised by great hunger. It is in this period that the street pie men would see their livelihoods diminished where an opportunity arose to provide indoor meals based on cheap palatable and common ingredients. Concomitantly, it was also a period where the legend of Sweeney Todd (the 'demon barber' of Fleet Street whose customers ended their days as pie fillings) would be established.

¹⁹ See for example - 'Soup Kitchen in Leicester Square', *The Poor Man's Guardian*, 6, 11 December 1847.

By the late 1830s, because of falling incomes, potatoes were increasingly replacing wheat in working class diets and there are reports in the *Times* of farmers shooting people caught stealing them (Gurney, 2009). As well as becoming a key ingredient for what would later become the eel, pie and mash shops, the potato had its own symbolism in the debate around hunger and its articulation in the so-called 'Hungry Forties.'²⁰ Thompson (2013: 348) notes that around this time potatoes were seen as the food of the 'primitive' Irish peasantry ("Erin's root-fed hordes") contrasted with the food (wheat for bread) of the free-born Englishman contributing to a gastro-nationalistic moral panic.

In Victorian literature, hunger is portrayed both as a pervasive threat to order but also has a moral dimension. In the cultural texts of the period there was a "nervous interest in what, and how much, paupers ate" (Berry 1999: 48) but simultaneously a trope of self-control. In Christina Rossetti's *The Goblin Market*, Lizzie's refusal to eat the goblin's fruit is a spiritual act of denial concomitant with the period's valorisation of idealised womanhood. In contrast, John, a representative of the male working class in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* ([1848] 2018: 125) is dehumanised by starvation, reduced to a pre-civilized state, with "hunger in his shrunk, fierce, animal look". The breakdown of the family unit is shown through the impoverished, typhus-stricken Davenport's 'selfishness [which] he has never shown in health" when he "snatche[s]... with animal instinct" the jug of tea intended for his wife (Scholl, 2017: footnote 26). Dickens' Magwitch in *Great Expectations* will be forever grateful to Pip for feeding him at the opening of the tale and will become his invisible benefactor.

However, food representation changes in Victorian narrative by the 1860s when "taste begins to supersede hunger" (Scholl, 2016: 5). The eel pie shops, likely serving the petit bourgeois and respectable working classes in a simulacra of the emergent bourgeois restaurant, sit between these two poles.

²⁰ 'The Hungry Forties'. This term, it is now acknowledged, was a retrospective invention coined in the 1920s by free trade supporters as criticised in Chaloner, 1967.

1.6 Eating out and translatable spaces

As least as far back as the fifteenth century, England had a network of inns that meant travellers no longer had to rely on the hospitality of monasteries. “However, it would seem that availing oneself of a meal provided commercially was restricted to people journeying until sometime at the end of the eighteenth century (Warde and Martens, 2000: 22).” Prefiguring the bourgeois developments of the restaurant, cuisine and an associated societal change in Paris, Felicity Heal (1990) concludes, rather depressingly, that the early modern Englishman never appeared terribly hospitable to strangers. According to her, hospitality by the elites became performative and a way of estimating the recipient’s moral worth against a backdrop of an emergent market economy and the beginnings of state charity for the needy. Importantly for emergent patterns of dining, especially amongst the growing working classes, the growth of urban London changed prevailing notions of hospitality by foregrounding personal preferences and individualism against a more traditional rurality of social duties. Hospitality was increasingly frustrated and delineated by social rank and became focussed on rites of passage and communal festivities. Both of these would decline in nineteenth century London as part of the ‘civilising’ of the street and the allied pacifying of the mob (Golby and Purdue, 1984).

By the turn of the nineteenth century, the necessity of providing food services for those away from home resulted in “what might be called professional as opposed to amateur building. Prior to that... most buildings were ... adaptable for a variety of purposes” (Olsen, 1974: 269). We can see this in the building of new public houses that reflected the need for privacy and segregated drinking areas for different patrons. As so many of the contemporary eating places were inadequate to their new, expanded role (and fashions that dictated that middle class meals at home became increasingly ritualised) the public landscape within which the eel and pie shops would emerge started to change (Drummond and Wilbraham, 1991: 335). Coffee houses of this period had altered little from their heyday in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when their associated function was of facilitating debate amongst customers. Their wooden compartments were open to the centre of the room but, with the increasing concerns of Victorian propriety, many added upstairs spaces for women and families.

Astonishingly, by 1820 there were some 3,000 restaurants in Paris (Zeldin, 1977, 2: 739). Transplanted to London for the upper classes, these spaces were translated and revelatory. The Grand Divan Restaurant on the Strand in 1848 still nodded to the coffee house in booths on either side of the room but also utilised long mirrors set in gilt frames. In place of pewter, there were electro-plated tankards, clean linen and napkins (King, 1980: 237). From a dark London of the early century, “the new restaurant did good in other directions. It let in the daylight into London life generally (Scott, 1900: 12).” It is this cheerful and bright aspect the eel pie shops would inevitably copy.

Such spaces were well publicised in the press as *a la mode* and aspirational. We may certainly conjecture that an early taxon of the eel and pie shop would have been aware of these developments. However, for most of London’s population, public eating spaces in this period left a great deal to be desired:

On working days the artisans and lower middle classes often ate their midday meal at a Tavern or a cheap eating house where an ordinary of hot meat, vegetables, bread, cheese and beer costs from 6d to 1s. Some of these places were none too attractive (Drummond and Wilbraham, 1991: 333).

‘Himself’, the anonymous author of *Memoirs of a Stomach* (1853) records that:

I have dined at eating-houses, the effluvia of which, steaming up through the iron gratings made me qualmish before eating, and ill all the day after ... I have groped my way down hypocausts in Fleet Street, and dined in cavern-like taverns, wishing myself a thousand miles away the moment the eternal joint was uncovered (Drummond and Wilbraham, 1991: 333).

These are also highly gendered spaces. In Dickens’s *Dombey and Son*, women like Miss Tox have to seek refuge ‘in a musty little back room usually devoted to the consumption of soups and pervaded by an ox-tail atmosphere’ (Dickens, 1848 in King, 1980: 235).

In early Victorian London, certainly by 1830, we see a “hierarchy of eating-places, catering for a range of needs and incomes - from humble cook-shops and ‘ordinaries’ to better class inns, chop-houses and dining rooms up to a few renown taverns and hotels” (Lummel, 2016: 9). The emergence and fading of these numerous types of eating places are synchronous with the early eel and pie houses and in nearly all, some later element is partially visible.

The conduit between the working class food of the street, the beginnings of mass catering, the restaurant and crucially the owners of the embryonic eel pie shops is most clearly seen with the pastry cooks and their cookshops. These cookshops supplied a variety of cooked dishes to the lower middle classes and, according to Dickens, were often grim:

Mr Grazinglands looked in at a pastry cooks window, hesitating as to the expediency of lunching at that establishment. He beheld nothing to eat but butter in various forms, slightly charged with jam, and languidly frizzling over tepid water. Two ancient turtle shells on which were inscribed with the legend ‘soups’ decorated a glass partition within, enclosing a stuffy alcove from which a ghastly mockery of a marriage breakfast spread on a rickety table, warned the terrified traveller (Dickens, 1877: 27).

The poor frequented their own versions of cookshops or bakeshops which sold more or less similar fare but also had communal ovens where people without facilities could take food to be cooked. These date back to the seventeenth century and as well as housewives bringing meat in a pot to be cooked, street vendors would also have their food cooked here.²¹ Dickens, in *Little Dorritt* mentions such a place:

... a dirty shop window in a dirty street, which was made almost opaque by the steam of hot meats, vegetables, and puddings... within, were a few wooden partitions, behind which set such customers as found it more convenient to take away their dinners in stomachs than in their hands (Dickens [1857] 1967: 283).

²¹ For working class cookshops, see - Flanders, 2014: 291 (footnote).

Cookhouses, notorious for skimming slices of customers' meat for themselves, inevitably declined later in the century as more homes were built with rudimentary kitchens of their own.

When visited by Egan's Tom and Jerry, coffee-shops for the lower orders, seemed to be places of "drunkenness, beggary, lewdness and carelessness" but a few offered newspapers and a pause in the city *en-route* to work (Egan, [1821] 2019: 165).

Judith Flanders (2014: 294) relates how:

The coffeehouses clearly filled need: from only a few dozen catering to artisans in 1815, they had increased in number by 1840 to nearly 2000; There a full breakfast could be purchased for 3d. A coffee house in one working class district served up to 900 customers a day, who had a choice of three rooms: the cheapest was open from 4:00 am to 10:00 pm, where customers could enjoy breakfast of coffee, bread and butter for 1 1/2d day; the second grade room offered coffee, a penny loaf and a penny worth of butter for 3d; or, in the most expensive room, customers could order a dinner where the coffee shop supplied the bread and the coffee, but the diner brought his own cooked meat.

Soup houses were even less charming offering basic soup, bread and the inevitable potato for 2d or 3d. Chop houses were a cut above all of these, although they varied considerably in quality of food and surroundings chiefly because the waiters were not paid but expected to live off tips and paid for the tablecloths to be laundered themselves. So-called 'slap-bangs', named for the onomatopoeic slamming down at speed of the dishes, were a cheap and not-so-cheerful cousin of the more salubrious chop houses that fed better-off clerks and City gents alike.²²

Further taxons of the eel and pie houses could be found in less likely places. By the 1830s, traditional public houses were also under threat from modernity by the rise of the new Gin Palaces. From the mid-eighteenth century, gin had become

²² For a description of Guppy's meal in a slap-bang see - Dickens, [1853] 2008: 276.

progressively more expensive due in no small part to the 1751 Gin Act and pubs had developed from taverns that were essentially a front room of a house onto a more professional footing. Now, however, plate glass windows and gas-lighting meant that customers flocked to these fashionable, bright and decorous new wonders that served only gin. As Dickens ([1836] 1995: 217-218) significantly remarks, “the more splendid do these places become, the poorer the area.” Indeed, gas light could be such a modern and dizzying spectacle that *The Times* reported in January 1837 on a confused drunken man demanding gin from a baker’s shop (Jackson, 2019: 7).

By 1861, *The Sporting Life* gives us a rare and brief glimpse of what we may expect to find in a mid-century eel and pie shop when it mentions “splendid shops, dazzling with gas, and glass, and Women’s charms”.²³ The shops appear as a modern ‘spectacle’ synchronous with a nascent consumer commodity culture framed by the earlier Great Exhibition of 1851 (Richards, 1990).

One may conjecture that location, price and not a little business acumen was required to make these new prototype spaces profitable. The number of advertisements *selling* these new businesses are clearly noteworthy. One such, from 1848 is typical and from its mention of a coffee house may indicate a joint venture.

To be let, near Finsbury square, a HOUSE and SHOP, well adapted to any business - now in the pie trade - low rent, and partly made by lodgers - coming-in moderate. For particulars, apply at the Globe Coffee house, Caroline-place, City road (*Morning Advertiser*, 15 June 1848).

Further variants of the trade can be seen here:

Worthy of Notice - To be let - an old established eel pie house with immense Ginger beer trade, with fountain, cylinder, and receipts complete, in a crowded thoroughfare, near the Borough rent low; coming-in moderate. Apply at the eel-pie house, 49 White-street near St George’s Church, Borough (*Morning Advertiser*, 23 May, 1848).

²³ The Betting Interest, Its origin, *The Sporting Life*, 30 May, 1861: 1.

From the mention of ginger beer, we may assume a further (and unexpected) menu item from very limited source material.

In 1849 a mini *cause-célèbre* was reported in several newspapers of a romantic, failed suicide attempt by a young man who was (allegedly) prevented from jumping to his death from Blackfriars Bridge. He carried a letter to his new bride apologising for their poverty after he had “set up an eel-pie house, which had proved a disastrous speculation, for he had lost upwards of 40/-...” (*Daily News*, 16 January, 1849) An article a week later clarifies the situation that the man in question:

... prevailed upon a female servant to lend him 20/-. With which he took an eel-pie house in Barbican, and instead of being turned out by the landlord as he had stated, he absconded after selling some of the materials, and with the remaining portion of money got married, and lastly excited the sympathy of the public in his behalf by what the writer considered a sham attempt at suicide” (*Daily News*, 30 January, 1849).

1.7 Defeat and the culture of consolation

The potato blight of the ‘Hungry ‘Forties’ brought untold suffering but “[t]he fungus (*Phytophthora infestans*), however, did what 20 years of bitter agitation had failed to do; it brought about the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846” (Drummond and Wilbraham, 1991: 283). With this legislation dead, mid-century London expanded to an extraordinary 2.4 million people (Green, 1982: 129).

The following decade saw the start of a period where food generally became cheaper and, after years of economic and political turmoil, dining for the middle classes increasingly became to be seen as culturally significant within an arena of pleasure and amusement in an expanding ‘leisure’ economy (Rich, 2011: 2). For the London poor, a term that now included a vast army of casual labour and those whose occupations left them at the mercy of economic and seasonal fluctuations, charitable feeding and soup kitchens remained a constant presence. These parallels however were mirrored by an increasing ‘hollowing out’ of the capital as the middle

classes, increasingly drawn to an 'improving' Evangelicalism (Holladay, 1982), settled in the suburbs away from the 'corrupt' commercial centre.

Historically, the artisans, small masters, their workers and apprentices had lived in close proximity to their workshops. This community, full of rituals, drinking, gambling and sport was lost by the middle class flight and cut adrift from the proletarian poor that had moved into the city centres. The artisans, who could trace their lineage to the remnants of the guilds, had been generally hostile to mass industrialisation. Steeped in an eighteenth-century Radicalism, their language spoke to encroachments on the Civil War settlement of the 'free born Englishman' and they looked to the writings of Thomas Paine and republicanism. The traders and small masters were more influenced by the classic liberalism of John Stuart Mill who championed their own beliefs of self-reliance, free trade and individualism.

Nonetheless, the legacy of the 1832 Reform Bill marked a consolidation within the middle classes who strove increasingly to emulate the aristocratic elites. By the time of the final defeat of the 1848 Charter, London had become intensely stratified, and by the 1870s the middle classes were "generally voting Conservative" (Stedman Jones, 1974: 465). The working class, having no ideological vehicle of its own on which to carry its emancipation forward, fell into political despondency, largely abandoned and increasingly demonised by the bourgeoisie.²⁴ In turn, the class would divide as Engels, writing to Marx in the late 1850s explained. He saw a growing conservatism in some sectors of the working class and referred to it as a 'Labour Aristocracy'.²⁵ This notion, although contestable, regards these mostly skilled workers as becoming 'bourgeoisified' (Gray, 1981).

This working class introspection would not end until an upsurge in trade union activity in the 1880s, but by then the cultural framework into which proletarian culture developed had been largely set. The partial granting of suffrage by the Conservatives in 1867 served only to prove how limited the earlier radical threat had become and how unassailable the architecture of capitalism. In this context the

²⁴ Marx would not write the Communist Manifesto until 1848.

²⁵ See Marx's response to Engels on 9 April 1863 where he reflects on an "apparent Bourgeois infection of English workers" - Marx and Engels, 1965: 140.

working classes, through trades unions and co-operatives societies, increasingly sought an accommodation within class structures that would guarantee at least some stability and dignity.

During the last thirty years of the century the London working classes, as Stedman Jones (1974) suggests, appear to have turned more and more towards the consolations of pleasure and distraction found within family, sport, seaside outings and the music hall. In this it appears that they were at least outwardly receptive to an overwhelming new cultural hegemonic message from the middle classes. This was of thrift, hard work and a delineation between the 'good' and the 'idle' poor: one that equated cleanliness as a code for moral probity. This concomitant obsession with aspiration, materiality and consumption, drove an expansion of dining culture with its associated manners around public and private spaces. Here was a coetaneous "culture of governance and pacification by spectacle" (Harvey, 2004: 223) that now included both cheap cafes and expensive restaurants that signal directly to the growth of the eel and pie shops.

Although we might profitably conjecture that sections of the London working class were guided by some form of memory of *pre*-industrial solidarities and convivialities, much of the emergent proletarian culture from the 1880s onwards was formed within the interstices of now entirely working class neighbourhoods that had known little but urban living. As McLeod's (1974 in Savage and Miles, 1994: 64) work evidences, working class married couples came overwhelmingly from the same geographic areas and this hyper-locality of micro-class formation became crucial to the types of culture that proliferated. Despite the fact that the London working classes were constantly surveilled by the bourgeoisie, the culture that grew within these communities was largely opaque and defensive in nature signalling to its own uniqueness.

1.8 Cat's meat and glue for the gravy

From the thirteenth century onwards the Guilds and the Assize system oversaw much of bread and ale production and their prices. By the end of the eighteenth century however, regulations became more lax and rapid urbanisation, poor

sanitation and extended food chains meant that food quality and the incidence of deliberate adulteration became endemic. The level of contamination was made public as early as 1820 when Frederick Accum published a *Treatise on Adulterations of Food and Culinary Poisons*. By 1830 an anonymous publication called *Deadly Adulteration and Slow Poisoning Unmasked* made it clear that almost all commercially available food was corrupted in some form. A rising hegemonic belief in the free hand of the market, competition as well as periodic inflation, food shortages and remote, “highly capitalised and mechanised producers” meant that not only was the country’s food not safe, it was also not trusted (Burnett, 1979: 110, 113). Victorian literature is full of social horror at suspected (and sometimes real) poisoning at the hands of servants (Horn, 1990). It was this as well as potentially substantial losses to the treasury on heavily taxed comestibles (often the most adulterated) that led in the 1850s to Dr Thomas Wakely, the editor of the *Lancet*, commissioning Dr Arthur Hassal to write a report of his investigations into the scandal of contaminated food. These became known as the *Lancet’s* ‘Sanitary Commission’. There followed a Parliamentary enquiry itself followed by a Select Committee which led to the Adulteration of Foods Act in 1860 with much media interest. Successive legislation continued throughout the century (although the issue wasn’t resolved until comprehensive inspection regimes in the 1930s). Just as the early pie-man was slandered by notions of adulteration, the stigma was still referred to by Manby Smith about the new eel pie houses:²⁶ He retells a humorous story of a widowed pie-maker who refuses the matrimonial advances of a new upstart who has taken all her trade and who is saved by a friend arriving at the competitor with a “huge brace of dead cats” and announces that he’s arrived with the regular order...” (Manby, 1857: 208-209).

The 1850s to the mid 1870s, commonly referred to as the *Golden Age* of Victorian society saw the economy grow and ‘generally’ wages increased ahead of prices. There is a marked increase in consumption across all classes and this period prefigures a point where “... there was a dramatic growth in the number of public eating establishments in the second-half of the century” (Assael, 2018: 17-18). More “... the records of inspection and regulation illustrate the specific ways in which the

²⁶ See - Dickens, [1836] 2020: 292. The pie-man relates that in Summer, “fruits is in, cats is out.”

restaurant related to the issue of public health and testify to the increasing significance of public eating within the shaping and ordering of the later Victorian and Edwardian urban environment” (Assael, 2018: 130).

Restaurants had started to advertise themselves as ‘well ventilated’ and ‘hygienic’ literally building themselves into the narrative of the city, along with physical roads and pavements that were increasingly inspected and regulated. By 1874 *Kelly’s* lists thirty-three eel and pie houses and, although contemporary reportage is patchy, we can assume that they were at some level a deliberate replication of successful and fashionable bourgeois restaurants (Hawkins and Garlick, 2002). By this period then we might conjecture that the mid-century pie shop has likely morphed into a largely working class space that probably served pies of eel, and (probably) meat, stewed eels (likely in a liquor) and soup. The fare is almost certainly an aggregate of the offerings of an earlier pie shop with proletarian street food served in a space that resembles a cookshop or coffee house with bench and (possibly) booth seating. The pie-shop or house (not the bourgeois, restaurant) appeals largely to the employed, skilled or semi-skilled working class and possibly (largely depending on location), self-employed petty-bourgeois tradesman. It is situated within, or in close proximity to, a street market and is common in these areas with some operating until very late at night.²⁷ They were certainly popular, affordable and prolific as an article in 1869 explains, “There is a wonderful outbreak of pie shops... we know of a locality that boasts three such emporiums in succession” (“How we dine”. *London City Press*, 13 November, 1869: 13). The pie shops are, or try to be, respectable as several newspaper advertisements of the period record vacancies for: “*Respectable* [my italics] able boy... to make himself generally useful in Eel and Pie House” (*Kentish Mercury*, 2 August, 1895).

One of the best reportage that we have of shops of that era, however, does explicitly confirm that disreputable adulteration was continuing. As Olive Malvery, an extraordinary Anglo-Indian reporter recalls when undercover in an eel pie house, she is instructed to go to “...the oil shop to get sixpen’orth o’ glue” which will go in the

²⁷ “Report of two drunk and disorderly men”. *Lloyds Weekly Newspaper* 25 September 1898: 1. The article relates how “*Shortly after midnight*, the prisoners went into an eel and pie shop in East Street, Walworth.

gravy as the customers, “like it thick” (Malvery, 1908: 83). Malvery doesn’t reveal the identity of this shop but in this period, analogous to the emergent chains like J. Lyons and Spiers and Pond’s, we see the establishment of what might be called the triumvirate of the eel pie business that would dominate until the late twentieth century, each speaking of consistency and reliability.

In 1889 Robert Cooke, an East Ender with Irish roots and a background as a butcher, fishmonger and a publican, opened an eel and pie shop in Watney Street Market and, shortly after, his wife, opened another in Hoxton Street (adjacent to the market).²⁸ On his death, his widow, Martha would also own a coffee house at 169 Hoxton Street, illustrating well the complimentary and commutable relationship between different early taxonic working class eating establishments.²⁹ A decade before, a penniless Italian peasant, Michaele Mansi, had arrived from Ravello and married Cooke’s daughter Ada. The Cooke family gifted an eel and pie shop to them in Tower Bridge Road (that remains open to this day). From this Mansi built an empire of such establishments, in his own name, making himself and his family fabulously wealthy.³⁰ In 1915 another Irish immigrant Samuel Kelly opened an eel pie shop in Bethnal Green and by the outbreak of the Second World War had four of his own shops and a live eel business.

1.9 Modernity, space and identity

Adulteration had been so widespread that it’s little surprise that eel and pie houses, now splendidly dressed in their ‘gas and glass’, would appeal to a working class clientele by producing what was essentially honest, homely food. By the late

²⁸ The Cooke’s claim that it was their family that paired pies, mashed potato and parsley liquor in a shop in Sclater Street in 1862 although no record of this shop exists in either tax records or the Land Registry. There is evidence however from the 1871 census that Robert Cooke was resident at 104 Sclater Street with his wife and two daughters and was a fishmonger.

²⁹ Martha Cooke is listed in the 1901 Census at 169 Hoxton Street in the Borough of Shoreditch as an employer, working from home originally as a ‘Refreshment Housekeeper’. This is crossed out and written over with “Coffee Ho.” See - TNA PRO 1901 RG 13/274: 26. However by 1905 she is listed in the Post Office Directory as the owner of an Eel Pie House at the same address. See - *Post Office London Directory for 1905*, Commercial Directory, *Post Office London Directory for 1905*: 1051. An image of Olive Christian Malvery working in a ‘cheap coffee house’ shows an interior that would be instantly recognisable to a contemporary eel pie and mash shop. See - Malvery, 1908.

See - Appendix, fig. 2.

³⁰ The family would change their name to a less sounding foreign *Manze* during the First World War.

nineteenth century, the shops have about them an air of respectability and a cleanliness. Perhaps the best description of a late Victorian eel pie shop is this by the writer and *bon vivant* George Sims:

The dressing of an eel-pie shop window is conservative. It is a tradition handed down through many generations to the present day. The eels are shown artistically on a bed of parsley which is spread over a dish... To see the eel pie business at its best, to appreciate its poetry, you must watch the process of serving to its customers. Behind the counter on a busy night stands the proprietor in his shirt sleeves, a clean white apron preserving his waistcoat and nether garments from damage. Observe with what nimble deftness he lifts the lid of the metal receptacle in front of him, whips out a hot pie runs a knife round it inside the dish, and turns it out onto a piece of paper for the customer - possibly into the eager outstretched hand. He is generally assisted by his wife and daughter, who are almost, but not yet equally, dextrous. There are metal receptacles in front of them also, and the pies are whipped out in such rapid succession that your eyes become dazzled by the quick continuous movement. If you watch long enough it will almost appear that a shower of hot pies is being flung up from below by an invisible agency. (Sims, 1903, 3: 51)

Although Sims' description is likely from the 1890s and still speaks of pies as being eaten by hand, it also speaks of cleanliness and speed. Ultimately, it also speaks of a working class modernity, an arena engaged in commerce and debate. More, as Harvey (2003: 232) has outlined, such enterprises enabled spatial dialectics around which specifically community values and identities could be built. The London working classes, zoned into clearly defined areas, have used (and continue to use) the historic eel pie houses as gathering points in which to performatively celebrate their identity, partly unique and partly a distillation of bourgeois notions by osmosis.

Historically for many working class people we might imagine, the novelty of the eel and pie shop was seen as offering the possibility of experiencing in reality some of the idealised pleasure already consumed in imagination from the restaurants of the wealthy. Consumption of the food was by the late century not only the solution to

hunger but also about the excitement and crucially the *anticipation* of that purchase. It expressed the consumers' uniqueness - ('autonomous imaginative hedonism' (Campbell, 1987: 77) but also identified a relationship to 'acceptable' class tropes (Johnson, 1988: 27-42).

Indeed, as George Dodd reported of the mid-century pie shops, "At some of these commercial dining rooms... [that are] in themselves a characteristic of the middle class respectability of our times..." (Dodd, 1856: 507). Although this 'respectability' is crucial as it gave a moral and cultural framework to consumption and an indication of how to act 'appropriately', it requires some clarification within the context of a late nineteenth century London working class.

Delineations within that class were significant. The capital's artisanal elite had always divided itself from other workers and this appeared to mirror the hierarchy of micro-class divisions that "extended down to the very lowest stratum of the London poor" (Stedman Jones, [1971] 2014: 338). In that sense, the notion of Victorian working class respectability likely had a distinct, class-located sense. This was probably a contingent, situation-specific compromise and often performative rather than one "'emulative' of bourgeois patterns" (Bailey, 1979: 347). In that way, there could be a 'duality' of respectability as evidenced by performers within the music hall whose satire could undermine bourgeois pretensions (Walkowitz, 1992) or by negotiations around the strictures of Victorian temperance (Harrison in Bailey, 1979: 336).

Although the last two decades of the nineteenth century saw an economic decline, there was a rise in working class spending especially in the arena of entertainment and leisure (Bakker, 2011). The eel and pie shops would become, as I expand in a subsequent chapter, arenas of these class and site-specific 'respectabilities' and, like the music hall and Association Football, sub-cultural touchstones of a new working class life. Indeed, the shops would become as much a part of cultural production as any Marie Lloyd song or coster slang. In essence, although they held within them a refusal to completely acquiesce to bourgeois values and (overt) control, they were as much about conciliatory comfort and offered "...an assertion of personal dignity in the face of adverse circumstances" (Goby and Purdue 1984: 185).

By the turn of the twentieth century the shops had turned culturally inwards creating around themselves a protective cocoon of performative self-mythology and a political conservatism wrapped in a gastro-nationalism. They were, in the strictest sense, subaltern counter-publics (Fraser, 1990) without any of the implicit radicalism. Frozen in development from perhaps the 1920s, they have survived in a semi-fossilised state, spatialised to (often former) market-adjacent sites, hyper-local, unnoticed and untroubled within plain sight, becoming only visible to a twenty-first century London when their customer demographic and racial constituency was challenged by globalisation and gentrification.

Conclusion

Following Norbert Elias' warning that "nothing is more fruitless, when dealing with long-term social processes, than to attempt to locate an absolute beginning" (Elias, 1983: 232), I have sought to demonstrate that the origins of the eel and pie shops lie not in the entrepreneurial figure of any one family dynasty but much earlier in the changing class relationships between a largely corrupt state of Thompson's ([1980] 1991: 27) patrician 'banditti' and the artisans that served them.

Economic rationalisation along with the elements of an embryonic bourgeois state (aided by amongst other factors, an emergent press with its adjuvant literate readership) meant that the humble pastry cook now served a different clientele and in doing so would propagate a taxon of working class eateries respondent to the temporal disruptions of capitalism, one of which through class descent, would eventually birth the contemporary eel, pie and mash shop.

The shops themselves, clearly an earlier inception than previously recorded as my research evidences, would be partial responses to the 'coming inside' of the working class. This was a process of bourgeois control (physical, cultural and moral) of the street and the necessity of mass catering, initially as a reaction to hunger but also congruent with the middle classes growing consumerism, morality and fears of pollution. The genius of the new eel and pie shops was to combine elements of advancing modernity in a replication of the 'gas and glass' of, amongst others, the

gin palaces with the warmth and respectability of a home that spoke of a proto-industrial conviviality.

The food served utilised the historic food of the London poor (the eel) with easily available ingredients in a setting that was geared to speed and necessity rather than the reflexivity of the (Habermasian) public sphere. Contrary to contemporary memorialisation (the political and cultural signification of which I shall discuss in my final chapter), the fare was more mixed with some shops like Evans' (the forerunner of today's Arments) still serving soup until at least 1914.³¹ Indeed, in a revealing interview in David Furnham's forgotten film, *Noted Eel and Pie Shops* (1975), Joe Cooke's grandmother, Lily, 91 at the time significantly recalled that "Robert Cooke [the founder of the Cooke dynasty] was-my-father in law... in Watney Street, Stepney "He never sold pies, he sold hot eels and mash."

By the mid-nineteenth century, this intensely localised and market-adjacent communality, itself derived of a synthesis and 'remaking' (Stedman Jones, 1974) of the culture of different types of manual workers, saw the emergence of a unique coster identity, simultaneous with and intrinsic to, a wider London working class culture. This, by the 1870s, without political navigation, had turned inward, defensively orientated towards the family and home set against a pacified lifestyle of consolation and distraction that saw them congruent with music halls, association football and seaside excursions (Stedman Jones, 1974: 485). This was the community that would largely become the customer base for the late nineteenth century pie shop. Although we cannot be entirely sure, it is to this period that straddles both centuries and likely no earlier, that we can trace the contemporary shop, its rituals and its traditions. By the early twentieth century the shops had become numerous but shielded within an urban working class culture of hyper-local social solidarities based around micro-class divisions of work, respectability and propriety.

³¹ In an image from a family photograph held by the Arments dated c.1914, a window display clearly offers soup.

The handful of eel, pie and mash shops that now remain within London, memorialised in contested recollection, are the product of a unique synthesis and are nothing less than a fossilised *extant taxon* of an early feeding-station/canteen/restaurant hybrid closely associated with, and synchronous to, the development of the identity of the costermonger who in turn contributed in no small measure to the emergence of a distinct and unique London character. It is to that character, long in creation, that I now turn.

2. The Theatre of the cockney

Perhaps we can remember and adapt Marx's insight: we make our identities, but with inherited resources and not under circumstances of our own choosing. (Gilroy in Gilroy, Grossberg and McRobbie, 2000: 127)

Introduction

Except perhaps in a generalised, geographic sense, the cockney identity, fundamental to, and the main signifier of the contemporary eel and pie shop, is seen as more or less redundant in a global, neoliberal city. Today, cockney is a nostalgic signal. The image of the good humoured, 'rough diamond' of the Lambeth Walk has been in decline since at least the 1940s and is now largely found in half-remembered and reconstructed simulacra in Essex. However, it remains a referent of an exclusively urban, London identity whose dominant register remains a 'proletarian entrepreneurialism' (Hobbs, 1998) associated with selling and service. From London's historic army of clerks, artisans, shop keepers, costermongers or casual labourers it survives, if only in the recollections of old men as "you got something to sell? I'll buy it off ya."³²

In this chapter I attempt to chart the contested evolution of the idea of cockney that appeared to emerge from its pre-modern roots evidencing an increasing divide between earlier rural power and knowledge and nascent, urban forces synchronous with early capitalism. I trace the notion, increasingly defined by a spatiality that began to articulate the contours of the new, expanding city of London towards a tension between the commoners and the elites; between the educated and the non-educated, between the patrician and the plebian (Thompson 1991). In this sense I argue that cockney began to display a duality: firstly, as an identity defined by speech type and then by barbed comedy but increasingly as a metaphor for the interplay between the powerful and the powerless.

³² Brian. Interview by author 22 June 2022.

Towards Victorian modernity, I use cultural texts to plot the rise of, and brutal satire towards, an interstitial, Romantic class that defined itself in cultural opposition to the elites of the *ancien regime*. Secondly, I describe a new strata, initially outlined and personally represented by Dickens, as grocers, journalists, shop assistants and (eventually) eel and pie shop owners. I then examine the fluidity of the moniker and the circumstances of the term's rapid class slippage, synchronous to the alliance of the bourgeoisie and the old elites, that sees cockney become a symbol for the multitudinous urban poor. In that sense, I argue that the journey of the cockney is about who controls the word and its fluid connotation.

During early Victorian modernity, I trace the performativity of the cockney as both an escapist pantomime that simultaneously aped, celebrated and satirised the appearance of the elites and a dynamic, dramatic identity informed by street commerce (Jankiewicz, 2012). Both forms I suggest may owe much to pre-industrial forms of the crowd and carnival reflected back through early working class musical and entertainment traditions that began to shape a specifically London proletarian identity. This identity I argue was carved from precious moments of enjoyment during periods of extraordinary privation and political impotence after the defeat of the Charter. I attempt to contrast this by delineating the characterisation of the cockney as a representative of bourgeois fears of both the street and degeneration: simultaneously repulsive but erotic.

In this I question the notion of the construction of a Victorian 'underclass' (Davis, 1989) by examining the conflation of the coster class with cockney (Brodie, 2001) to describe the further class descent of the character and its re-inscription by the contrasting outlooks of Victorian Liberalism as both comic and criminal: simultaneously a representative of sympathy and fear. I relate this fear to a burgeoning cultural hegemony that sought to meld the potentially revolutionary cockney from the 'abyss' into a figure of imperial incorporation. Here, I utilise Stuart Hall's (1973) work on the dissemination of hegemonic messaging via television to sketch the increasingly middle class music hall's eventual co-option of the authentic voice of the street ventriloquised by a bourgeois performer across culture and media.

This process, I suggest, further utilised Walter Bagehot's (1867) idea of political theatricality to absorb the cockney into the nation via a popular imperialism within a discourse of 'invented tradition' (Hobsbawn and Ranger, 2012). The cockney is then I indicate, utilised as a vessel to encapsulate a particular type of 'ordinary' Englishness and periodically valorised according to its usefulness to capital.

2.1 The cockney in history

Writing in *The St James' Magazine*, Cadwallader Waddy (1873: 127) suggests that the origin of the cockney was "shrouded in mystery." The contemporary association of the cockney with a specific philosophy and dialect is however, largely a nineteenth century construction (Stedman Jones: 1989).

Indeed, in projections redolent of his own period, William Matthews in his seminal *The Cockney Past and Present* (1938: 4-5), identifies in amongst (many) others, the colloquialisms of Shakespeare's Mistress Quickly as those of a "Cockney char woman" and in Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1613), finds George the grocer and Nell his wife, "Cockney treasures". Yet upon inspection, these appear no more than Elizabethan conventions of guileless, 'lower' language. Matthews again hopefully cites the example of the dramatist Samuel Foote, "one of the first writers to formalise the Cockney" (1938: 4-5) whose *Taste* (1752) relies on the humorous mistakes of the alderman Pentweazel and his wife. These "vulgarisms" are again conflated with a later, 'lower-class' cockney.

Early editions of Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* make no linkage at all between cockney and diction, simply citing it as a London 'native' and secondly as an "effeminate, ignorant, low, mean, despicable citizen (Stedman Jones, 1989: 281). Johnson's subsequent etymological suggestion connects the cockney to the notion of *cockagne*, 'a country of dainties' that may additionally related to the Norman word for sugar cake but also refers to the Elizabethan notion of a dear child, or 'cocker'. Thomas Tusser in his *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry* (c.1557) seems to foreshadow this. He has -

Some cockneies with cocking are
made verie fooles,
fit neither for prentise, for plough, nor
for schooles (Tusser, [1557] 1878: 549).

Here, 'to cocker' was to spoil or pamper and all of these definitions seem to suggest that cockney was in this period identified with urbanity and a subject unused to hard rural labor.

Julian Franklyn (1953: 15) follows Matthews in citing John Walker's *Pronouncing Dictionary* (1791) that congratulates the cockney as "models of pronunciation to the distant provinces [who] ought to be the more scrupulously correct." Walker ([1791] 1830: 17) comments at some length however, on what would become a mid-nineteenth century cockney trope; the use of 'v' for 'w' and the dropped 'h'. This seems to be a grammatical mistake across the board: perhaps a fashion or an affectation and not just amongst the urban poor. His real concern with the mistakes of the 'lower orders' however is the mispronunciation of 'curtsey', that "... has its last syllable changed into the *che* or *tshe*, as if written *curt-she*."

The main problem in his view was the -

difference between the metropolis and the provinces is that the people of education in London are free from all the vices of the vulgar; but the best educated people in the provinces, if constantly resident there, are sure to be strongly tinctured with the dialect of the country in which they live. Hence it is, that the vulgar pronunciation of London though not half so erroneous as that of Scotland, Ireland or any of the provinces, is, to a person of correct taste, a thousand times more offensive and disgusting (Walker [1791] 1830: 17).

The distinction of 'educated' and 'vulgar' is not necessarily class (this period certainly predates an industrial proletariat) but between the educated and the non-educated, the elites and everyone else. We might say, in echo of Thompson (1991), between the courtier and citizen, the patrician and the plebian - the genteel and the vulgar.

This tension dominated the late eighteenth century mirroring as it did the rise of a new kind of Londoner.

The first reference of cockney with its direct spatiality, Bow Bells, seems to have come from the English lexicographer John Minsheu in 1617 and he repeats a trope that links William Langland's *Piers Ploughman's* small and misshapen eggs ('cocken-ey') to people brought up in cities and ignorant of real life (Stedman Jones, 1989: 281).³³ The retelling of this story, again linking the townsfolk with ignorance, is repeated over and over in subsequent centuries:

That a cittizen's sonne riding with his father... into the country... asked, when he heard a horse neigh, what the horse did, his father answered, the horse doth neigh; riding farther he heard a cock crow and said, doth the cock neigh too? (Elmes, 2005: 52).

Cockney is then an early signifier of the developing tensions between emergent forces of capital in towns and older, feudal forms of power and knowledge in rural areas. Samuel Pegge's counterblast to Dr Johnson's dictionary echoes this analogy centuries later and his criticism is couched in exactly the same terms. Pegge objects to Johnson's alleged ignorance of "antient dialectical words... [and] ... treats them as outlaws who have lost the protection of the Commonwealth" (Stedman Jones, 1989: 281). For Pegge, cockney is a language "in use among the citizens within the sound of Bow-Bells is that of Antiquity and, for the most part, composed of 'Saxonisms' (Stedman Jones, 1989: 282). This is of course, a tenuous link to an older England: a more authentic and symbolic 'cockney' Englishness that allegedly predated the Norman yoke. The comedic also begins to link with the geographic. In Chaucer's *The Reeve's Prologue*, the cockney is a dull fellow. Oswald worries, "I shall be held a daffe, or a cockney". In the second act of *King Lear*, Shakespeare has the Fool exclaim:

³³ Interestingly, inhabitants of both London and York are described in this way by Robert Whittington in his *Vulgaria*, (1520) - "This cokneys and tytyllynges [*delicati pueri*] may abide no sorrow when they come to age. In this great citees as London, York the children be so nycely and wantonly brought up that comonly they can little good." McArthur, Lam-McArthur and Fontaine, 2018: 142.

Cry to it nuncle, as the cockney did to the eels when she put ‘em i’th paste alive; she knapp’d ‘em o’th’coxcombs with a stick and cried, ‘Down wantons down!

Not only is this useful in locating the eel in the historical English diet but it places the cockney as an early figure of modernity, completely uncomfortable in any other environment than the city. A century later, the *New London Magazine* would write that:

There is no popular subject of satire, on which the modern common-places if wit and ridicule have been exhausted with more success than on that of a mere cockney affecting the pleasure of the country.³⁴

The cockney was invariably a figure of humour, “a living paradox, a metropolitan provincial, the stunted offspring of the big city” (Dart, 2012: 5). Rather than a single tongue however, in Pierce Egan’s *Life in London* (1821), the city is a patchwork of local dialects:

A kind of *cant* phraseology is current from one end of the metropolis to the other... In some females of the highest rank, it is as strongly marked as dingy dragged-tail Sall, who is compelled to dispose of a few sprats to turn an honest penny. (Stedman Jones, 1989: 84-85).

This *cant* is located in the geography and attitudes of the character, but this is not identified by Egan as cockney. Egan’s cockney is to be found in his 1839 novel, *Pilgrims of the Thames*, where conspicuously monikered Peter Makemoney, a City alderman, becomes the Lord Mayor of London. Makemoney is “... a thorough cockney... The sound of Bow Bells... was delightful music... he had seen nothing else, but London and he thought that there was no place like London” (Stedman Jones, 1989: 285). Makemoney is a connective between the eighteenth and nineteenth century representation of the identity. He is a born and bred Londoner, who “... despised anything like ostentation; and self-importance he was equally

³⁴ “The Genius.” *New London Magazine, or Gentleman’s Monthly Intelligences*, August 1761: 424.

disgusted with; but his home and fireside were great objects to his mind..." He liked a drink and "was particularly fond of a good song..." (Egan, 1838: 7-8). Makemoney links the earlier idea of the innocent, London-as-the-world (he is gently mocked in an episode on the waters at Chelsea Reach) with an honesty and solid, burgher values. Similarly, Robert Smith Surtees writes in his 'sporting cockney' *Jorrocks* novels of the (more) comic, corpulent cockney squire who has risen through society. Jorrocks is not genteel, but he stands in his honesty and plain speaking contrasted with the greedy (and effeminate) aristocracy.

But 'arter all's said and done there are but two sorts o'folks l' the world,
Peerage folks and Post Hoffice Directory folks, Peerage folks, wot think it's
right and proper to do their tailors, and Post Hoffice Directory folks wot think
it's the greatest sin under the sun not to pay twenty shillings i' the pund
(Stedman Jones, 1989: 286).

Cockney could also technically refer to anyone who wasn't aristocratic. He could be the wealthy grocer, Watty Cockney in *Love in the City* (1767) or the out-of-place Cosey in *Town and Country* (1807) but he must have the city in his blood. That city was *old* London; the mediaeval and the historic. The city of a certain pedigree. According to Thomas Barnes (a future editor of *The Times*) in a review of James Kennedy's farce, *Love, Law and Physic* (1813) it is noted that the cockney shopman from Southwark, a character known as Lubin Log, exhibits "the illiterate vulgarity of manner and of idiom which distinguish the native London shopman... for the lash of comic satire" (Dart, 2012: 7). This seems significant in two senses. Firstly, shopkeepers typify for Barnes, "... the real home of the cockney character, the place where its peculiar mixture of pertness and illiteracy, dullness and vivacity, were most fully expressed" (Dart, 2012: 8). Secondly though, it marks the geographic spread of this new type of cockney to the (then) London suburbs such as Islington, Camden Town, Clerkenwell and Southwark. These are areas that become home to a "new lower middle class of dependent clerks, technicians and professionals" (Mayer, 1975: 417), part of the growing service-sector. It is from these areas and this constituency that the first owners and customers of the burgeoning eel and pie shops had begun to emerge by the 1840s. These were now part of an uneasy class and cockney had become code for the vulgarity of modernity uniting city and the new

suburbs. This is the grammatical (and lived) pivot of the central struggle of the nineteenth century, the rise of the bourgeois and its synchronous dance with the working class. At the turn of the nineteenth century, cockney had become a catch-all term for those who lacked property: a barbed metaphor for those without authority.

This barb is the spite and bile unleashed in *The Satirist* in 1813 and again in 1817 in *Blackwood's Magazine* against the so-called Cockney School of Leigh Hunt and his collaborators, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley and William Hazlitt *et al.* The main thrust of *Blackwood's* venom was Hunt's *commonness* and narrow, classed, crucially suburban vision, that "has never seen any mountain higher than Highgate Hill, nor reclined by a stream more pastoral than the Serpentine River (Cox, 2010: 251). The period from 1813 (when Hunt was imprisoned for libelling the Regent) up to the 1840s has been called 'The Cockney Moment'. As Jennifer Cox (2010) suggests, the Cockney School defined its own cultural legitimacy against the elites as part of an emergent bourgeoisie, a unique 'cockney cosmopolitanism'. The audience that Hunt (the son of a clergyman) and Keats (the son of an ostler) and the other 'cockney' poets were addressing was found "among the skilled workers, small shopkeepers, clerks and the better grade of domestic servants that the mass audience for printed material was recruited during the first half of the nineteenth century" (Altick 1957: 83).

Literature was but one part of a culture of self-definition that was, in some sense, solidified in 1832. The limited Reform Bill allowed the propertied middle class to define itself *against* the aristocracy and *from* the lower-middle class and the poor. According to this definition, cockney was a demarcation between cultural and political legitimacies and, not for the first time was a cipher for power: for those who had it and those who did not.

Now, cockney was in cultural terms, "the misshapen 'foster-child' of Romanticism and Social Realism" (Dart, 2012: 26). In political terms, it outlined the downward trajectory of a class, ascendent during the Regency but largely unaccommodated afterwards.

2.2 Dickens and descent of the cockney

The 1830s was a period of great influx into London. Dickens' sharp eye as *Boz*, collated the changing city through the prism of his own difficult formative years. Forced to work in Gray's Inn as a solicitor's clerk at fifteen he was, essentially, a north London cockney.

In his sketches Dickens outlined a new interstitial class of grocers, journalists, shop assistants and (eventually) eel and pie shop owners. This grouping, made precarious by the 1832 Reform Act, was unable to gain acceptance as true bourgeoisie yet desperate not to fall into the abyss below. As petty bourgeoisie they were as Engels remarked, "great in boasting... [yet] very shy in risking anything" (Marx and Engels, [1851] 1912: 232). This political impotence meant that for the bourgeois proper, the cockney class was no longer suspected of radical intent and "... even by the late 1830s in England, the clerkly and shopkeeping classes were no longer the object of quite the same suspicion as in the 'Cockney School' period" (Dart, 2012: 26).

It was also Dickens who seems to have encapsulated the class slippage of the cockney into more familiar registers by his portrayal of Sam Weller in *The Pickwick Papers*. He does this by transposing his London voice, rather archaic even by this time, with that of the lower-classes. As Benjamin Smart recalls in *Walker's Pronouncing Dictionary* (1846):

The diffusion of literature among even the lowest classes of the metropolis, renders it almost unnecessary to speak now of such extreme vulgarisms as the substitution of v for w, or w for v. Few persons under the age of forty years of age with such a predilection for literary nicety as will lead them to these pages can be in much danger of saying that they like 'weal and winegar wery well'... [this speech pattern belongs to a] ... more distant generation of cocknies...[and that] ... the cockney speaker has to learn at least consistency in his pronunciation (Stedman Jones, 1988: 287).

Certainly, Mayhew (1857: 5) writing of the 1840s in his *London Labour and the London Poor* makes a similar comment that "The characteristic dialect of Bow-Bells

has almost become obsolete: and alderman now-a-days, rarely transpose the vs and ws.”

Indeed, Mayhew (1857: 5) lists several other London dialects such as The London exquisite, The affected Metropolitan Miss, The fast young gentleman, The Cadger's Cant and the coster's backslang. A version of one of these would form the basis of what would be known as cockney rhyming slang but that connective between the coster community and the working class (labouring cockney) would be some decades away.

Dickens' motives for Weller's class demotion are unclear and it was an odd reversal: although Dickens only described the character as a “specimen of London Life”, the true cockney in the book should have been Pickwick himself, the epitome of the long-established vein of 'sporting cockney'. Yet Weller is by speech and manner a reassuring character. He has a rough, urban wisdom that is almost an ironic echo of the rural knowledge that the earliest cockney stood against, and his diction is a contrast to the staccato delivery of Jingle, the cockney confidence trickster. Weller, like his wider cockney compatriots has ambitions to be a gentleman but by the end is again Pickwick's loyal servant. This may be Dickens' way of putting working class ambition in its place, but it may also be seen as a gentle (if slightly patronising) humanising of the labouring classes: a repeat of his earlier attempts in his *London Recreations* (1833-1836). Tellingly, in 1850 Dickens remarked that (it is) “The wish of persons in the humbler classes of life, to ape the manners and customs of those who fortune has placed above them... is often the subject of... complaint. [Yet] some of the some of the finery of these people provokes a smile but they are all clean and happy, and disposed to be good natured and sociable” (Dickens, 1850: 55-57).

Although Turner (2020: 115) suggests his use of speech may have been deployed to “satisfy public expectations” and adhere to theatrical convention, it may also be a signal that the lower orders are no longer willing - or capable - of rising as a threat to the social order. Whatever Dickens intended for the cockney, the term now became a weapon of satire in the culture war by the dress and affectation of the aspirant class embodied in the youthful shop assistant or clerk. That these (men, predominantly) are typical of the new consumer dynamic that sees food (such as the

emergent eel and pie shops) and dress as modernity and progress is no coincidence.³⁵ Clearly, the journey of the cockney is about who controls the word and its fluid connotation.

The mid-century sees two major changes in the representation of the cockney. The first was the 1867 extension of the franchise and the second was the growth of consumerism especially amongst the lower middle classes. This was concomitant with the birth of the character of the 'sham-genteel swell'. Although the 'dandy swell' as a London figure had existed for some time in various incarnations, it is now linked to a performative life-style that crossed classes.³⁶ Cockney dandyism was an escapist pantomime celebrating the aping of the appearance of the elites. Revolutions in the fashion industry meant that decent but cheap imitations of the elites' clothes were, for the first time "generally available... to the better class of plebian worker" (Dart, 2012: 206). Although clerks and apprentices were restricted in what they could wear at work, they were free to dress as dandies in the evenings. This performative, simulacrum 'look' has transmitted itself down to contemporary working class (especially youth) culture - the Teddy Boys' adoption of Edwardian fashion being an obvious example. The appropriation of the elites' style and the ensuing cultural faux-pas (and fear) contingent upon that continues to be a subject of satire. The 'Del-Boy' character created by John Sullivan in the BBC comedy, *Only Fools and Horses* for example, combines the cockney ('flashy') adaptation of 1980s formal wear with the linguistic contortions reminiscent of Dickens' 'Wellerisms'.

Presciently, and somewhat ironically given the bourgeois appetite for social emulation of the aristocracy, William Hazlitt (1821: 41) would, in the early part of the nineteenth century warn on the dangers of "... being taken for what one is not."

³⁵ It may be instructive to look at Dicken's *Shabby Genteel People* - another Sketch by Boz - that reflects on the clothing of the less cheerful and not-so-young characters of the lower middle class, struggling in their patched and threadbare clothes. They wait to rise from their predicament but never do so whilst the young believe they will but find fulfilment in fashion and style.

³⁶ Piece Egan would write for example about the earlier dandy cockney fraudster, Samuel Hayward who affected the life of a man of leisure. See - Egan, 1822. We might see the Regency dandy, George Bryan "Beau" Brummell (1778-1840) here as an archetype of modernity and performativity in this sense against the backdrop of consumerism although his elite status meant that his style was as a leader rather than a follower.

Hackney-born Renton Nicholson's *Cockney Adventures and Tales of London Life* (1838) gives us a city full of aspirant cockney young men, their consorts and their often humorous adventures in dialect. A weekly penny-dreadful concurrent with Dickens' *Sketches by Boz*, Nicholson would describe the characters of the London street of the 1830s in an anticipation of Benjamin's (1999) bourgeois *flâneur* that would chronicle Paris' characters and *physiologies* in his *panoramic literature*.

2.3 The Music Hall as distorting mirror

The embryonic music hall, so crucial for the development of cockney identity, reflected back and refined these styles of the street. It became the mecca of the salaried youth of the new working population, the single young men ('counter-jumpers'), and performers like Alfred Vance (1839-1888) better known as 'The Great Vance' who embodied this symbiotic trend on stage as 'swells' or *Lion Comique*. These characters were parodies of the upper classes, generally dressed in evening wear, and sang songs that were "hymns of praise to the virtues of idleness, womanising and drinking" (Dagmar, 1996: 175).

The fear of the masses entering the polity via the music halls was expressed by *Tinsley's Magazine* in 1869:

We do not hesitate to lay upon the music-halls the parentage of that sham-gentility which has become so abnormally prominent among the striplings of the uneducated classes during the past few years. Nowadays, your attorney's clerk - apparently struck by some 'levelling up' theory of democracy - is dissatisfied unless he can dress as well as the son of a duke" (Stedman Jones, 1988: 290).

The 'swell' is just one of a range of characters that music hall performers could call upon. Others were Irish, blackface, the rustic - and the cockney. They are all by this time however played by professional middle class performers in what Derek B. Scott (2002: 243) calls 'the imagined real', "where the identity of the performance remains separate from that of the character portrayed." The period coincided with a simultaneous duality within liberalism itself that both articulated a

fear of this 'levelling up' and expressed guilt surrounding the extreme poverty that laissez-faire had undoubtedly unleashed. The sympathetic ventriloquising of the poor onstage by bourgeois performers may have partially reflected the cultural ascendancy of a Gladstonian moral tone, or as Himmelfarb (1968: 300) succinctly has it, "a Victorian angst". Increasingly, the cockney is simultaneously both satirised and represented in a more benevolent way in songs like "The Ratcatcher's Daughter" that take a romantic view of poverty (Koppen, 2014).

Discussion of the exact type of precursor to the music hall goes beyond the scope of this study, but my argument is that this largely undocumented culture is simultaneous with the working class culture that would meld into the eel and pie shops. Just as the early shops in the 1840s would adopt the appearances of the gin palaces, publicans in the 1820s and 1830s, "... successfully invested in gaslight and gilding" and looked for other ways to expand their business (Lee, 2019: 32). Public houses formalised so-called 'harmonic evenings' or 'free-and-easys' that would typically be held in rooms above the saloon. It seems that in addition, working class youth had their own clubs, and these were, allegedly, "[places where] boys and girls meet... and get drunk and debauch one another" (Lee, 2019: 36). It seems that a "Georgian permissiveness lingered well into the early Victorian period" (Lee, 2019: 36). What is equally clear is that there was a vibrant and authentic working class entertainment culture, that ran parallel to the bourgeois entertainment halls but waned (Speight, 1977). This decline was two-fold. It was achieved by moral panic in the press and by legislation. It seems likely that the intervention of Sir George Grey, the home secretary, in 1849 was decisive and his interest in opposing unlicensed music and dancing venues may well have had a great deal to do with the fear of Chartism and local unrest. Unlicensed and temporary makeshift theatres, the so-called 'Penny-Gaffs', continued for some time however, perhaps until the later part of the nineteenth century. According to *The Morning Post* (Lee, 2019: 51) their audience was young and very poor:

Farces and pantomime, were mixed with stories of highwaymen and murder, drawn from penny dreadful serials (e.g., *The Mysteries of Paris*) or along similar bloodthirsty lines (e.g., *The Blue Apron and the Cleaver*, or *The Sanguinary Butcher of Cripplegate*).

A newspaper article on a gaff in Poplar gives a good account of the audiences of these early taxons of the more 'respectable' halls. The audience we are told consisted of "Ragged boys, each one with his pipe, potatoe [sic] and (we must add) his prostitute" (Sheridan, 1981: 54). Mayhew ([1851] 208: 49, 50) specifically links them with the costers and their "dancing tunes" and is suitably outraged by what he sees. The disappearance of these theatres was simultaneous with the advancement of mass consumption, the 'control of the streets', the moralising of working class culture and its commodification by the forces of capital and modernity.

In a wider cultural sense, this development crucially enabled the creation of a transgressive low *other*, a synchronal notion of the working classes as different, monstrous yet tantalizing and vitally erotic (Walkowitz, 2012). Simultaneously this defined a cultural cartography that delineated zone of exclusion known as the *Abyss* - the East End itself.

This complicated, vampiric cultural ingestion and regulation of the increasingly prohibited carnivalesque in everyday life was fundamental because it "symbolically heightened the eroticised version of fantasy life" and therefore facilitated the "inner dynamic of the boundary constructions necessary to collective identity" for a nation-building project" (Stallybrass and White: 2008: 20). It would also have an ironic resonance in later notions of working class respectability, structural to the identity of cockney and the eel and pie shops.

This process also helped solidify a new cockney identity formed in the pages of *Punch*. The cockney character of 'Arry was created by E.J. Milliken in sketches that lasted from 1877 to the 1890s. He was a fusion of several earlier cockney stereotypes, notably in his aversion to the countryside, his diction, his caddish behaviour and his vulgarity. He was a 'swell', spending his salary on garish clothes, holidays and cheap cigars.

Politically, he was a product of the Disreali's 'Leap in the Dark', the limited franchise expansion of the 1867 Reform Act. 'Arry was a working class Tory ("the

petticoats want keeping down, like niggers and radicals” - Stedman Jones, 1988: 291) and a fervent Jingoist - the term referencing a bullying, expansionist nationalism around the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78.³⁷ The character was celebrated in the popular song of in 1881 that bears his name. Sung by one of the greatest stars of the day, Jenny Hill, the song is a defence not of ‘Arry’s character *per se* but more tellingly of what he represents:

The ‘Upper ten’ may jeer and say
What ‘cads’ the ‘Arries are,
But the ‘Arries *work*, and *pay their way* [my italics]
While doing the la-di-da (Stedman Jones, 1988: 291).

‘Arry prefigures by a century the latest incarnation of the cockney, the Thatcherite East End ‘barrow boy’ who, in a similar vein, is both comic and threatening; a grotesque that will make the eel and pie shop a central totem of their identity based on a palimpsest of previous (and invented) cockney characterisations.

2.4 The coster confusion

Mayhew’s cockney was rooted simply in an older “dialect of Bow-Bells”. For him, the costermongers were members of the dangerous classes, and their argot was that of “London thieves” (Mayhew, 1857: 5-6). They were “nearly all Chartists”, a synonym for the mob (Mayhew, 1857: 29). His views were angrily disputed at the time by the costers themselves and, although Mayhew is a valuable source of information, his reputation, even at the time was not entirely trusted (Himmelfarb, 1984: 15).³⁸ In light of this, recent scholarship around the coster community and indeed around the notion of casual labour is worth examination.

The demonisation of the street in this period, was part of a complex cultural shift. The costers, part of an older tradition of an informal economy stood, like all of the

³⁷ The term came from the lyrics of a song by George William Hunt, made popular by the performer G.H. MacDermott. “We don’t want to fight but by Jingo if we do/We’ve got the ships, we’ve got the men, we’ve got the money too...”

³⁸ For a contemporary account of a demonstration by costers against Mayhew’s ‘defamatory’ writings, see *Reynold’s Magazine*, 18 May 1851.

street-sellers, stubbornly in the way of this (Jankiewicz, 2012: 403). Rather than the retrospective label of simple ‘penny-capitalists’ (Benson, 1983) who allegedly pursued a “middle class occupation at the working class level of life”, theirs was more likely a “dwindling subsistence economy trapped within the expanding capitalist system” (Richards in Jankiewicz, 2012: 394). As such, their very presence, let alone their unregulated economic activity, was subversive. To the respectable, they represented a confrontation between the stability of the new bourgeois capitalist order and an older, more human set of interactions between members of all classes that were potential customers. Jankiewicz (2012) makes an excellent point when he says that by their very nature the performative role of costers was crucial. In a society where a person could disappear and reinvent themselves (often by necessity) one could transform one’s identity by changing the products that one sold. Although some coster businesses were clearly hereditary, this identity fluidity mirrored the street spaces that the costers occupied (Stedman Jones, 2014: 61-62). To be heard, it was necessary to stand out and perform, and this clearly prefigures their co-opted role in music hall. The open undermining of authority meant that the costers were seen as enemies of order and new laws. Indeed, *The Morning Post* in 1848, reporting on mass demonstrations in Trafalgar Square claims that the crowds were “chiefly composed of the costermonger class.”³⁹ This radical edge to the politics of the streets seems to have been somewhat forgotten by later historians. Work by Mark Brodie questions many of the later conservative assumptions about the coster’s political allegiances. It appears that in many cases they “quite consciously identified themselves and their causes with the working class... that was clearly recognised by politicians of the period, but ... has been largely ignored since” (Brodie, 2001: 149). Some of Stedman Jones’ work on casual labour in this regard is based on earlier studies by Pelling (1967) whose basis for resolving that the costers were an overwhelmingly conservative force is evidenced from just one specific area of east London. Yet “[W]hen first established in 1894, the Whitechapel costers deliberately chose to call themselves a labour union” and certainly, many coster unions “... like the Whitechapel and City unions, seem to have been generally to the left (Brodie, 2001: 149,152).”⁴⁰

³⁹ *The Morning Post*, 8 March 1848.

⁴⁰ It seems likely that the confusion about certain local political alliances was based on, for example, union membership figures from where costermongers *lived* rather than where they *traded*.

In this way, the costers, at this stage, rather than fitting the narrative of the unitary nature of John Bright's *residuum*, demonstrate a more nuanced existence (Koven, 2006).⁴¹ Indeed, Jennifer Davis' work that centres around the construction of a mid-Victorian underclass makes the point that the so-called 'casual poor' exhibited attitudes and behaved in ways "characteristic ...of the nineteenth century working class in general" (Davis, 1989: 20). More, perception and reality of the residuum,

continuously interacted to shape each other in a number of crucial ways. Thus, the behaviour of the casual poor, conditioned by their economic circumstances, often appeared to substantiate the popular image of them as inherently violent and lawbreaking.

This refinement is crucial and again, whilst beyond the scope of this study, challenges the axiomatic association of cultural divisions of the London working class. It postulates a convincing, more nuanced position that the 'casual poor' was an ideological 'turn' manufactured in the 1870s and 1880s as a successor to earlier notions of the criminal 'other'. In this sense, the residuum "was as much a consequence of its identification as it was a necessary precondition for it" (Davis, 1989: 13).

The implications for the identity of the cockney and especially of the eel and pie shops is that it signals a necessary duality: the very definition of a 'respectable' working class *depends* on the criminal, feckless other. These tropes are still, in so many senses, current in the contemporary cockney identity, evidenced in the eel and pie shops, mixed as they are with notions of cleanliness, hard work and respectability.

⁴¹ Bright, a Liberal MP was the first to use the term in reference to an 'irredeemable' Victorian 'underclass' in a debate against further enfranchisement. See - Alexander, 2013: 99.

2.5 The character refined

If street markets, costers and the residuum threatened to interrupt commercial progress mid-century, they provided contemporary writers and journalists, “good copy about the pulsating organism of living London” (Walkowitz, 2012: 144). The hardships of the costers and the closures of their ‘convenient’ local markets for the middle classes that they inevitably served, were clearly linked. It is in this period, largely perhaps due to the everyday utility to a large part of a cross-class audience in the theatres, that the costermonger makes his appearance as a music hall character. He is simultaneously a figure of sympathy and a crook.

Alfred Vance, who we have already seen typifying the ‘swell’ character, was also one of the first of the music hall performers to utilise this ‘respectable’ coster identity with such songs as *The Chickaleary Cove* and *Costermonger Joe*. In a unique character reversal of his dandy (of either the upper or lower-class variety), Vance transforms from the well-dressed cad to become one of “the brutal denizen of Whitechapel...” (Roberts in Stedman Jones, 1989: 295). Vance and a host of other Victorian performers adopted a stage identity of low-life (semi-) realism that exhibited an almost prurient fascination with poverty, moral choice and casual male violence.⁴² This was a performative flirtation between the character of the ‘respectable’ working class and the dangerous criminal, predicated on the middle classes’ increasing acknowledgement that there actually was such a thing as a working class culture.

It was the appearance of the actor Albert Chevalier in 1891 however that cemented him as “...the Kipling of the music-hall”, the cockney as coster and the cockney as a “new archetype in the early 1890s” (Chevalier in Stedman Jones, 1989: 272). Chevalier was an unlikely star for the masses. A veteran of more sedate middle class supper and recital clubs like *The Savage* and *The Green Room*, his debut was the result of a marriage between his artifice, his astute manager, Newson Smith and the founding of new West End Theatre syndicates.⁴³

⁴² See - Anstey, 1888: 36 - “Bein niver too tight of a Saturday night but what I kin wallop the wife...”.

⁴³ The Music Hall landscape that Chevalier conquered was in part the result of the liberalisation of the theatre sector by the Theatres Act of 1843 (amending the regime of The Licensing Act of 1737)

These posited a new financial model that moved away from the sale of alcohol into creating 'star' performers to carry audience numbers. In many ways, this professionalisation of the theatre mirrored the working class restaurants like the eel and pie shops: no longer an artisanal trade but a bourgeois inspired business enterprise. It should be noted however that Chevalier was preceded and outlived by a real cockney performer, Ernest Augustus ('Gus') Elen (1862-1940) who had a "voice of extreme authority, disillusionment and sardonic irony" (MacInnes, 1967: 51).

In terms of identity, Chevalier makes the cockney self-reflective and a figure of great sympathy. This is especially true in the rendition of his famous "My Old Dutch". The song is a lament featuring an elderly coster and his wife who, after forty years of marriage, are separated before the workhouse gates. Not only is this sentimentality a trope that will endure within the cockney identity, but also Chevalier's dialect turns from the comic Dickensian confusions into what might be recognised as a modern cockney cadence. Interestingly, in an interview with *The Graphic* in 1892, Chevalier makes no pretence of his artifice and admits that,

It's a great mistake to suppose that there is any one cockney dialect. There are half a dozen. The 'coster song', as people will call the things I sing, is a kind of embodiment of several; and it isn't necessarily cockney at all" (Stedman Jones, 1998: 299).

There can be no clearer indication that this formative portrayal of the cockney which in its major form still survives, is a fiction: a concoction of the music hall and a saccharine impersonation of the authentic voice of the street ventriloquised by a bourgeois performer across culture and media.

which had allowed for plays to be performed only in the so-called 'patent theatres' - The Theatre Royal Drury Lane and The Theatre Royal Covent Garden.

2.6 The character reflected back

The new, more acceptable representation of the cockney now became standardised. Marie Lloyd (1870-1922) similarly adopted a cockney identity, and she appears as a “respectable crossing-point in the journey of cockney from low to middle-brow culture” (Matthews, 1938: 99). Her, “A little bit of what you fancy does you good” and “The Coster girl in Paris” are evidence of “the music hall’s feeding upon itself rather than by drawing ideas from, or representing, the world outside... a representational code is learnt, reproduced and bingo, you have a cockney” (Scott, 2002: 256). These ‘cockney’ songs, as Matthews (1938: 98) has it, are now “nostalgic for a golden age that preceded modernity...” and can be a cross-class cipher for pretty much any and all representations that can be hung onto them. What was hung onto them, and onto the cockney identity of course, was nationalism.

It is in this late Victorian period, not completely and not necessarily before that it’s possible to categorise the London working classes as turning towards conservatism (Davis, 1989: 103-128). It is in this era that the cockney was conscripted into the nation. No longer part of a ‘wandering tribe’ or a member of the residuum to be feared, cleared or damned for their own moral failings, the cockney was now an imaginary, and cheerfully colourful character that encapsulated very British virtues. From Elgar’s *Cockaigne Overture* to Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, the poor had to be reimagined and repackaged as upholders of the status quo. More succinctly, they were accepted into the body politic because their difference was held in check within a framework of national unity. It is not coincidental that this shift happens against a backdrop of mass Jewish immigration, a rise in trades union activity and a significant dockers strike in 1889.

Indeed, “... from the 1880s, no aspect of Britain’s privileged position was secure. The history of the British state in this period illustrates the profound difficulties of accommodating the changing economic, industrial and political conditions” (Mica and O’Shea, 1996: 27). The riots in London on the 8th of February 1885 that coincided with the severe winter and mass unemployment were seen as more alarming than the threat of 1848 and increasingly the predominant reaction to the

rediscovery of poverty in this period “was not so much guilt as fear” (Stedman Jones, 2014: 290). A riot involving 20,000 unemployed building and dock workers ensued after a demonstration organised by the Social Democratic Federation in Trafalgar Square in November 1887. This in turn was followed some days later by ‘Bloody Sunday’, again in Trafalgar Square, when the police violently assaulted a crowd protesting coercion in Ireland. Certainly, for many within the bourgeoisie, these confrontations must have seemed like the thin blue line of order holding back the barbarians of the East (End) at the gate. Engels (1968: 370-371) was convinced that this ‘New Unionism’ was a political turning-point and William Fishman (1988) has suggested that for many in bourgeois London, these events signalled the start of the coming revolution.

Violent mass repression against the much-swelled residuum was never a realistic possibility. Rather, hegemony had to be “actively constructed and positively maintained” (Hall, 1996, 424). The response to this crisis was the formation of a culture of a ‘suffocating nationalism’ (Anderson, 1992: 24) that continues and is ‘useful’ to this day, visible within the larger identity of the London working class. As Cecil Rhodes had presciently noted, “If you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialists” (Porter, 1975: 125).

At the start of the nineteenth century, notions of an ancient constitution, nationalism and patriotic allegiance were identified with radicalism. This vocabulary was inherited by Chartism but by the 1840s “... the language of patriotism begins to pass out of the mainstream of English radical movements” (Cunningham, 1981: 18). Disreali’s Conservatives began to harness the power of patriotic feeling to both assure the bourgeoisie of Tory intent and to win working class votes.

Although (again) beyond the scope of this study, I argue that Hall’s (1973) work on the dissemination of hegemonic messages via television is analogous to the music hall’s construction of cockney in the struggle for the continued cultural domination of the late nineteenth century’s ruling elites. The music halls’ role in the racism inculcated in the working class audience is well documented (Hobson, 1901) although the work of Andrew Crowhurst (1997) offers a rare challenge, contending that the halls merely celebrated the emergent consumer culture. Hall’s argument is

that within the *discursive* form itself - in this case the *language* of song - (Hall's 'sign vehicle') the 'product' (in this case cockney identity) is circulated. It requires both a 'means' (performance) and its own set of production relations within a media apparatus (the music hall as a newly productive, professionalised arena). It is the 'encoding' and 'decoding' of the hegemonic message that are the *determinate* 'moments' in its (successful or unsuccessful) reception - and crucially - *reproduction*, from source to receiver. It was essential for the decoded identity to *appear* unconstructed: hence cockney was *required* to be palimpsestic, referencing numerous historical notions of origin (mediaeval artisans, street sellers etc) as for example, Matthews (1938) and Franklyn (1953) were only too keen to do. The notion of identity is, according to Hall, subject to the "continuous play of history... culture and power (Hall, 1990: 225) and I argue that it is the role of *memory* to naturalise and habitualise these codes, further concealing their origins. The eel-pie shops become in that sense, both in their linguistic connotations and what they signify visually for Hall, ideological *codes* or shorthand for the cockney identity.

It is this thesis' contention that the music hall was an effective hegemonic device (in tandem with popular fiction in late Victoriana) that centred the bourgeois capitalist class as the shining example of national and racial ideals that by economic and democratic necessity would have to become 'ordinary' and in turn, form a 'popular' imperialism. In that sense, it fits well into both Anderson and Hobsbawm and Ranger's (2012) paradigm that claimed lived 'custom' morphed, under modernity's pressure, into an inauthentic and invented 'tradition'. As Walter Bagehot (1867: 59) had suggested, the masses "defer to what we may call the *theatrical* show of society."

Significantly, as Alistair Bonnett (1998) points out, the inculcation of this popular imperialism was vital to the transition from the liberal, to the more advanced, socially consensual form of welfare capitalism that would emerge in the next decades. That said, it is likely that this patriotic fervour had at least some prior fertile ground amongst the lower-classes in which to take root. Fear of invasion during the French Wars had, as Perkin asserted, meant that "patriotism reinforced paternalism to hold overt class conflict in check" (Perkin, 1969 in Cunnigham, 1981: 21: 208). Further, there was always a "popular John Bullish Toryism" that foregrounded roast beef,

beer and hearty pleasure which found home in the ‘sporting cockney’ (Joyce in Cunningham, 1981: 21). This would be the English ‘ordinary culture’ that Raymond Williams would later transpose as the inheritance of the industrial proletariat.

The result would be a largely compliant, pacified and patriotic urban working class. In London, a loveable, sentimental coster plastered on top of the underlying vulgar of ‘Arry who loved his Queen and country, was “and-in-glove with the nobs” but who knew better than to challenge his position because of the “few bob in his pocket”.⁴⁴ A Frankenstein cockney; the latest in a line of palimpsestic identities.⁴⁵

It enabled the London (now white) working classes “...to start drawing on a form of social symbolism from which they had been once marginalised...” (Bonnett, 1998: 318). Crucially, going forward, the roots of this identification would be forgotten but would form the defence of the eventual Welfare State to which mass non-white immigration would be seen as antithetical to working class political and social ‘gains’.

2.7 The Pearlies

More than any other, it is the ‘pearly’ king and queen families, adjacent to the cockney and central to the cultural architecture of the contemporary eel and pie shop, that are the loci for, and a direct performative receptor of, the music hall tradition.

The pearlies, and their employment by music hall as faux-costermongers provide a folkloric link to, and a direct aping of, royalty and social stratifications. Overall, they provide the final clue as to why the Chevalier version of cockney would displace both the character of ‘Arry, the swell, the cockney-as-criminal and the wider fears of the residuum in popular culture and win cross-class approval.

⁴⁴ *Punch*, 11 May 1878: 205.

⁴⁵ A notion that references the biological and social imperatives of ‘Degeneration’ theory that would influence the second half of the nineteenth century and to some extent perhaps the first half of the twentieth.

As Samuel and Stedman Jones (1989: 64) have shown, the appearance of Henry Croft, the first pearly king, was as a fundraising performer. Croft was not a coster but a road-sweeper who in 1880 (or 1886 - records vary) sewed pearl buttons to his clothes as a charity exercise for the Temperance Hospital on the Hampstead Road. Croft's centrality to this narrative however has been disputed as Charles Coburn (1928: 107), another music hall performer claimed that the pearlies were actually invented by the singer, Hiram Travers who had a costume covered with *brass* buttons.

Although Croft may have simply been copying the music hall 'cockney swell', he might also, simultaneously, be seen as the inheritor of several historic London traditions. Samuel and Stedman Jones link the pearlies to the figure of the Jack-in-the Green associated with much earlier pagan May Day rituals although this is disputed by Judge (2000) who concludes that it seems likely that the tradition was associated with milkmaids (later with chimney sweeps) and was first recorded in the middle of the seventeenth century. Pearl Binder (1975: 19) links them, rather hopefully, to a 'Lord of Misrule' character, the instigator of annual, permitted disorder but this is based on an inaccurate conflation with the coster community.

It is however as showmen that the pearlies symbolise a complicated working class insertion between authority and the poor: one that reinforces the 'imagined tradition' (Anderson, 2006) of the Chevalier cockney. Generally seen as a conservative force evidencing overt patriotism and defence of royalty, the pearlies were, counter-intuitively, instrumental in providing essential funds to pre-state based, hospital, charity and church organisations via their friendly societies.⁴⁶ The pearlies inherited, and then superseded, a nascent system of provident clubs, some of which were temperance based and some, like the Jolliboys, which met in pubs.⁴⁷

Their activities mark a move away from simple charity to alleviate particular categories of poverty to a more universal welfarism providing a class-based

⁴⁶ "... timorous, bien-pensant insurance clubs and wavering support for the Liberal Party." See - Anderson, 1964: 36.

⁴⁷ Binder asserts that the membership of these clubs were the link to the early pearly kings. See - Binder, 1975: 77.

alternative to direct patronage that linked bourgeois guilt to the failure of laissez-faire. Geoffrey Rivett (1986) in his *The Development of the London Hospital System 1823-1982*, relates that dissatisfaction with the hospital system had been growing since the 1850s and that charitable funds were a confusing and inefficient form of administration set against the idea of modernity. Nevertheless, the intervention by fundraising of a section of the London working class caused some consternation among the well-to-do middle class that managed the schemes. Indeed, "Working men... expected a *quid pro quo* as of right, and to have a say in management. They did not see their contributions as an act of charity but as a form of insurance" (Rivett, 1986). This interjection into the political process was concomitant with, but not intrinsically linked to, trades unionism. Publicly however the pearlys never deviated from an avowedly non-political stance, and this may account for their largely enthusiastic reception from the elites: pearlys were honoured by Princess Marie Louise in 1927 and were officially represented at the 1953 Coronation.

Pearlys in some form prefigured the arguments upon which the National Health Service would be based but its institution meant that they lost as a body much of their initial *raison d'être*. Their collections were often carnivalesque affairs that echoed such mediaeval gatherings as the Bartholomew Fair which transgressed rules and subverted authority (Bailey, 1988). So unruly did these 'carnivals' become that the pearly fund-raising hospital processions were finally banned by the police in 1928. Yet the pearlys, analogous to the eel and pie shops (that they continue to promote), remain as independent working class entities and emblems of class solidarity and pride.

The pearlys were however unequivocally not costers but rather in some senses their social inferiors. This was a sub-class of the poor but not the casual poor, that aspired to the perceived independence of the coster with his cart and merchandise, but who were in no position to attain the capital required to purchase them. Despite Chevalier's lyric in his, "The Coster's Serenade":

Mine is the noblest turn-out in the crowd
Me in my 'pearlies' felt a toff that day
Down at the Welsh 'arp, which is down 'Endon way

C. Duncan Lewis offered, “we laugh at the ‘pearliers’... the true London coster would never dream of sporting such buttons” (Stedman Jones, 1989: 386) The idea of a late nineteenth century cockney stereotype was however useful for the pearlies as an adopted identity that both raised and distinguished them from the ranks of the residuum.

As the likely representatives of the working classes that the intrepid bourgeois reporter would usually find on their safaris, the numerous pearly communities were likely partly responsible for the (mis)representation of the pearly/coster conflation (Samuel and Stedman Jones, 1989). As a result of this, the pearly community willingly adopted an identity that was a stereotype based on a fictive notion of a ‘respectable’ poor, fit for an imperial era.

2.8 Modernity, ordinariness and the first decline of the cockney

By the 1890s a generation of novelists sought to challenge the alternate comedic or violent depictions of the cockney in popular cultural texts. The so-called Cockney Novelists, Arthur Morrison, Henry Nevinson, Edwin Pugh, William Pett Ridge and Clarence Rook *et al* relied on first-hand research and activism to portray a more accurate personal and group identity.

These works, whilst not entirely free of some of the patronising cliches of the poor as ‘threat’ or ‘other’ in mid-century writing, do intimate some sense of the living interiority in London’s working classes centring notions of community and belonging whilst not flinching from depictions of brutality or crime.

The authors largely however failed to give any sense of wider class structures that surrounded their characters who have largely accepted their place within the political landscape, “rendered harmless by the new beneficent state machinery, controlled by the upper classes” (Keating, 1979: 221). This cockney is differently ventriloquised but equally stereotypical. He is now a patronised figure with a ‘heart of gold’ and a ferociously loyalty to his superiors despite the poverty that surrounds him. This is perfectly illustrated by Pugh’s short story, *Bettles: A Cockney Ishmael* (1898) where an East End drunkard redeems himself (dying in the process) through his courage

during the imperial campaign in the Sudan. Pre-empted by Rudyard Kipling's *Soldiers Three* (1888) this cockney is the perfect 'pet' for the elites during the First World War who celebrated his subaltern humour, bravery and stoicism.⁴⁸

The duality between this acquiescence and residual working class defiance is more usefully imaged in some of the depictions of the cockney in the elite's art of the period. William Rothenstein's *Coster Girls* (1894) references Hogarth but the subject's hands-on-hips stance shows a wholly defiant, independent young woman.

C.R.W. Nevinson, the scion of radical bourgeois parents led a group whilst at The Slade before the Great War that called themselves *The Coster Gang*. These adopted the dress and boisterousness of the cockneys (Fox, 1987: 152), seeking out mock, and sometimes real fights with the police, progressive students and even authentic costers. This imitation of the subversiveness and violence that lurked under the surface of working class life may, according to Lisa Tickner (1992 in Black 2003: 23), reflect the 'crisis of masculinity' in avant-garde circles of the period highlighting the tension between modernity and the dulling conformity of consumer capitalism. In 1914, Eric Kennington, later an official artist in both world wars, painted the stark, brutal and overwhelmingly modern, *The Coster Mongers* (fig. 3 in appendix). The painting, whose main focus is the confrontational glare of a muscular, red-waistcoated street seller seems additionally to conceal a longing from the painter. In both instances the cockney coster had become an image on which to hang a bourgeois neuroses; a ventriloquised and caricatured symbol of 'real' life.

By the 1920s, after the slaughter of the trenches, the ubiquity of the cockney identity as formulated by Chevalier and the Cockney Novelists had waned. Caught between the dialectic of imperial decline and the first, heroic phase of modernism, cockney henceforth would be only periodically and sporadically useful to its hegemonic creators as a motif and a warning siren that a certain *type* of Englishness was under threat.

⁴⁸ For these wartime recollections see - Hamilton, 1920.

By now, the East End had been captured by Labour. Although this in itself was by no means a systemic challenge (rather the result of campaigning by a timid political organisation rooted in a “defensive solution to the employer’s counter offensive of the 1890s” (Stedman Jones, 1982: 118)), the origin of that success might be partly responsible for the elites’ re-identification with a timeless, bucolic, England *profonde*. The transformation of this hegemonic idea of ‘Englishness’ had certainly started much earlier, but the codification of it as a reflection of its bourgeois image - the cloaking of “...its cold mercantile heart in swaths of chiffon sentiment” - was a relocation of it to the Home Counties where it continues to symbolically reside.⁴⁹

In London, the middle classes looked to the Metropolitan Line and its suburban havens; the sterile semis, housing the sons and daughters of clerks, accountants and returning colonial administrators who had imagined from afar an ordered, leafy home in the image of ordered, imperial cities like New Delhi (Wilson, 1982).

For the cockney, this sense of the pastoral had been encapsulated by the rise of the allotment from the late nineteenth century. In many East End boroughs these small plots of waste land enabled the working classes, especially those in casual employment like dockers, to grow their own food and to supplement their diet. The allotments also linked these (mostly) men with their peasant pasts and cultivatable land lost through previous centuries’ enclosures. It conjoined with notions of local community, civic engagement and, kept them out of the pub (Scott, 2010). In some senses it foreshadowed the Essex ‘pioneer’ movement which by the late 1920s saw East Enders built their own, sometimes rather makeshift, holiday homes and cultivate their own land in the county.

It is within this period that the institutions of contemporary England are formed: The Oxford English Dictionary, the national art galleries and the employment of English as an academic subject. The ‘Georgian’ poets; Rupert Brooke, D. H. Lawrence, Walter De La Mare *et al*, all evoked a romantic rurality along with the virtues of a moral responsibility tied to a particular kind of ‘Englishness’. Kipling broken by the death of his son, retreated to Sussex and Ebenezer Howard planned to create the

⁴⁹ Self, Will. *The Guardian*, 6 September, 2014: 19.

synthesis of a rural fantasy in satellite towns. However, the period was one where, everything seemed, “pregnant with its contrary” (Marx, [1856]1969: 500). This reinvention of Englishness coincided with a modernism (albeit as a confusing site of several intersecting discourses) that championed the city.

Although these ‘Modern Times’ were about the ‘experience’ of the new-fashioned and exciting city, they were also about uncertainty. Once, working class identities had been formed singularly within families or within artisanal living arrangements, but they were now assembled in different, more complex multi-dimensional spaces as workers flooded into city’s offices from working class satellites like Barking or Dagenham.

Although references to eel and pie shops are conspicuous by their absence in the editorial content of Edwardian London’s newspapers and magazines (a reflection of the continuing lack of interest and understanding of developing working class culture by the bourgeois press), they are visible in plain sight and seem to develop quietly within unexamined working class communities away from the glare and approbation from the seats of the wealthier patrons of the music hall (and subsequently the cinema).⁵⁰

Although the coster, with his horse-drawn cart was now increasingly an anachronism, this period was ironically a golden age for the eel and pie shops. These decades mark the start of the empires of the triumvirate of the great pie shop families, the Cooke’s, the Manze’s and the Kelly’s. Print advertisements from the period indicate an expansion of eel and pie establishments and the changing nature of their role and fare. The shops were still selling foods like soup that the Victorian street would recognise but by now they were a natural inhabitant of a contemporary working class high street.⁵¹ In one poor area of East London a plethora of modest

⁵⁰ Within all of my research, I can find only one music hall song that directly references the shops - *The Little Eel-Pie Shop* from the 1870s - that was sung by George Laybourne to the tune of Rossini’s *Carneval de Venice*. I understand this absence as indicative of the ubiquity but perceived cultural unimportance of them. See - Newton, 1975: 61.

⁵¹ *London Daily News*, 10 April 1902: 2 - “£25 eel pie and soup house old established, well-known business, near King’s Cross genuine living trade capital fixtures and utensils included.” *Kentish Mercury*, 12 December 1902: 1 - “Under distress for rent. 31 high-street, Deptford. Messrs Newell and Hamlyn will sell by auction at Two O’clock... the fittings and utensils in-trade of an eel pie

eating places are recorded that included no less than three pie shops and one hundred and twenty-three coffee shops.⁵² This would seem to indicate, likely because of housing conditions - necessity rather than choice - “that much working class life still took place outside of the home” (German and Rees, 2012: 157).

After the First World War, real wages fell, and inequality had grown (Cole and Postgate, 1971: 496-498). Music hall reflected the cockney uncertainties of the time with sentimental songs that dealt with evictions (“My Old Man said follow the van”), homelessness (“I live in Trafalgar Square”) and overcrowding (“If it wasn’t for the ‘ouses in between”). This period may also mark the first of a series of epochs of ‘forgettings’ (and subsequent ‘rememberings’) of the cockney identity and its allied culture in the eel and pie shops.

Although the Chevalier cockney of late Victoriana was palimpsestic, it was, in the final analysis, a fiction. Its subsequent haunting of the following century might be interpreted as a way to anchor both a lost authentic working class culture (based on a pre-capitalist form and an invented platform) and a temporal anchorage *against* the ‘time-space’ compression of the new modernist century (Harvey, 1989: 147).

For the youth of the elite, the inter-war years saw a flamboyant reassertion of class difference. The ‘Bright Young Things’, the inheritors of Stein’s ‘lost generation’ caroused with a Modernist *swagger*, whilst the cockney made do with a flickering projection of their refracted lives in the escapist cinema. The East End sustained itself with Bank Holiday excursions and summer camping in Kent fields picking hops.

⁵³ By 1920 there are 89 eel pie premises listed in the Post Office Directory.⁵⁴

and dining room business comprising counter, seats and tables, eel kettle, pie warmer, crockery etc. Auction offices 487 New Cross Road SE.

⁵² *Clarion*, Friday 28 October 1904: 5 - “A report issued by Poplar Borough’s Sanitary Committee inspires a contemporary to remark that there seems no chance of anyone starving in the borough *if he be in possession of a few coppers*. It was stated that there are in the borough the following establishments - Coffee Shops, 123; fried fish shops, 68; eating houses, 23; dining rooms, 35; cook shop, 1; eel-pie shops, 5; restaurants, 109; pie shops, 3; sausage shops, 4; tripe shops, 7. But what of the scores of people who do not possess ‘the few coppers’ wherewith the purchase the succulent sausage and the toothsome eel-pie?”

⁵³ At its height, from the Twenties to the Fifties, about 200,000 East Enders - mostly women and children - made the annual pilgrimage down into the Kentish hop gardens, filling the ‘hopper’s specials’ trains which left from London Bridge station in the early hours of the morning.

⁵⁴ *Post Office London Directory for 1920*, Commercial Directory, *Post Office London Directory for 1920*: 2131.

The cockney was, however, still a figure of occasional journalistic curiosity, principally for editorial 'colour'. Stephen Graham, writing in the *Westminster Gazette* in 1925, visits the East India Dock Road where he recounts a Saturday night's revelry in the 'four-penny gallery' where "coster flappers" wedge themselves "among the lads." Outside, "The public-houses have arcades, wherein an overflow of customers stand and smoke" and "One walks along to what may be called 'Eel Pie Corner' - for there is so much eel pie for sale."⁵⁵ The cockney identity is alive, well and boisterous, but largely ignored. Again, newspaper advertisements are often the only way to gauge the condition of the eel and pie shops. They seem to reveal that the shops are popular, capacious, and busy often with live eel stalls on the pavement in front of them.⁵⁶ A piece in *The Sphere* from 1925 locates the cockney and the eel and pie shop as both numerous and as a place to eat quickly and run - synchronous with the busy, 'modern', urban cockney:

In the jellied eel and eel-pie centres round the Elephant and Castle the standers gather morning and evening at counters or ledges, wolf their stewed eels, pay and depart.⁵⁷

By 1938, Mass Observation, forensically reported from The Old Kent Road how,

The market men don't pack up until after nine, and the pubs fill up quickly... At closing time... [the street] fills up again ... some sing. Some make for the fish and chip shops, others to meat pie and jellied eel establishments. In these main sale is 2d and 3d. hot meat pies, with pennyworths of mashed potatoes, which have lots of parsley chopped up with them (This parley garnishing seems peculiar to south of the river in London. Obs. has seldom encountered it on the north side, but every sausage and mash shop in the Old Kent Rd or Walworth Rd districts has it)

⁵⁵ Graham, Stephen, "London at night. In the four-penny gallery", *Westminster Gazette*, 25 February 1925: 10.

⁵⁶ An advertisement in the *Westminster Gazette*, 27 September 1922: 3, speaks of "shop fittings inc. eel tanks £175 all in..." Another in *Westminster Gazette*, 29 June 1923: 12, references an "Eel and Pie busy spot. Camberwell. Seats 25: 3 rooms... old estb..."

⁵⁷ *The Sphere*, 18 April 1925: 16.

The piece continues to render further fascinating detail that echoes Victorian health scandals but also offers up rare evidence that by now the shops sell eels, pies and mashed potatoes.

In this shop there is a large notice saying, 'I will pay personally to anyone £500 who can bring forward the newspaper showing I have been prosecuted concerning the contents of my pies.' And another notice, on glass 'Our celebrated pea soup Nourishes and Sustains. Per 2d and 3d basin.'⁵⁸

The mention of soup further gives lie to the contemporary claim that the shops have only ever sold their contemporarily (and false) memorialised combination.

These inter-war journalistic interventions, simultaneous with the reporting of the modernity of the elites, are part of a pivot away from an imperial, heroic national identity to a reinvention that privileged a private, domestic and understated ordinariness. The cockney archetype was now a useful metaphor for an everyday working class Briton defined by their modesty, quietness, simplicity and kindness to animals (Samuel, 1989: xxiv). This ordinariness would soon form the basis of a national fiction of the decent working class grimly 'carrying on' fighting Hitler. It would also form the basis of another fiction that Britons were a 'race apart' in that battle and subsequently contribute to an exclusively racial concept of citizenship that would develop problematically after the Second World War. For the time being, however, George Orwell could codify this native common-sense normality that "... centres around things which even when they are communal are not official - the pub, the football match, the back garden, the fireside and the 'nice cup of tea'" (Orwell, 1946 in Waters, 1997: 211).

⁵⁸ MOA: TC Music, dancing and Jaz, 38/2/C – The Lambeth Walk, XIV: 7 (image1381).

2.9 The cockney keeps calm and carries on⁵⁹

The co-option of the cockney's cheerfulness and determination in the face of the Blitz is the basis of the haunting of the present-day's austerity nostalgia. The roots of this may partly be found in the framing of the extraordinarily successful musical, *Me and My Girl* (1937). In it, Bill, a Lambeth cockney stands to inherit an Earldom but risks it all for his 'common' girlfriend, Sally. The Lambeth Walk, the dance the musical popularised (with the help of the massed ranks of pearly actors onstage), cemented the London cockney as "the class who knew how to have a good time" (Madge and Harrison in Stedman Jones, 1989: 313). It contrasted their 'traditional' culture with the 'fast', Americanism of the Jazz age, and also valourised the notion of cockney as crucially *biddable* innocents perhaps a remnant of the Cockney Novelists.

In the inter-war period, the ordinariness of the cockney had additionally been moulded by the 'benevolent bureaucracy' of Herbert Morrison's London County Council. Morrison's endeavours, via the most moderate Labourism, housed and educated many of the London poor, yet the prosperity of this vision depended on the unquestioned role of imperial commodities that by now were traded via a kind of Empire market bloc in contrast to the former rigours of Free Trade. This hegemonic concept was instilled by the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) whose activities (and films like, *Song of Ceylon* (1934) inculcated an idea of benevolence and protectionism that would eventually form an element of the Welfare State.

The successor to the EMB, the General Post Office Film Unit, was responsible for much of the lauded documentary output of its time, especially the film *Night Mail* (1936). The documentary, a precursor to much of the wartime propaganda, features real working class men who were, almost for the first time, not the anonymous subject of ridicule (McGahan, 2010). Notwithstanding the rather ironic aesthetic debt

⁵⁹ I use this slogan in an ironic sense to reference the contemporary nostalgia that surrounds austerity. The now ubiquitous phrase was discarded by the Ministry of Information after a test printing and never found its way to public display. Rediscovered, it was sold as a reproduction by Barter Books in Northumberland and then in the shop at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London where it coincided with the austerity regimes of the Conservative government almost seventy years later. See - Hatherley, 2016: 18.

to Socialist Realism, this prototype of the everyday hero was utilised in perhaps the most famous wartime film, *London Can Take It* (1940). Although cockneys are not specifically mentioned, the title is significant. In contradiction to the profoundly conservative rural locale of the pre-war, the title is geographically specific (much to the annoyance of bombed northern cities) and the heart of the nation is seen once again as London.

It was to this end that the Ministry of Information conscripted the cockney into the war effort. Contrary to the axiomatic notion that the cockney was a reactionary patriot who could be willingly bombed night after night and actually enjoy it, the booing of the royal family in the East End seemed to have been a genuine shock to the political establishment (Calder, 2012). Less so perhaps was the extraordinary rise in crime under the cover of Blitz darkness and the role of the cockney black market 'spiv' who, along with more positive representations, has remained in the public consciousness, forever associated with London crime (Leg, 2017).

The enduring duality of the cockney identity notwithstanding, the experience of wartime shelters had foreshadowed an inevitable period of radical social change. According to Lord Morley in 1941, "It is quite common now to see Englishmen speaking to each other in public although they have never been formally introduced" (Timmins, 1995: 32).

The end of the Second World War definitively marked the universalisation of bourgeois democracy and in many ways was also the culmination of the long, concomitant nineteenth century journey of the cockney and its culture. Its identity, so long defined as a subordinate vehicle of political exclusion, would now be irresistible as a defining character in the new nation as determined by an insurgent Labour administration.

The imperial foundations of that nation however could no longer contain even the most modest aspirations of the working classes. This national, cross-class populist project was a reward, not only for winning the war, but also for their loyalty to capital.

In the decade after victory, the cockney *per se* played a bit-part cultural role but its translation as the epitome of cross-class wartime solidarity was important.⁶⁰

In *Passport to Pimlico* (1949) it was only through an appeal to a 'Blitz spirit' that societal cohesion could again be achieved. In 1959, the Dutch historian, Johan Huizinga suggested that the only distinctive national character the British possessed "was their susceptibility to the illusion that they had one, and a very remarkable one at that" (Huizinga in Waters, 1997: 213). As Chris Waters suggests, "To enter the later 1940s and 1950s is to enter a new world in which the components of national identity that had been manufactured in the 1930s and early 1940s seemed to come unstuck (Waters, 1997: 213). That misplacement of identity is painfully dramatised in the semi-autobiographical *Limelight* (1952) and more presciently in *The Entertainer* (1957) with Laurence Olivier's Archie personifying the ashes of a post-imperial Britain through the character of an old and bitter music hall comic.

The bright hopes of a more equitable post-war society were soon dashed by America's insistence on both the rapid repayment of war debts and Sterling's return to full convertibility. It was also dashed by the Labour government's use of troops to break the strikes of the working class in the docks of the East End in 1945. The docks continued industrial action along with lorry drivers, bus and train workers in 1949 and 1950 when Arthur Deakin, General Secretary of the TGWU told them he would "not move one finger" to help them (Murray, 2008: 100). The Labour government again used troops against power workers and the Smithfield meat porters in 1950 and in the same year sent gas workers to prison for illegal strikes.

Fascism resumed its domestic march as a resurgent Mosleyite movement marched through mostly Jewish areas in the East End and overseas Britain ignominiously withdrew from empire to the bloody horrors of Indian partition and the Palestinian *Nakba*. Phil Piratin (1948: 89) one of two Communist Party MPs elected in the East End in 1945, revealed that only one tenth of the planned 1300 council houses had actually been built by 1948 but that money had been found to redecorate Clarence House for the new queen.

⁶⁰ The character of Mrs Mop, a cockney *char-lady* is likely one of the last mainstream representations of this period. See - *It's That Man Again*, BBC Home service, 1939-1949.

2.10 Disillusionment and the spoils of war

After 1945, as Blackwell and Seabrook (1986: 64) attest,

... what was not recognised at the time, however, was that the bonding which occurred between the Labour Movement and the majority of the working class had occurred at a moment of unusual turbulence and, far from being a base which had been one for all time, was actually a precarious achievement which would have to be fought for in order to be retained.

The palimpsestic cockney identity that had been inherited from the struggles of the nineteenth century was a mixture of different sections of the labouring classes. London had always been a city of artisans and small masters, clerks and shopkeepers that teetered between the precarity of petty-bourgeois trades, the employed working class and the enormous pool of casual labour decried as the residuum. After the First World War, this structure changed. Rapid industrialisation meant that by the early 1930s,

London accounted for five-sixths of the net increase in the number of factories, two-fifths of employment in new factories, and one third of all factory extensions undertaken even though it had only one fifth of the population. (Pollard, 1962 in Stedman Jones, 2014: 348)

However, the ambitions and security of this new proletariat was undermined by the shallow roots of the socialist, Social Democratic Federation and factionalism between skilled and unskilled labour. Overwhelmingly, the future of this class was in the hands of Morrison's timid Labour bureaucracy that had been absorbed into the state apparatus during both world wars. Unsurprisingly, the social structures of these communities, largely uneducated, insular, sometimes self-employed and inculcated by the first bloom of modern consumerism via the music hall, remained relatively conservative by nature.

John Marriot's (1996) work on the history of cockney areas like Canning Town, Silvertown and North Woolwich, however, is instructive. The original migrants to

these areas had been agricultural labourers (not peasants) “who had direct experience of capitalist social relations in the countryside, and casual labourers displaced from the East End by collapse of stable economies ... all brought with them the imprint of an older rural culture and kinship systems that proved remarkably resistant to urban modernity” (Marriot, 1996: 87).

These communities, celebrating their lives in overcrowded slums were insular, boisterous and inevitably, in an inversion of the Victorian imposed social order, the street was their entertainment. The street was important not only because houses were cramped and small but also because the community represented a form of strong local identity, usually the result of casualism. This meant it was necessary for workers to live very close to precarious employment opportunities.

Entire streets were composed of workers and their families who formed inevitable social solidarities connected by work. For Marriot (1996: 87), “street parties... the celebration of body over mind, sport ... and ‘crime’ elements of the carnivalesque survived among the metropolitan poor.” Indeed, the formative Dock Strike in 1880, of which some of these communities had been part, “bore as much resemblance to a mediaeval carnival as to a modern industrial strike” (Stedman Jones, 2014: 347). This epitomised the East End as a spatial disruption to the rest of the city: its occupants transgressive. These were places that the police kept away from “... for the people are rough and more than once water has been thrown over constables” (Ridenhour in Fishman, 1988: 23). In an echo of the earlier eroticisation of the poor as *other* by the bourgeoisie, East End women were inevitably sexualised as simultaneously chaste or bawdy. This dynamic is played out in James Joyce’s ‘Lundub’ (as he has it in *Finnegan’s Wake*) where cockney matriarchs, so important in the nostalgic histories of the pie shops, are “vaudeville, sexually desirable, disorderly and humorous” (Boland, 2016: 84). The growth of these areas to the East of London promoted a distinct cultural and political character. They were “... everyday worlds... multiple sites of resistance and contest outside of traditional political institutions [found within] families and households” (Rose, 1998 in August, 2001:196). If the roots of the contemporary cockney are to be found it is, along with the proletarian entrepreneurialism of the coster, located here.

In 1892 West Ham (South) had elected the first independent Labour MP and the first Labour council, but election turnouts were consistently low. Marriot argues that because the Labour Party was universalist in aims (likely seen as middle class, outside irrelevances) this reinforced a resentful sense of local identity, where “[L]oyalties to place then take precedence over loyalties to class, spatialising political action” (Harvey, 1989: 279). Marriot’s research is clear that certainly in the local West Ham Labour party, sensibilities were un-ideological in that there remained a virulent anti-communist, anti-cosmopolitan and overtly local prejudice that rejected any progressive moves that did not address hyper-native concerns.⁶¹ Extrapolating these tendencies across London areas seen as traditional and cockney, we find that in terms of electoral politics, voting Labour had crucially become a habit for these communities but not a part of their defining identity.

It is within these local ties (albeit in post-war Bethnal Green) that Michael Young and Peter Willmott’s (1957) sociological work was based. Just as the defeated post-Chartist working class sought sanctuary and consolation in the distractions of blossoming consumerism and the music hall, as Richard Hoggart (1992: 166), recognised, the “real things are the human and companionable things - home and family affection, friendship and being able to say ‘Enjoy y’self’”. What counted was not class politics but “neighbours, family, patrons who could do favours or provide jobs” (Hobsbawm, 1989: 10).

However, Jon Lawrence’s recent critical re-examination of the original transcripts of *Family and Kinship in East London* (building on significant, mostly feminist criticism from the 1970s) finds a subtly different world where “... notes paraphrase respondent’s testimony... [and] generally represent *reconstructions* of vernacular speech rather than verbatim testimony” (2016: 574). The re-examined research finds the streets that defined what was left of the post-Victorian cockney identity riven by micro-class differences, petty antagonisms and “specious ramblings about kitchen matriarchs” (Oakley, 2014: 58). Johnny Speight, the working class scriptwriter

⁶¹ Perry Anderson’s arguments about the nature and historical context of England having the first proletariat are significant here. “It was not until the 1880s that the working class really began to recover from the traumatic defeat of the 1840s. By then the world had moved on. In consciousness and combativity, the English working class had been over-taken by almost all its continental opposites. Marxism had missed it.” See - Anderson, 1964: 36.

responsible for much 'kitchen-sink' television in the 1970s, would write of his family moving four streets to a different house in nearby Canning Town in the same period.

It was almost a social upheaval. Some of the people in this new street even had aspidistras in the window. They all wore shirts. At the very top end they even wore collars and ties. The houses had bay windows. We still had an outside toilet...But we were a cut above the others. (Speight, 1973: 20)

Certainly, this may have been a place where "Anyone feeling lonely only had to stand at the door, and ...someone would come along ... and cheer their neighbour up" (Blake, 1977: 12). But it was also a place from which many people couldn't wait to escape from; where despite Young and Willmott's well-intentioned bourgeois socialism, many people *wanted* to move to new council estates in Debden. Bethnal Green was a place where people were scared to admit they liked opera because they would be seen as 'snobbish' and where 'respectability' was often performative. (Lawrence 2016: 576).⁶²

"The working class community, as it survived in the writings and in the political discourse of working class commentators was a retrospective construction" (Bourke, 1994: 137).⁶³ Although this assertion may be too broad, it seems that the allegiance of social solidarities were restrained by limited choice: to 'make ends meet' and 'to keep up with the Joneses'. Relationships based on 'cockney culture' were about negotiations of power structures within tiny community 'cells' - differences for example about how well people scrubbed their steps (Blacker, 1974: 165-166). Different communities were often hostile simply because they were geographically separate, and association was made through marriage, music and sport (Benson, 1989). As Trevor Blackwell and Jeremy Seabrook (although talking more generally about working class communities) presciently recorded in the 1980s:

⁶² Interestingly, the East End *wasn't* an entirely culturally barren zone. As Paul Newland suggests, during WWII, "The working class also enjoyed a surprisingly wide range of culture, including jazz, classical music and drama. See - Newland, 2008: 47. More, The Sadler's Wells Ballet had performed in Victoria Park in the summers of 1942 and 1943. See - Palmer, 2000: 145-146.

⁶³ For a rebuttal of Bourke's 'trenchant' critique of community, see - Jones, 2018: 122-125.

These discoveries serve the function of covering up what was actually happening, which was that working class people were deserting these very communities, as individuals and not as a class as soon as they could afford to buy their way out. (1986: 110)

Indeed, as Carolyn Steedman's (1987) autobiographical work evidences, the grand nostalgic affirmations of working class life found in Hoggart, Young and Willmott often fail to recognise complicated individual psychologies of, for example envy and the very real emotional desire for material *things*.⁶⁴ It is partly these clandestine individualisms that will eventually re-shape the late twentieth century cockney and form its contemporary notion.

Urban densities had been falling since the 1920s and many wanted to move to places where community and personal relationships would be based on love not "proximity and need" (Lawrence, 2019: 1). The fracturing of those casual-work dominated communities, initially by the Blitz, slum clearances and then the palimpsestic replacement of music hall by first cinema and then personal television, showed a world outside these restrictive, 'defended' neighbourhoods (Suttles, 1972: 21). The failure of Labourism to capitalise on the wider solidarities of the Welfare State (and its subsequent absorption into the establishment at both local and national level) led to a further political disillusionment and an embrace of modernity among London's working classes that was profoundly capitalist, leading to a reinforced conservatism that largely defines contemporary cockney identity and with it, the constituency of the eel and pie shops.

For the East End communities that remained after subsequent waves of migration down the A13, that social conservatism was linked to a hyper-local identity that historically defined (in a large part) the customer base of each eel and pie shop. The shops had been overwhelmingly street market-adjacent (or adjacent to where historic street markets or 'ghost-markets' had once been). It is this study's contention that these memories of distrustful, hyper-local micro-communities ensured both the

⁶⁴ Steedman's work is a useful counterweight to the heavily gendered rendering of monolithic, collective, working class life. For a more London-centric perspective, see also - White, 2013.

popularity of the shops in their immediate post-war heyday and their continued anonymity in plain sight to other classes. It may also explain the (partial) cultural distrust of outsiders unaware of local social codes and solidarities, until these bindings were loosened by the final breakage of the traditional high street by Neoliberal forces and increasing gentrification from perhaps the 1990s onwards.

The contemporary 'forgetting' and 'remembering' of cockney, contingent upon utility to the dominant hegemony, can be seen in this context as a modern continuation of a constructed fear and suspicion in an urban geography unmitigated by bourgeois intervention or control and mirrored in the parallel defensiveness and suspicion of cockney communities.

Whilst the Victorian cockney was still within living memory, Franklyn (1953: 45) could observe that, “

Hidden in the cockney soul there is a stubborn, almost sullen resistance to reform; this is based on a deep attachment to environment... [in] the apparent appreciation of all that is being done for him, there lurks a wilful grip on life as he himself thinks ought to be lived, and as he intends to continue to live it...

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the cockney, a specifically London identity born of the increasing primacy of the capital, has signified different meanings at different times. The contours of cockney have largely however been defined by the powerful and in that sense, the ascription of the term has long been a weathervane of changing class relations.

The identity appears to have been an early signifier of the developing tensions between the emergent urban capitalist forces and older rural authority and privilege. By the eighteenth century, cockney had become a site of conflict between the Old Corruption of the *ancien regime* and different stratifications of a new class. This cockney was defined as much through cultural sensibilities linked to urbanisation, modernity and democracy as through cold, hard commerce. Here was a class that had been ascendent during the Regency but by the early nineteenth century was still

politically unaccommodated. The cockney became a site of contestation between the idea of the courtier and the citizen (Thompson, 1991) and this tension mirrored the rise of a new kind of Londoner.

Dickens' early nineteenth century (auto)biography of this precarious interstitial petty-bourgeois group of grocers, journalists, shop assistants and (eventually) eel and pie shop owners further revealed that cockney was now partly informed by a new consumer dynamic. The cockney dandy of the period, reinforced by popular cultural forms performatively linked lifestyles in an escapist pantomime that celebrated the appearance of the elites. However, by his use of an already "obsolete" dialect characteristic of the poor (Mayhew, 1857: 5), Dickens increasingly tied the cockney identity firstly to an urban working class and then by extension to its feared apotheosis, the residuum. This formation conjoined with a performative, dynamic, dramatic identity that was further informed by street commerce (Jankiewicz, 2012).

The continuing class deterioration of the cockney evidenced the identity's increasing dualities. The cockney was now situated between the law-abiding and the criminal; between the repulsive and the erotic and between the 'respectable' poor and the worthless 'other'.

Dickens' representation of cockney likely influenced the music hall, which called for ever more 'authentic' performers (Scott 2002: 237). This striving for authenticity was largely reflexive, with performers often replicating already existing representations, rather than any real figure (Turner 2002: 256). The increasingly palimpsestic cockney identity was further constructed by its conscription into the imperial nation to help pacify a disruptive proletariat additionally signalled through theories of racial superiority and a limited democratic expansion. This coding was transmitted via the behavioural forms of popular song, public houses and the eel and pie shops in, as we have already seen, a culture of consolation (Stedman Jones, 1974).

Largely insignificant between the wars except as a nostalgic signal to a good humoured and dutiful subaltern, the cockney re-emerges during the Blitz to define a stoic 'ordinariness' that would become the basis for the Welfare State. By war's end, the cockney, a character built on the foundations of assumed identity and fragments

of working class reality, did not simply fade as Stedman Jones (1989) suggests but had become inherently unstable, its contradictions, as I shall examine shortly, increasingly evident.

The cockney had at times come to define the nation yet, like the eel and pie shops, it was both culturally coded and hidden in plain sight, insular and hyper-local, its meaning complicated and precarious.

The notion of cockney, and thus the significance and prominence of the pie and eel shops I argue, rises and falls in direct relation to its usefulness to capital at times of political stress. In this way, cockney identity contains dual manifestations of welcome and hostility and is rooted in a deeply conservative melancholia and saccharine nostalgia.

Identity is the landscape upon which the eel and pie shop culture is built; *memory* - which I shall interrogate in due course - is the vehicle of its transmission.

3. The Defensive Trench of Empire

Introduction.

In this chapter I return briefly to the nineteenth century to thematically contextualise the cockney identity within the notion of whiteness and empire.

I examine how the ‘dirt and darkness’ of the London poor (Marriot, 2003) was recorded and classified by the ascendent bourgeoisie, simultaneous with contemporary racial theories, into moral notions (Stallybrass and White, 1986). These depictions, I argue, imported as they were from the conquests of Empire, were analogous to the representations of the slave society built in America and largely in contrast to the previous (relative) cultural flexibilities of the Georgian city.

The stratagem of extending ‘whiteness’ to the working classes during the New Imperialism to constrain potentially explosive domestic social forces was I suggest, a fundamental shift by the elites from overt repression to a more consensual version of hegemony. This reframing of the nation as a racial singularity (Bonnet, 1998; Virdee, 2014) I argue was comparable to the elite’s appeal to Protestantism during the seventeenth and eighteenth century wars with France.

I suggest that because the London working classes had been “invited to participate in the rule of others” (Mackenzie, 1986: 254), the eventual concessions of universal suffrage and the creation of the Welfare State were conducted within a racial context whose effects are entirely significant to the contemporary cockney identity memorialised in the contemporary imagination as emblems of a largely mono-racial, hyper-localism to which the eel, pie and mash shops are to a large extent a spiritual sanctuary.

By the extensive use of cultural texts, I thematically chart the cockney identity from the immediate post-war period to the New Labour era. The physical devastation of

the Blitz was for the cockney I suggest, a moment 'between two worlds'; the world of wartime Britain, its austere aftermath and the changed Britain that came after. I suggest that this subsequent memoryscape became a central motif within the social imagery of the period. Further I propose that this period and its subsequent reimagining retains enormous contemporary cultural and political relevance as a touchstone for the growth of anti-globalisation sentiment, populism and, eventually Brexit.

I link the destruction of cockney territoriality through generally unsympathetic zonal redevelopments, subsequent gentrification and gradual exodus to a partial paralleling of the Victorian 'clearing of the streets' which largely broke traditional kinship networks. I further connect these developments with the allied decline of long-established forms of labour and concomitant social structures simultaneous to the identity's contested relationship with modernity. In this I argue that housing and its allocation were central to the *ressentiment* towards mass immigration and the hastening of the transmission (and simulacra) of the cockney identity towards Essex and its 'dual class trajectories' (Watt, Millington and Huq, 2014).

In all of this I outline the contours of cockney as an identity concurrent to the evolution of a post-war national economy and a popular modernity celebrated in working class ritual of which the eel, pie and mash shops, although in a long trajectory of decline, remained relatively vibrant and central.

The traditional cockney identity I argue, simultaneously continued its role as a nostalgic conduit to capital but evolved multiple valances that spoke to an increasing emphasis on popular culture, age, choice and individuality (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2018) further complicating its continued existence as a palimpsestic construction. Through this notion I begin to trace a new and coexistent East End culture, born of an emergent multicultural narrative that corresponded to a social democratic project that birthed the ancestors of the contemporary cockney.

My research suggests that the cockney's role as a conduit to the forces of capital was reprised through the years of the neoliberal ascendancy as a signifier of tradition and as a nostalgic scaffolding. This in some ways narrated the "slow cancellation of

the future” (Beradi, 2011) by forces of the Right that captured elements of the East End working class by appealing to their race and their perceived abandonment through an ‘authoritarian populism’ (Hall, 1978). The contemporary reimagining of the eel and pie shops as a totem of a lost white, working class London is, I argue, firmly anchored within this nostalgic haunting.

Finally, I narrate the contours of the subsequent demonisation of the culture of the London working class by New Labour through Late Modernity’s valorisation of globalisation and aspiration. I suggest that the notion of ‘ordinariness’, once epitomised by the Blitz cockney, was now to be located in middle class values through the prism of culture not class. I suggest that Blair’s Labour Party had forced the white working class “to think of themselves as a new ethnic group” (Jones, 2011) and this would be increasingly reflected within the constituency of the eel, pie and mash shops.

3.1 The ‘whitening’ of the London working class

As the Victorian century opened, the bourgeoisie began to hegemonize and historicise their own ascendancy and distinction from the morass of the proletariat. Whereas the poor previously had been seen as simply criminal, the primacy of Britain’s industrial working class meant that it began to be defined in dark, monstrous terms: a creature born of a shadowy, labyrinthine city (Baldick, 1990). Progressively, the proletariat came to be seen, literally as a race apart and this notion was framed in terms borrowed from the subjugation of native populations conquered by Empire.

By the middle of the century, fear of decline and domestic disorder meant that delineations of race and class merged with pseudo-science and were recoded into an explicitly moral formulation around the ‘darkness’ of dirt and disease (Marriot, 2003). In this way, a constructed identity of ‘whiteness’ and racial purity became central to the bourgeois imagination. Its absence defined the location and exclusion of the poor within the nation. For the ‘fallen’ cockney of the late nineteenth century this categorisation would be crucial.

The gentlemen who explored the 'dark' inner-city colonies of London as brave colonial adventurers were a central conduit to this conceit. In this way, the journalist James Greenwood could reference in 1874,

Creatures that you know to be female by the length and raggedness of hair that makes their heads hideous, and by their high-pitched voices, with bare red arms and their bodies bundled in a complication of dirty rags (Marriot, 2003: 161).

Peter Stallybrass and Alon White (1986: 128) have successfully argued that dirt was an important signifier for the bourgeois cultural imagination as it could map a class-based otherness which might contaminate both the physical and moral boundaries of the city. This could be navigated, whereby "the axis of the body is transcoded through the axis of the city (1986: 145)". 'Good dirt' was the result of hard labour and 'bad dirt' the result of moral pollution. The correlation of London's topography in these terms was coterminous with Prince Albert's shocking death from Typhoid and dirt increasingly became a metonym for crime and anarchy.

In the gas, glass and gleaming counters of the early eel and pie shops we see this notion of hygiene and propriety internalised and translated into a nascent, aspirational working class culture. Ironically, of course the shops also traded in eels: a bottom-feeding creature that had been the staple of London's poor for centuries but at this stage, eel-eating still crossed class boundaries. Wesleyan allegories like 'cleanliness is next to godliness' however remain deeply rooted in working class domesticity, identity and memory.

After the mid-century, a racial coding of the home populations started to become central to the classification of the moral structure of the poor themselves. In this way, George Godwin, editor of the *Builder*, could in 1854 suggest that when in order to investigate the conditions of the working classes, "It is necessary to brave the risks of fever and other injuries to health, and the contact of men and women often as lawless as the Arab or the Kaffir" (Marriot, 2003: 161).

Domestically this paradigm created obvious contradictions. London's urban poor, an increasingly significant political and social force, were overwhelmingly white, and this meant that their 'blackness' had to be constructed within a framework of an 'internal colonialism'. The Irish had already been primed for this racial encoding as 'primitives' during the Famine in the 1840s (Thompson, 2013: 348). Against the backdrop of the Fenian campaign, they would be visually *simianized* as monsters in brutal cartoons (Curtis, 1996) and Carlyle would speak of them as "the white negroes" (Marriot, 2003: 165). Significantly of course, both the Cooke's and the Kelly's eel and pie dynasties share an Irish immigrant heritage but as working class entrepreneurs, they rose above "the floating armies of labourers who built the canals, the docks, the railways and transformed the face of England" (Bermant, 1975: 43).

Simultaneous with the new notions of social Darwinism, the theories of Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882) had specifically warned of miscegenation within the *abyss* that would lead to a degeneration of the race (Pick, 1993). In this way, *The Saturday Review* in 1864 could speak about the Bethnal Green poor as, "... a race apart... of whom we know nothing, whose lives are of quite different complexion from ours... offer a very fair parallel to the separation of the slaves from the whites (Malik, 1996: 93).

The Daily Telegraph in August, 1866 would refer to white, working class rioters as "... negroes... who have the taste in their tribe for any disturbance..." (Lorimer, 1978: 195). According to Edwin Hood, "the negro is in Jamaica as the costermonger is in Whitechapel; he is very nearly often a savage with the mind of a child's" (Malik, 1996: 97). Increasingly, there seemed a parallel between the representation of some of the London working classes and the slave society built in America. Bonnett (1998: 336) points out how this 'colour divide' was reproduced in cultural texts of the period and that "the popular stereotype of the Negro in the mid-nineteenth century owed more to the new world than to Africa" (Lorimer, 1978: 206). Indeed, during the Chartist agitation of the 1830s and 1840s there had been a rhetorical (if exaggerated) linkage made by abolitionists between the conditions of bondage of the British industrial proletariat and that of slavery in America and the Caribbean. By the end of the 1860s however, this moral, reforming correlation amongst sections of the English middle classes had started to flag. The Indian Mutiny/The First War of

Independence (1857-1859), The American Civil War (1861-1865) and the Morant Bay Rebellion (1865) had all shaken the notion that colonial subjects could be held captive at arms-length as voiceless subalterns. When significant bread riots followed the collapse of the Thames ship-building industry in the 1860s, adding to the vast and threatening casual labouring mass of the residuum, bourgeois fear led to the questioning of the confident utilitarian moral and economic rationale underpinning of the administration of the Poor Laws (Stedman Jones, 2014: 15).⁶⁵

By the mid-1870s in response to widespread international economic recession European powers scrambled to further exploit the wealth of their colonies by expanding their territories in a race that would become known as the New Imperialism. To simultaneously constrain domestic demands for social change and achieve popular support for such global conquest necessitated extending the notion of 'whiteness' to accommodate the working classes in a transition to a popular, socially consensual (and eventually, welfarist) form of Imperialism. In this way, the nation could additionally be reframed as a patriotic, racial singularity to exclude the racialised 'other' (Bonnet, 1998; Virdee, 2014).

The formula for this transition may however be found in a much earlier, significant extension of the nation that was the elite's appeal to Protestantism during the seventeenth and eighteenth century wars with France. This address was aimed at uniting an English nation with the Scots and Welsh against a Catholic enemy demonised since the Reformation. The ingestion of the idea of nation was a fundamental shift by the elites from overt repression to a more consensual version of hegemony. This national framework appears to have largely held in place when the English artisanal class enjoined an ideological struggle against the Old Corruption and when a specific class consciousness began to form within the early proletariat. Both of these strands coalesced around the rhetoric of liberty that looked backwards to a patriotism framed by the 'freeborn' Englishman's "birthright" (Thompson, [1963] 2013: 85) and forward to the ideas of Paine.

⁶⁵ Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life among the Lowly* (1852) was a well-known and popular novel of the time and the racism and segregation of the society it portrayed drew direct comparisons with the English working class. For the economic crisis and The Poor Law see - Jones, 2014: 15.

However, the early proletariat began to contest the elite's concept of the nation as unjust because it excluded other racialised groups that were seen as equally British. Indeed, contrary to the long-standing view that the working classes were a heterogeneous mass, Irish Catholic migrants appear to have been key actors within these early democratic developments uniting many "radical strands not least the emancipation of Ireland, the abolition of the monarchy and slavery" (Virdee, 2014: 14). Thompson ([1963] 2013: 483, 652-654) attests that the Irish workers were present in Luddism and Virdee (2014) cites both John Doherty, an Irishman who became a national trade union leader and William Cuffay, a leading Chartist and the descendent of an African slave as evidence of this cosmopolitan culture of proletarian solidarity. This nascent inter-racial and religious unity during the "heroic age of the proletariat" (Anderson 1964: 33) was a connected struggle against slavery, imperialism in Ireland and for emancipation. It appears to have terrified the elites.

The siding of the bourgeoisie with the upper classes around the 1832 Reform Bill and the subsequent banning of Combinations began to dissipate this political-racial unity.⁶⁶ Irish labour was used to undercut other working class wages and without political leadership, antagonism grew. As Nancy Stepan (1982: 4-5) suggests, identity began to be manufactured around "a more parochial and nationalist outlook." This was deployed by the elites against the Irish in the 1830s and 1840s and was a "racist discourse produced for the emergent English working class" (Hanley, 2016: 109).

The notion that the Irish were now 'other' became more firmly ingested within the English working classes who, after political defeat, entered a period of "prolonged catatonic withdrawal" (Anderson, 1964: 33). In direct relevance for the cockney, this historical, racial idea of nation according to Virdee (2014: 5) limited "the political imagination of even those who were representatives of the exploited and the oppressed."

⁶⁶ Combinations refer to an early form of trades union.

Whiteness had now been re-framed as ordinary and commonplace to signify “the homely virtues of quietness, tidiness, cleanliness and decency” (Bonnett, 1998: 330). Exactly the qualities that would coalesce around the identity of the ‘respectable’ working class, the eel and pie shops and their customers. Bonnett sees the project of ‘whitening’ almost exclusively as uni-directional but, as Jonathan Hyslop (1999: 402) contends, this “fails to give sufficient centrality to direct working class involvement and participation in, and movement through, the empire, as a historic formative force in British working class racism.”

Historically, notions of blackness as ‘opposite’ had long been connected with performances within English Mummary to represent ancient liberties against the foreign yoke. ‘Blacking-up’ had also used by poachers and dockside against pressing gangs (Thompson, 1977). Both strategies linked ‘blackface’ with protest against the enslavement of the ‘freeborn’ Englishman in some sense sympathetically connected subjugation to blackness whether inferiority was implied or not.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss in fine detail preceding working class racisms, yet it seems clear that previous colonial exploits were informed by notions of white supremacy transmitted through an earlier ethnic chauvinism. Charles White’s 1799 treatise *Account in the Regular Gradation in Man* had suggested all races shared a common heritage in the Garden of Eden, but that Africans were degraded by their lack of civilisation (Hanley, 2016: 118). Indeed, some radicals like William Cobbett appealed to working men to define themselves against abolitionist’s compassion citing the slave’s revolt in San Domingo as evidence of their “politically uninformed barbarism” (in Wood, 1999). A more conservative, overtly racist notion of patriotism itself began to supersede this earlier radical patriotism to enable “the working class to participate in the rule of others” (Mackenzie, 1986: 254).

Like the later cockney identity, it has long been argued that this racism (militarism and jingoism) was inculcated into the working class identity not only by the music hall but by the mass circulation of patriotic fiction (Hobson, 1901), compulsory schooling and semi-military organisations like the Boys Brigade.

By the late 1870s, the instilling of Imperial whiteness linked to a nascent (masculinist) Labourism saw an emergent 'waterfront' culture in the East End docks. This, the defensive trench of Empire was where a tight-knit, hyper-localism of sailors and dockers saw themselves as bulwarks against 'alien cultures' in their own vernacular version of the pure white Englishman (Cohen, Qureshi and Toon, 1994).

Labourism further disseminated whiteness through an imperial working class of British, Australian and South African workers that traversed the world (Hyslop, 1999).⁶⁷ The incorporation of the working class as racially white allowed capitalism to mutate towards a more interventionist form. This mollified the sharper edges of class struggle and simultaneously addressed the "increasing complexity and consumer orientation of capitalist production" (Bonnett, 1998: 329). It was clear that the battles for the eventual creation of the Welfare State (and elements of welfarism across the white Commonwealth) were not conducted in a context free from race. Indeed,

The Imperial working class of the pre-First World War era was unable to separate its hostility to its own exploitation from its aspiration to incorporation in the dominant racial structure (Hyslop, 1999: 418).

So, when it did finally arrive in 1945, "welfare came wrapped in the Union Jack" (Bonnett, 1998: 329).

This process was however not linear: Andrew Crowhurst (1997) posits that white working class people still continued to concurrently identify and represent themselves positively as 'black' or 'other' using earlier music hall traditions. Indeed, when the American cake walk (a dance developed from gatherings on black slave plantations) was introduced to the London music halls in 1898 it was adapted by South London cockneys in their own swagger and eventually became the first danced Lambeth Walk in 1903 (Howkins, Collis and Dodd, 1986: 47).

⁶⁷ Jonathon Hyslop's work on the trans-national nature of the Imperial working class is formative here. He charts the progress of a largely Cornish mining community with in-demand specialist skills imbued with a small-masters ideology of individual liberalism rather than a working class communitarian socialism whose influence on the labour movement was profound. It was their championing of white-worker supremacy within an Imperial commonwealth that dominated the Trades Union movement until after World War Two. See - Hyslop, 1999: 398-421.

Cockney culture was certainly *not* in itself inherently racist. Although the bourgeois construction of the cockney in the cartoon of 'Arry in Punch was deeply prejudiced, London had for centuries been racially mixed - what might be called an early 'ordinary cosmopolitanism' (Gilroy, 2000).⁶⁸ When racial tensions emerged (such as national race riots in 1919) they were almost always due to the economic stresses of scarcity within capital but referred back to the elite-created racialised 'other' of the early-mid nineteenth century. Testimonies of cockneys around race and whiteness in the early twentieth century are rare but Doris, a white resident of Canning Town's Crown Street, known locally as "Draughtboard Alley" for its racial mixing could reminisce about growing up alongside black and mixed-race families in the 1930s with little apparent tension.

There were lots of black kids. We used to play together, no animosity between any of us. There were white women married black, you know, West Indians, they were working on the boats. Got on ever so well together... Everybody in the street used to speak to each other, and all the children used to play together (Padfield in Caballero, Chamion and Aspinall, 2018: 142).

Similarly, Anne Bowes, a mixed-race woman from the same area would recollect that "Where we lived there was no feeling that mixed marriages were wrong. The white people we lived with accepted it" (Padfield in Caballero, Chamion and Aspinall, 2018: 142).⁶⁹

Such solidarities in London's working class communities reflected the rapidly changing nature of cockney territoriality. Mass Eastern European immigration from the 1880s into traditionally cockney areas had created, by the inter-war years, a confident and relatively integrated Jewish population that saw themselves as 'EastEnders'.⁷⁰ The concept of the East End and cockney, although now virtually interchangeable, were crucial spatial delineations of identity from Victoriana to

⁶⁸ For a historical perspective on London's racially mixed past see - File and Power, 1981; Bell, 2002; Shyllon, 1992.

⁶⁹ These interviews started life as a sensational *Daily Express* article, ironically about the 'dangers' of racial mixing with the inevitable brutally cropped photograph excluding smiling white children standing with their black friends. See - "The street of hopeless children" *The Daily Express*, 18 March 1930.

⁷⁰ For a fascinating treatise on Jewish linguistic integration in the East End, see - Sivertson, 1960.

modernity. In areas like Spitalfields, Jews came to dominate the shops and street markets. Some of these 'foreign' costers - especially around Hoxton and Bethnal Green - were members of large socialist and anarchist organisations (Knepper, 2008). It was members of this community that reinvigorated and radicalised notions of a wider cockney community that saw itself valorised at opposition to Blackshirts marching at Cable Street in 1936 and in the almost forgotten post-war struggles against fascism. Indeed, Jews played a crucial, if unintentional role in redefining the identity of cockney through the inter-war years by consciously identifying themselves as locals and to some extent, divisions between Jew and gentile broke down as a younger generation moved from the ghettos into more mainstream white-collar employment (Lammers, 2005: 332). It is this formulation of the cockney that rebuilt the East End from the rubble of the Blitz whilst an historically older, 'whitened' proletariat either decamped to Essex or became marooned within their mono-racial memories within more mixed communities.

It was, however, the arrival of the first wave of non-white British subjects from the Caribbean in 1948 to (in part) address the post-war labour shortage, that almost immediately unsettled the newly-won welfare structures of a constructed cross-class, racial-national community.⁷¹ Their landing coincided with the questioning of what it meant to be British in a post-war and post-imperial world. Bill Williamson (1988: 170) suggests that a more exclusive concept of citizenship had already started to develop and cites the Conservative opposition to the 1948 British Nationality Bill which had sought to expand the definition of citizenship linked to a multi-ethnic Commonwealth.⁷² A wartime national identification towards 'ordinariness' (the conscription and valorisation of the working classes into the nation) that centred around the domestic and private (Light, 1991) meant that "the migrant other was constituted as the 'stranger' *par excellence*" from the 1950s onwards (Waters, 1997: 228). Indeed, Bill Schwarz (1996: 73) pertinently perceives this period as a 're-

⁷¹ In fact, the Attlee Labour government was "taken by surprise by these arrivals of immigrants" but had no legal way to stop them as they were British subjects. The very real labour shortage, put at somewhere between 600,000 and 1.3 million workers, aimed to be stemmed by de-mobilised Poles and freed German and Italian former prisoners of war but not enough of them could be recruited. See Patel, 2021: 61. Indeed, as Neal Ascherson reports, "... the Windrush only put in at Kingston, Jamaica, because it was half-empty, and the captain - hoping to cut his losses - had put an advertisement in the local paper offering berths to London." See - Ascherson, 2021: 6.

⁷² I think it's important to note that Caribbean immigration was also seen as a 'return to the motherland' after Colonial efforts during World War Two. See the arguments in Patel, 2021.

racialisation' of England where the tropes of the colonial frontier came 'home' to Britain (Webster, 2001) along with a generation of Empire administrators creating an atmosphere that resembled the 'embattled' Afrikaner and whites in the American South desperately trying to cling to segregation. Here perhaps was the beginning of the notion of 'whites as victims' where the immigrant would eventually have the 'whip hand'. In cockney communities this may have fed into anxieties about the emasculation of the working man against the increasing gains of woman and of miscegenation. Immigrants, in an echo of the Victorian residuum were seen to live in vice and squalor as evidenced by Colin McInnes' *City of Spades* (1957) in opposition to an increasingly settled and domesticated working class normality. They were also a threat to white women. In Roy Baker's *Flame in the Streets* (1961), Trade Union leader Jacko Palmer upholds the rights of a black worker but struggles with news that his daughter plans to marry a West Indian.

The contestations of the rights and primary entitlements of the white population of East London, of which the cockney subsequently become the embattled motif, is one of the defining legacies of this period memorialised in the contemporary imagination as emblems of a largely mono-racial, hyper-localism: the eel, pie and mash shops, to a large extent, their spiritual sanctuary.

3.2 From the terrace to the tower block

The terrible damage of the war had erased much of the territoriality of the East End and in that sense, part of the historically geographic notion of cockney identity itself. The cockney sanctum, St Mary Le Bow, was lost during the Blitz of 1941. The bells were recast at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in 1956 but not installed until five years later. By the time they pealed again, they did so over a transformed landscape and an increasingly dissociative cockney identity.

This devastated cartography is shown in *Hue and Cry* (1947) in which East End school children battle crooks and spivs over bombsites that brutally expose the compressed multiple buried layers of the city's history. The film links the children's

ingenuity, the new energy of the age, with the lumpen characters of the cockney villains whose password, 'Lambeth Walk', links them to a pre-war *pastness*.⁷³ In *The World my Wilderness* (1950), Rose Macauley's central character Barbary Deniston squats a deserted flat in the anarchy of the destroyed inter-zone of post-war London and engages with a community of outcasts, criminals and deserters. The sites simultaneously speak of the past and the future and damaged cockney youth set against the new Jerusalem of the planners' dreams. Here, the vibrant and chaotic "green world" of the fast-growing rosebay willowherb (*chamaenerion angustifolium*) is contrasted to the grey austerity of London. Macauley suggests this is a potent period of innocence which the cockney children of *Hue and Cry* will never know again.

The children stood still, gazing down on a wilderness of little streets, caves and cellars, the foundation of a wrecked merchant city, grown over by green and golden fennel and ragwort, coltsfoot, purple loosestrife, rosebay willow herb, bracken, brambles and tall nettles, among which rabbits burrowed and wild cats crept, and hens laid eggs (Macauley [1950] 2018: 53).

Within these edge-lands, several generations of Londoners would hide, play and make love away from their impossibly cramped and conservative homes. Antecedents to prefabs and unauthorised, makeshift, re-purposed spaces were the emergent cockney youth's practical responses to the landscape. Eventually, this 'unofficial countryside' (Mabey, 1973) of allotments, pigeon fanciers and 'drosscape' was only to be found in the forgotten outer wastes of Stratford and Bow and would be finally destroyed in the corporate devouring of post-industrial wildernesses by the behemoth of the Olympic Park. Yet this 'temporary' cockney figure, a child of the post-war years that wandered, played and danced pan-like in nature before the city buried it again, stands in ironic opposition to the original mediaeval connotation of the urbanite fearful of the countryside.⁷⁴

⁷³ The film's childhood heroes are not so far removed from reality. During the London Blitz, seventeen-year-old Patsie Duggan, the son of a Poplar bin man, led a gang of children, some as young as ten that acted as unofficial firefighters and rescue squad and were responsible for incredible acts of bravery. They were photographed by Bert Hardy for Picture Post in 1941 but largely forgotten until the publication of a children's book in 2015. See - Ashley, 2015.

⁷⁴ For a description of some the last of London's lost wastelands, see - Sinclair, 2012.

The devastation narrative runs through to the 1970s in cultural texts and is finally contrasted in *Bronco Bullfrog* (1969) with the real and idyllic countryside where Del and Irene, the young, doomed couple temporarily flee to escape their drudgery and entry into adulthood. As Ben Highmore (2012: 75) suggests this devastated landscape became, like the Blitz itself, a central motif within the social imagery of the period. “It constituted an affective landscape that played host to a mood world... sometimes resilient or defiant, joyful and exuberant, and sometimes resigned.” The ‘cultural feelings’ around this panorama and its privation congealed over decades and have been reformed in contested contemporary memory-scapes in which the cockney, as an unwitting agent of nostalgic capital, is once again valorised as an exemplar of self-sufficiency and *robustness* via modernity especially within the Brexiteer generation.⁷⁵

This devastated interregnum is for the cockney, simply a moment ‘between two worlds’ (Hall, 1978); the world of wartime Britain, its austere aftermath and the Britain that followed. In *A Place to Go* (1963), Ricky croons in his local Bethnal Green pub about a council waiting list that is “a mile long” just before his family are given eviction notices as part of their slum’s clearance. The moment is, however, pregnant with possibilities - a rebuilding of the cockney areas in line with organic communities or within a bourgeois modernity: a sympathetic re-assessment of the city and its people or a Brutalist re-imagining. This rebuilding is, in some senses, the continuation of the Victorian project to literally sweep the London working class from the streets and re-zone them. The cockney is banished from this (temporary) Garden of Eden to face re-housing within concrete towers or dispersal to the hinterlands.

There is a forgotten context in which these communities might have been more sympathetically accommodated within a popular modernism whilst “[T]he leftist planners and architects who briefly dominated under Atlee were side-lined after 1951 in favour of developers... are still the usual punching bag for the latter's schemes” (Hatherley, 2008: 131). Raymond Williams however was very clear that the planning decisions taken during this period, while supposedly democratic, were used to mask

⁷⁵ See for example - Hyams, 2011; Jacobs, 2015.

a bourgeois authoritarianism. He ruefully called this the 'smokescreen of consultation' (Williams, [1961] 1992: 312). Opposition was ruthlessly suppressed and framed as "... the white working class as a 'hazard to modernity'" (Skeggs, 2004: 91).

The very public and violent eviction in 1968 of Stephen Hurn and his wife from their home in Victoria Road, Leytonstone following a compulsory purchase order is particularly telling. In Pathé footage the couple are seen behind a barbed wire barricade remonstrating with police and bailiffs who pay no attention to their pleas about their own little "freehold piece of England" and significantly, likening the council to the Nazis. Their appeal to an earlier, radical patriotism of the Englishman and his liberty is almost a century too late. They are beaten and dragged away.⁷⁶

The tower blocks and low-rises that came to dominate the East End throughout the 1960s, although initially welcomed by some of their new residents, destroyed the recognisable landmarks of communal spaces of places like the pie and mash shops. They imposed a -

privatised space of family units stacked one on top of each other, in total isolation... [and] the ... effect of redevelopment was to destroy what we have called matrilocal residents. Not only was the new housing designed on the model of the nuclear family, with little provision for large low income families... but the actual pattern of distribution of the new housing tend to disperse the kinship network... (Cohen, 1981: 79).

By the early 1970s white Bethnal Green residents that remained in traditional housing found themselves squeezed between their own decrepit living conditions and a (largely bourgeois) squatting movement enjoined by a small community of Bengali seamen living in equally squalid private lodging houses. New housing, predicated on council waiting lists that had traditionally kept generations of East Enders together and was seen as the white community's post-war reward, was largely allocated on the basis of need to the fast-growing immigrant population of

⁷⁶ Pathé. "Angry scenes during East London Eviction, 1968." See - <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/VLVA52HPMYO0ZRUY0BPPUAGXFFZRM-UK-ANGRY-SCENES-DURING-EAST-LONDON-EVICTION>

Bangladeshi's.⁷⁷ This was supported by new urban modernisers within the local Labour Party. There followed what Dench (2006: xviii) called "a lengthy period of undercover class war" where white residents were "required to submit to new social rules and rulers and above all to continuing immigration" (Dench, 2017: xviii). Increasingly branded by the media as racist and supported by far-right groups, many white residents moved out of the area (largely to Essex) leaving behind a mostly poor and elderly population who were joined by new "[M]iddle class whites who did not need to compete directly with international immigrants for public resources, and so could take pleasure in their exotic culture and pride in their presence" (Dench, 2017: xviii).

This so-called 'white-flight' from the East End however, had a long history. During the early 1920s, London had continued to grow at an enormous rate. It did so increasingly outwards, pushing towards the suburbs. Inwood (2000: 708) suggests that around "...two million migrants (a third from inner London, the rest from elsewhere in Britain) settled in suburban London in the interwar years" (Inwood, 2000: 708). Even so, by the 1930s, East London was still, along with the industrial North-East of England, the most overcrowded area in the county (Inwood, 2000: 758).

Many in the capital looked longingly to the fresh air of the of the Thames estuary, historically a place of day trips for London's respectable working classes. The landscape they would have passed through on the trains to the seaside became building sites for local authorities and private investors buoyed by low interest rates and the burgeoning building societies movement. Encouraged by the extension of rail and Underground lines, a building boom between 1934 and 1938 meant that in London's eastern outer suburbs there were several huge London County Council estates with a total population of around 250,000. By 1939, Becontree in Essex had 116,000 tenants, more than the population of Ipswich or Halifax (Inwood, 2000: 718). These homes, with indoor toilets, several bedrooms and outside garden space were a huge improvement on London's decrepit slums. There was something of an ironic

⁷⁷ Between 1971 and 2001 the numbers of Bangladeshi residents in Tower Hamlets, the borough that contains Bethnal Green, rose from around 4000 to almost 66000: from 2% of the area to just over 30%. See - Young, Gavron, and Dench, 2006: 227.

Empire notion about the idea of the East London homesteader colonising the empty veldt although many of the villages that were swallowed or annexed by these newcomers took a dim view of the new populace. The working class settlers, heirs of the world's first proletariat drew on the only image available to them for an ongoing vision of this promised land. This was the bucolic, ordered middle class suburbs of the well-to-do Home Counties - an image itself largely borrowed from returning colonial administrators. It would sometimes sit uneasily with the modern and often Brutalist designs that the post-war New Town designers would envisage.

After the devastation of the Second World War London still had a “‘crude net deficiency’ of 470,00 dwellings” (Inwood, 2000: 824). New towns linked to the 1944 Greater London Plan like Harlow and Basildon were constructed through cutting-edge architectural design and planning and all the while slow, steady emigration from the East End continued across generations. Older, better-off East Enders sought out their old holiday locations to settle for their retirement. In such matrilinear cockney culture, “where ‘nan’ went the rest of the extended family often followed” (Cohen, 2013: 67, 83).

In May 1948 Lewis Silkin, the Labour Minister for New Towns nodded to Ebenezer Howard's vision of a suburban utopia suggesting that the towns would “produce a new type of citizen... healthy, self-respecting... with a sense of culture and civic pride.”⁷⁸ John Reith, the first Director of the BBC and chairman of the New Towns Committee called them “essays in civilisation” (Cowley and Palmer, 2018: 132). Many of the new residents shared the Utopian dream simultaneously with recreation of a lost East End embodied in Welfarism, education and social housing. By the 1970s however, some of the New Towns began their inexorable decline with lack of investment revealing their “marks of early malnutrition” (Cowley and Palmer, 2018: 147). The children of the original settlers began to embrace the increasing cultural and politically assertive individuality that had emerged through the 1960s blended with a largely conservative, working class cockney heritage whose culture was one of small business and ‘betterment’. Ian Dury would attest to one half of this vibrant, dual culture that was “doing very well” in songs like “Billericay Dickie” whilst Mike

⁷⁸ Silkin, Lewis, Labour. HC Deb 08 May 1946 vol. 422 col. 1072-184.

Leigh presciently satirised the *nouveau-riche* inhabitants of Romford in *Abigail's Party*. These might best be described as emergent “dual class trajectories” (Watt, Millington and Huq, 2014: 127).

Both of these portrayals drew heavily on the ‘sociology of aspiration’ (Hall 1992) and the idea of the (alleged) dealignment of social class. These evocations of the ‘new’ Essex anticipated a significant turn to the Right as detailed in the MP for Chingford, Norman Tebbit’s book, *Upwardly Mobile* that would appear a decade later. It is between these twin geographical and cultural co-ordinates that the cockney and the pie and mash shops’ future would be reinscribed.

Hand-in-hand with the re-location of cockney families to Essex was the decline in London’s traditional patterns of work. Much of London’s skilled working class started to decamp to the New Towns and automation began to replace traditional artisanal skills that had been the backbone of London’s small industries. Tailoring, furniture-making and dock work slowly died by the end of the 1970s. In *A Place to Go* (1963) Matt, the epitome of the individualist working class cockney who had worked in the docks all his life remarks, “... in the old days a job was a job, and nobody told you how or when to work... but at least it was your own life, and you was in charge of it.” The docks represented perhaps the distillation of all that might be seen to be cockney. Here was a closed community that had fascinated the bourgeois since Pierce Egan’s wanderings, “...[the] patriotic cockney and congenial crook, heroic boxer and sexual rough trade” (Cohen, 2013: 67). The docks came to symbolise what Phil Cohen (1981: 80) suggests was,

a gradual polarisation in the structure of the labour force: on the one side, the highly specialised skilled and well paid jobs associated with the new technology and the high growth sectors that employed them, on the other, the routine, dead end: low paid and unskilled jobs associated with the labour intensive sectors, especially the service industries.

Work was no longer to be found locally and employment meant travelling further. The historic connection between the artisanal London workplace and the community was lost and social solidarities inevitably dissolved. What Cohen (1981: 82) calls the

working class 'respectables' were trapped between the pull of the new, rising suburban working class, their adoption of conspicuous consumerism and the downward pull of a residual precariat clinging to the dignity of manual labour. This had a disastrous effect on the young of the East End whose living examples of work and familial cultures disappeared and were replaced by the growth of youth subcultures.

The territoriality of the East End was not just disturbed by relocation to the Essex or Kent hinterlands, however. Emigration to the (white) colonies of especially Australia and Canada continued apace after the war with many fleeing the East End for the promise of a better future.⁷⁹ In reality, this was largely the result of an official policy to source cheap labour and reinforce a white managerial class in the colonies. This crude social engineering had in actuality been happening in various forms since the seventeenth century (Coldray, 1999). Although records are imprecise, it appears that British emigration into Australasia was around 50000 in the early 1950s and grew to a peak of 80000 in 1965 (Clarke, 2004: 321). Footage of Tommy Trinder, the cockney comedian, wishing young East End orphans from Barnardo's well before they set sail for a new life in Australia is incredibly poignant given the catalogue of abuse, rape and forced labour that many were subsequently subjected to.⁸⁰

In London, the streets themselves became a site of transformed meanings. The communities that had been built around working class terraces were specific responses to issues of space and social conditions. For good or ill, people gathered outside to socialise and used the street as a kind of neutral zone - a way of maintaining the privacy (and primacy) of the home (Townsend in Moran, 2012: 172). The growth of television sales during the 1950s and 1960s meant that the pivot of the street became focussed into the living room. Similarly, the enormous growth of motor traffic meant not only that roads were widened but were becoming dangerous to children's traditional outside play. Despite updated legislation that stipulated certain roads had to be closed to traffic in the evenings, by 1971, nineteen million

⁷⁹ See - Constantine, 1998: 176-195.

⁸⁰ For this abuse see Child Migration Programmes Investigation Report, March 2018 at <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/reports-recommendations/publications/investigation/child-migration>. More than one million people left Britain for Australia alone between 1945 and 1972. In 2010, the British Prime Minister Gordon Brown formally apologised on behalf of the nation to the child migrants.

cars meant that effectively children's outside traditional play was stopped.⁸¹ The pie shops, the focus of many working class neighbourhoods, reflected this change. Many, like the Cooke's shop in Stratford who found themselves next to vast and busy roads that had brutally cut through traditional areas, simply closed. However, for some of the pie shops the redevelopment was not all bad news. Roy Arment, the owner of Arments Pie and Eel shop in South London recalls that "... we still had some of the locals but also... we had the biggest council estate in Europe [The Aylesbury Estate] on our doorstep... we were massively busy in the 1970s and 1980s..."⁸² For other pie shops, the demolitions and remodelling of the city marked the end of an era. Chris Cooke, the co-owner of what was regarded as the city's most palatial pie shop in Dalston recognised that times and demographics had changed, "A lot of our customers had moved out... they wanted to improve their standard of living ... they wanted their own house..."⁸³ The experience of relocation outside the capital, especially of those who came from the Bethnal Green slums was summed up by Betsy, Ricky's sister in *A Place To Go* (1963) who has moved to one of the Essex estates. "The house is nice really, trees all down the street and that but it's just a bit lonely ...the nearest pub is miles away ... it was all so new and shiny [but] there was nobody in it."

In *Sparrows Can't Sing* (1963) Maggie, played by Barbara Windsor, symbolically refuses to embrace the new future that has been forced on her, leaving the modern tower block (and the dependable Bert) to be reconciled with her former lover, the violent cockney sailor, Charlie. Windsor of course was a real-life pivot between the complex social solidarities of the East End's working class communities and their dark underbelly of criminality and violence. Her (alleged) relationships with the underworld and specifically her friendships with the Kray Twins are a significant acknowledgement of the duality of cockney culture. For the Krays themselves, it is their courting of fame and celebrity through a reprised, performative role as conduits

⁸¹ In 1961, Section 49 of the Road Traffic Act updated previous 'Street Play' legislation allowing local authorities to "prohibit traffic on roads to be used as playgrounds."

⁸² Roy Arment, interview by author, 11 November 2020.

⁸³ Chris Cooke, interview by author, 17 November 2020.

to the powerful that connects the 'modernist' cockney back to the Victorian music Hall.⁸⁴

Simultaneous to the demolitions and relocations, another process, as yet unnamed, had begun around the mid 1950s to further destabilise London's working class districts. Slowly at first but with growing confidence, young middle class professionals began to buy and move into the "unspoilt areas of the city... where they... live[d] cheek-by-jowl with the polyglot poor" (Raban, 1974: 181-182). The process of what would become known as 'gentrification' was a reversal of the bourgeois exodus of inner London in the nineteenth century. Yet these were not the "slummers" that the *Weekly Echo* had attacked as 'do-gooders' in 1885 by living amongst the poor but young couples enacting a bourgeois *lebensraum*.⁸⁵ These 'Nigel's and Pamela's' as Raban (1974) has them, took advantage of "the political vacuum created by the decline in the heavily-directed municipal planning of the immediate postwar period (Moran, 2007: 102)." Unsurprisingly, once ensconced they formed highly effective class pressure groups. One, the Barnsbury Society in Islington, successfully lobbied to create a conservation area and redirect traffic through neighbouring working class areas. By valorising their thrift and ingenuity they created a market for 'heritage', lifestyle goods, fashions and cuisine, publicising their achievements in the new weekend colour supplements for whom they worked. The traditional working class residents of Islington were largely puzzled by and suspicious of the bourgeois settlers yet seemed to prefer them to the other newcomers, West Indians (Bugler, 1968 in Moran, 2007: 114).

Through this inward immigration, house prices rose steadily through the period and the gentrifiers formed the basis for the eventual property speculation on which London's contemporary economic landscape is built. They were initially satirised as 'Hamsptead Lefties' by the Right and then by their own class as evidenced by Alan Bennett's BBC radio sketch show, *On the Margins* (1966). By the time Posy Simmonds started to draw a weekly cartoon strip for the *Guardian* in 1977 these

⁸⁴ It is alleged that on the first day of filming of *Sparrow Can't Sing*, men in the employ of the Krays threatened the cast and crew because they hadn't been consulted nor had given 'permission' for the filming in the East End. See - Price, 2021.

⁸⁵ *The Weekly Echo*. 30 May 1885 in Joyce, 1996: 521.

North London gentrifiers were more complex characters. Their financial security was matched only by their liberal self-doubt and their continued, entirely symbolic inability to communicate with the Heeps, their working class neighbours. Their focus was no longer on charming period features and colourful 'locals' but on liberal multiculturalism, cultural change and globalisation. They had become a class within themselves and would eventually form the 'liberal intelligensia' of the Blairite generation, or the "chattering classes" as their entirely unembarrassed bourgeois cousins categorise them.⁸⁶

3.3 The kids are alright

From the 1950s the late-Victorian cockney began to play several simultaneous roles still referencing what Williams (1977) might define as a residual cultural formation. Periodically useful to capital in the form of a nostalgic yet insightful character, the cockney was seen as an anachronism but also as a cultural signifier against urban renewal, town planning and the growing American hegemony. The character was additionally split between the strict traditionalist family and youth rebellion of modernity. The post-war East End became (and remains), a cultural and geographic backdrop for themes relating to a waning of authority, the decline of empire, family breakdown and crime (Hebdige, 1982).

Fittingly, it was partly in the performative arena of social realism, typified by the work of the Unity Theatre and Joan Littlewood's People's Theatre, that cockney was viewed as an authentic and politically revolutionary mirror to society. The emotion of loss for an older working class London is thoughtfully examined in John Krish's *The Elephant Will Never Forget* (1954) that symbolically mourns the city's last tram ("... past the pawnbrokers and through the street markets...") whilst the awkward, conflicted and modern generation of cockney youth is portrayed in Karel Reisz's sincere, *We Are The Lambeth Boys* (1959).⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Watkins, Alan. "The Chattering Classes," *The Guardian*, November 25, 1989.

⁸⁷ In Krish's film, the fear of forgetting the old working class city is underlined by the use of a song from the Music Hall (Archie Haldane's *Riding On Top of The Car*) as a soundscape to accompany a tram journey that sentimentally crosses the Thames. The narrator subtly warns us ("the trams were theirs") that these everyday objects so central to working class life - like the eel and pie shops - are passing and we should beware.

Inevitably, the replication of the cockney character found its way onto the emergent, single channelled television, via the genial (and by the end of the series in the 1970s, geriatric) Jack Warner as *Dixon of Dock Green*. Warner was the perfect establishment cockney; loyal, conservative and inevitably, hyper-local. It was however in the contribution to popular music that the 1950s cockney was perhaps most interestingly and effectively evolved. *My Fair Lady*, a Broadway musical based on the earlier *Pygmalion*, first performed in 1956 (and made into a film of the same name in 1964) internationalised the cockney stereotype. As Dave Laing (2003: 219) points out, this reference would be reproduced by Colin Maclnnes in his *Absolute Beginners* (1959) when the modernist hero, the photographer 'Blitz Baby'... refers to a London barman as speaking in an "authentic old-tyme My Fair Lady dialect" (Laing, 2003: 217).

Stedman Jones (1989: 302) rightly suggests that the "earthy freshness" of the language of the cockney was lost to American slang in this period. In the West End, the site of a new, pioneering cosmopolitanism (Panayi, 2020: 52) London's taxonic cafes and tea shops were being replaced by coffee bars resplendent with Formica and the music of Bill Hailey and Elvis Presley within a kind of "working class bohemia" (Coutts-Smith in Medhurst, 2023: 54). Whilst most of the young English pretenders like Cliff Richard and Marty Wilde imitated an American accent, Adam Faith and notably Tommy Steele sang in a voice that as Maclnnes suggested was 'Young England, Half English' with a cockney inflection (Laing, 2003: 218). The sinister Teddy Boy, an emergent working class subculture built around Rock n' Roll, wore as a uniform a pastiche of the American Zoot suit, Edwardiana and violence. The Teds were largely drawn from the ranks of unskilled and distinctly *un*-modern working class youth and like their Victorian forebears from the abyss, rough, unpredictable and dangerous to know. McInnes links them to the racial violence of Notting Hill and has his 'yobbo' talk in a reproduction of the (pre) Victorian cockney confusion of 'w's and 'v's ("So a few of ver blacks got chived. Why oll ver fuss?") (Laing, 2003: 219). The Teds were an intersection of the bourgeois moral panic around the brutality and boredom of Lewis Gilbert's post-war landscape *Cosh Boy* (1953) and a distinctly American cultural brutishness of the American teenager, prefaced in the earlier perfect criminal foil to Sergeant Dixon.

Musically, a naive melding of traditional jazz and the austerity 'make do and mend' ethos of skiffle, (that owed much to American folk music) was fused for a time by performers like Lonnie Donegan who's upbeat, comic songs borrowed heavily from the nostalgic cockney and its music hall roots. His "Rock Island Line" (1956), "Does Your Chewing Gum Lose its Flavour on the Bedpost Overnight" (1959) and "My Old Man's a Dustman" (1966) link to a lost vaudeville tradition that was still within living memory.

More than anyone perhaps it is the figure of the gay, Jewish, East End socialist Lionel Begleiter - later Lionel Bart - that perhaps typifies the performed role of the cockney in the 1950s. Already accomplished as a writer of hit pop songs for Tommy Steele and Cliff Richard, his association with the author Frank Norman resulted in the musical *Fings ain't Wot They Used T' Be* (1959), produced by Littlewood's Theatre Workshop. The show opens up a world of pimps, prostitutes and *polari* (the underground gay language) couched in a nostalgic cockney slang. The words (some of which had to be changed for causing offence) neatly condense an anti-modern, sentimental, *pastness* typified by the cockney characters.⁸⁸

They changed our local Palais into a bowling alley and
Things ain't what they used to be (chorus)...
There's Teds in drainpipe trousers and Debs in coffee houses and
Things ain't what they used to be (chorus)...
Once our beer was frothy but now its frothy coffee well
Things ain't what they used to be (chorus)...
It used to be fun Dad an old Mum paddling down old Southend
But now it ain't done...

It was succeeded by his *Oliver* (1960) which transformed Dickens' workhouse orphan and the murder of a prostitute into a jolly musical caper. In the same year,

⁸⁸ Redacted and re-written lines included "How we used to pull for them, I've got news for Wolfenden" (that referred to the 1957 Wolfenden Report which advocated tolerance on homosexuality) and more bluntly, but still correctly referencing the very real gender violence of the day, "Once in golden days of yore, ponces killed a lazy whore".

the British actress Elsa Lanchester (famous from her 1935 role as *The Bride of Frankenstein*) released her album *Cockney London* and the comedian Bernard Cribbins sang the comic ditty “Right Said Fred” about hapless cockney removal men. By 1962 the cockney, his accent and his impertinent audacity was becoming normalised. Mike Sarne implored the bored and irritated Wendy Richards to “Come Outside” and soon Ray Davies (*The Kinks*) and Pete Townsend (*The Who*) began to familiarise ‘common’ London accents.

These cultural notions nodded to at least the appearance of a complementary shift in inequality via widescale nationalisation and a Welfare State. This mirrored the profound changes in Britain from the classic liberal regime towards a ‘Buy British’, *national* economy largely encompassing both the left and the right against American and EEC (as then was) free marketeers.⁸⁹ Indeed it was the Labour Party that could be seen as “...*the* nationalist party. It put nation before class” (Edgerton, 2018: 386). From the late 1940s into the early 1970s growth averaged 2-3% of GDP per year and by the mid ‘Sixties both Labour and the Conservatives were calling for (an ultimately unrealised) 4% (Edgerton, 2018: 283).

For the working class these were decent years of post-austerity and spending; a long boom with (generally) low unemployment and high union membership.⁹⁰ It is these years, building on the ‘Britain alone’ myth that I contend forms the contemporary nostalgic memory epoch of current populism that has coalesced around the eel and pie shops. In this period, “self-sufficiency in food increased steadily but slowly... as Britons got richer and ate British food” (Edgerton, 2018: 287).

Apart from Joe Brown’s (1960) comic sung homage to the jellied eel (with lyrics inevitably by Lionel Bart) the pie shops during this period remained relatively invisible in cultural texts reflecting their anachronistic status within the emanent modern city. Still very much located in unglamorous working class districts whose Victorian high street landscape of street markets, pubs and corner shops remained largely unchanged, they continued to be part of the traditional, gendered cockney *passaggiata*. For mothers dragging children between market stalls and the kitchen

⁸⁹ See for example - Nairn, 1972: 5.

⁹⁰ In 1960, the TGWU, the largest union had one million members - *The TUC General Council, Report, 1960* at <http://www.unionhistory.info/reports/index.php>

sink they were the site of vital and connective neighbourhood chatter. For working men, an alternative to the greasy spoon cafés and part of the pre-match football ritual. At the weekends, a take-away relief for the housewife and a post-pub sponge after the 'local' had closed. Chris Cooke, the co-owner of Cooke's pie and mash shop in Dalston, remembers a post-war "heyday" for the shops which were busy and popular.⁹¹ Joe Cooke, his nephew, recalls the 1960s as working "six days a week and two nights slogging our balls off."⁹²

The mid to late 1960s however located the cockney seemingly polarised between two worlds. Alf Garnet, the cockney bigot in the BBC sitcom *'Till Death Do Us Part* (1965-1975) was very much the product of Empire and its defensive trench in a rapidly changing world of immigration and youth revolt. Garnett, like the dock workers and the Smithfield meat porters who marched in support of Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood" speech in 1968, represented the loyal, patriotic incarnation of the earlier century. Unsettled by the decline of imperial power and uprooted from their traditional territory and notions of racial supremacy by the forces of modernity, they provided the foot soldiers of an ascendent Right's economic and cultural counter-revolution against the gains of the Welfare State and (allegedly) faltering egalitarianism.⁹³

Yet concomitantly, the 'Sixties also located the cockney within an arena of working class cultural dynamism primarily through its youth. The roots of this lay in several places. Firstly, we might uncover it in the growing acceptance of the idea of the 'people's war'. This, as we have seen, grew from the desperate scramble of the elite's valorisation in 1940 of a one-nation 'ordinariness' in which the cockney played the starring role as a metaphor for the entire British working class. Secondly, the cultural shift engendered by the Angry Young Men's portrayal of changing class landscapes became something of a bulwark against the reassertion of the literary (and political) values of the Establishment. This prepared the way for 'authentically' working class cultural actors during the more radical 1960s. Lastly, the post-war

⁹¹ Chris Cooke. Interview by author, 17 November 2020.

⁹² Joe Cooke. Interview by author, 25 November 2020.

⁹³ Powell, a member of neo-liberal Mont Pelerin Society and the Institute of Economic Affairs had, along with the Chancellor of the Exchequer Peter Thorneycroft and his Treasury colleague, Nigel Birch resigned from government in 1959 in protest at plans for increased government expenditure in a move widely seen as one of the first articulations of 'monetarism' linking economic and political freedoms that would provide the cornerstone for the ideology of the later Thatcher governments.

cockney was clearly not immune to the attendant narrative of Americanisation and consumerism nor to the burgeoning siren call of 'youth culture'. Like their northern cousins (epitomised by Alan Sillitoe's Arthur Seaton in his *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, 1960), the young cockney saw little value in hard manual labour but hankered for an individual and more personal expression of 'style'.

The son of a Billingsgate porter and a char-woman, Michael Caine (originally Maurice Micklewhite) epitomised this ebullience. Along with David Bailey (the child of East London tailors) and Terrance Stamp from Bow whose father was a tugboat stoker, some fortunate young working class people found themselves at the heart of a new cultural formation that would last perhaps until the 1980s. However, they also remained between two worlds: wealthy but "a synonym for a working class jack-the-lad... and so sustained the 1950s representation of a cynical but *contained* [my italics] male rebelliousness" (Dodd and Dodd in Strinati, Dominic and Wagg, 2004: 125).

For most young cockneys however, not much had - or would - change. The doomed romance of Del, a mod from Stratford and Irene the daughter of an imprisoned armed robber, flowers when they flee to the countryside in *Bronco Bullfrog* (1969) only for them to return to their personal and class fate of drudgery and the new grey Brutalist concrete. The physical and cultural relocation of the cockney would lead Georgia Brown and Lionel Bart (both critically, Jewish 'East Enders') to ask, in a *schmaltz-laden* piece, *Who are the cockneys now?* (1968).

Norman Cohen's curiously unsentimental, *The London that nobody knows* (1967) showed a city increasingly distanced from itself. The film, edged by a haunting early electronica soundtrack excavates a forgotten city that is in sharp contrast to the 'Swinging' Sixties. The camera pans across Islington's Chapel Market and enters Manze's eel and pie shop, a gloomy, forgotten space that competes with the film's documentation of meth-drinkers and Victorian architectural oddities. Inside, we see a succession of elderly Londoners. They are wrapped in caps, scarves and grimy overcoats cheerfully eating pie, mash and bowls of eels in a dingy interior as if in a time-warp: a 'tribe' forgotten. As well they have been - relevant only within a nascent blooming of 'heritage' amongst the young early gentrifiers of the area and wealthy

flaneurs of the city's inner reaches. The only nod to the decade is a young Caribbean girl struggling to manoeuvre her knife and fork amidst the debris of a pre-cut pie and potato.

We get another rare celluloid glimpse, for all of four or five seconds of a pie and mash shop in the saccharine Peter Sellers vehicle, *The Optimists of Nine Elms* (1973) that is repurposed as a generic café.⁹⁴ The film is remarkable only for the texture of the shocking urban deprivation around the edge lands of the Thames that it reveals, the music of Lionel Bart and the hackneyed trope of Seller's faded music hall star.

David Furnham's extraordinary and forgotten documentary *Noted Eel and Pie Houses* (1975) opens to the mournful strains of an old pub piano and later introduces an elderly cockney chanteuse singing the Georgian ballad "Betty Brill". The film, the only dedicated audio-visual record of the shops up to this era, catches them in one of the first waves of their post-war decline. The film gives a sense of observing a living Victoriana. Initially focussing on the Cooke's family eel and pie shop in Broadway Market, the film surveys an almost derelict street and the adjacent rubbish-filled canal to the strains of a barrel organ. The squalor encapsulated the era's (so-called and contested) *Declinist* narrative; the strike-ridden, Sterling Crisis landscape of unrest and decay that 'inevitably' led to the economic redemption of Thatcherism.⁹⁵

Although Mary Cooke is shown dishing out pies in a very busy shop, one of her sons, Bob, merrily gutting eels in a stall outside laments, "You go down on a Tuesday and you see ten stalls where before there was a hundred."⁹⁶ The family matriarch, Lily Cooke, 91 at the time of recording, remembers a very different era when her father, drumming up business for his eels "... used to shout to a packed market, 'everyone a bright eye and silver belly' ... and you never hear that now".

⁹⁴ The shop featured is the long-closed Maggy Brown's Pie and Mash Shop on Battersea High Street, yet Seller's character clearly but incongruously purchases newspaper-wrapped fish and chips for the hungry siblings in his charge further reinforcing perhaps the untranslatability of pie and mash to the general audience.

⁹⁵ For a thorough reinterpretation of the historiography of post-war Britain and the ascendancy of the neoliberal narrative see - Tomlinson, 2016: 76-99.

⁹⁶ In fact, records seem to indicate that even during the busiest period of the market - the 1940s and 1950s, there were only ever licenses for up to 69 stalls granted at one time.

Much of the area's urban decay stemmed from the demolition and subsequent emigration of traditional Victorian housing residents that bordered Broadway Market's south side. Fred Cooke, co-owner of the family's shop in Dalston presciently remarked "I should imagine it won't be many years before they [the pie shops] disappear because you've got Chinese, takeaway meals, Kentucky Fried Chicken and that's replacing them."

The first glimpses of the Neoliberal ascendancy that would come to epitomise the next incarnation of the cockney would be Bob Hoskins' portrayal of Harold Shand, the undisputed king of the capital's underworld in *The Long Good Friday* (1979). Self-described as "a businessman with a sense of history and also a Londoner", Shand is attempting to redevelop his idealised childhood stomping-ground, the now derelict Docklands, with the help of crooked local politicians ("the Corporation") and the New York Mafia. Shand is the embodiment not only of the coster writ large but also of his post-imperialist delusion. Hoskins portrays a different cockney in *Mona Lisa* (1986). Here he is George, a tough ex-con recently released from prison who is forced to drive for a high-class call girl. In the opening scenes, his cockney significantly registers surprise at how multiracial his traditional neighbourhood has become in his absence ("where did all this lot come from?"). Yet it is as an enduring moral signpost that makes his cockney significant. Interrupting his charge Simone whilst she is with an upper class customer he offers, "Put yer clothes on. Make yourself respectable..." It is within that charged phrasing that he is offered as the reprised historical cockney; a character of 'ordinary', dependable decency.

A gentler characterisation of the 'lovable cockney rogue' still selling from market pitches but with a more realistic sub-plot of the inevitable working class proscription to poverty is found in the BBC comedy series, *Only Fools and Horses* (1981). The lead character, 'Del-Boy' Trotter is one of a long line of bourgeois-viewed characters seen through the prism of malapropism and cultural confusion from earlier cockney stereotypes like the ventriloquised voice of Richard Whiteing's *Mr Sprouts* (1868). Trotter is redeemed however from the worst excesses of Thatcher's children by his warmth and humanity: still a simultaneous cockney trope.

Created in opposition to *Coronation Street*, ITV's long-running drama of northern working class life, *Eastenders* (1985) followed on from an earlier and forgotten BBC attempt to reflect the now disappeared cockney communality and territoriality of Soho, *Market in Honey Lane* (1967). *Eastenders* was on some level simply a revised cultural text, the latest manifestation of the malleable cockney character. It reproduced the politically expedient valorisation of the much simplified 1940s cockney and, according to the producers, attempted to encapsulate the East End in the phrase, "hurt one of us and you hurt us all" (Smith, 2005: 11). Despite valiant nods to themes of race, sexuality and gentrification (often portrayed in the style of social realist dramas of the 1970s), *Eastenders* took as its starting point the palimpsestic cockney identity, "... that invented past for the actual past, so the future look[ed] nostalgic" (Edgerton, 2018: 386).⁹⁷

Indeed, the early years of the Thatcher government were characterised, especially in advertising, by the accommodation of nostalgic working class cultural tropes utilised synchronously with an appeal to aspiration and social mobility. This was evidenced in the adaption by the BMP agency in 1979 of the 'cockney rock' music hall of Chas n' Dave into an advertising campaign for Courage beer ("Gertcha"). These campaigns, (along with the less successful George, the lager-drinking cockney bear) and those that dealt with American, blue-collar 1950s memories, (for example, Levi jeans) were examples of what Svetlana Boym (2001) has called a 'reflective nostalgia' that "engages in antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths ... build[ing] on the sense of loss of community and cohesion and offer[ing] a comforting collective script for individual longing" (Boym, 2001: 31-32). Antithetical to this cultural position was a rare and entirely authentic post-punk feminist homage to both cockney and pie and mash from the forgotten all-girl band, The Gym Slips. Their 1983 single *Pie and Mash* celebrates visits to (the now closed) Georges' pie shop in Canning Town. The song recounts their ritual enacted "every Saturday" where you would "... collect your spoon and fork/ shovel it

⁹⁷ After the first episode of *EastEnders*, BBC Breakfast garnered reactions to the show in an East End pub. Significantly one of the interviews suggested positively that "...it's not the usual cliché of pie and mash". Breakfast Time, BBC1, 20 February 1985.
<https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/a7f6ea355fc094a70fd0ba25a192b401>

down, no time to talk.” The song, a B-side to their *Big Sister* proudly chants that “Pie and mash is working class!”

Working class or not, the Thatcher project however (along with the simultaneous New Right Reaganite propaganda across the Atlantic) appealed to some “people who feared they no longer recognised the Britain that they had grown up in” (Blackwell and Seabrook, 1986: 153). It offered the battered and temporally confused working classes a national reconstruction of imperial greatness couched in the language of a Victorian domestic stability described by Hoggart. By utilising working class symbols like the decent, industrious and patriotic cockney, the Thatcher project simultaneously stole Labour’s appeal to workers and closed down the future with a capitalist realism that prefigured Francis Fukuyama (1992) by more than a decade.

3.4 The Unmodern

From the late 1970s onwards, the image of a heroic, wartime British proletariat had started to disappear from cultural texts and the white working class were, as Leon Hunt (1998) attests, increasingly identified with unmodernity. Yet this identification did not come from the working classes themselves. As Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite (2018) has suggested, what “‘ordinary people’ meant when they talked about class” had started to change significantly in this period and that shift directly related to the cockney constituents of the pie and mash shops and the process of the reformation of their identities during the next thirty years.

For the pie and mash constituents, the 1970s were a period of relative plenty. As Michael Collins (2004: 205) suggests, his working class Southwark family were emblematic of such class gains. “People were getting more things now - filling out their homes with new carpets or new sofas... dimmer switches, knotty-pine wallpaper, a bar in the corner and L-shaped Campari red leatherette sofa.” For Paul Kelly, his father’s pie shop in Bethnal Green was symbolic of a simple good life where people “... had a few bob [and the shop] ...was like the hub of the

community... the queue used to be 30 or 40 people.”⁹⁸ Similarly, Melanie McGrath (2018) recounts an interview about two branches of a different pie shop (also Kelly’s) on the Roman Road. “In the seventies it was so, so busy: three people working behind the counter, three continually making pies, two people baking and four people washing up’. And there’s yet more to do at the branch number 600.”

From the angry young man of the 1950s to Caine’s cockney hero as outlaw in *Get Carter* (1971), London’s working classes had become observers of, and participants in, a process of increasing and overt individualisation. With the end of conscription, greater access to education, growing consumerism, secularisation and, via the New Left, the ‘self-realisations’ of gender parity, many saw an era of greater equality. It was captured by a distinct culture of a post-war generation where “‘youth’ itself became a metaphor for social change” (Hall in Barker, 1978: 285).

In a sense, the 1970s were defined by and through this new working class cultural experience. Texts from the period portray a vigorous populism: mass entertainment, especially television comedy, took aim at privilege and pomposity and, for the first time valorised working class characters.⁹⁹ So-called ‘low-culture’ from football to seedy sex comedies reflected proletarian visibility; popular music and fashion reflected working class (sometimes even androgenous) heroes.¹⁰⁰ Yet this success was no revolutionary moment, rather a gate-crashing of the perceived fruits of capital. Its dependence on the Fordist peak spelt its inevitable end and the start of a counter reaction from the Right.

During this period, cockney as a one-dimensional music hall caricature and prop to authority had begun to wane. Its dance with modernity and youth I contend, bestowed the identity with multiple valences and in a sense, the increasing choices of a new generation. One could choose to be a cockney by attitude, by race, heritage or simply by location; but even this was now open to negotiation, largely the result of

⁹⁸ Paul Kelly, co-owner of Kelly’s Pie Shop, Debden. Interview by author, 15 December 2020.

⁹⁹ Television ‘situation comedies’ paved the way for this trend. *Steptoe and Son*, BBC TV 1962-1974, *The Likely Lads* BBC TV 1964-1966 (reprised as *Whatever Happened to the Likely Lads* BBC TV 1973-1974), *Porridge* (BBC TV 1974-1977), *Rising Damp* (ITV 1974-1978) and *Till Death Do Us Part* (BBC TV 1965-1975) are prime examples.

¹⁰⁰ See - Simonelli, 2012.

displacement, gentrification and mass immigration. This 'mobility' of identity echoes Robert Hewison (1988: 7) who comments that increasingly, "moral choices were now a matter of taste, and the collapse of a general system of accepted moral values culture acquired greater importance as a guide to political choice."

Some neighbourhoods like the Isle of Dogs would remain solidly white and firmly closed to outsiders for at least another decade but other cockney heartlands like Bethnal Green saw an influx of Asians. As Monica Ali (2003: 208-209, 92) would write two decades later of the area's changing motifs and cockney's racial structures,

In between the Bangladeshi restaurants were little shops that sold clothes and bags and trinkets... I'm talking about the clash between Western values and our own... the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one's own identity and heritage.

For Paul Kelly, "... the Asian immigration changed a lot of the landscapes of the [eel and pie] shops ... thus you weren't getting people shopping down the market...[and coming to his father's pie shop]" - but you were already seeing cockneys in curry houses.¹⁰¹

Hackney, previously the site of mass Jewish immigration, was now extraordinarily multicultural but especially Afro-Caribbean. The reggae rhythms (like the Blues before them) adopted by punk bands like The Clash and John Lydon would form the musical and cultural backing for a culture of anti-racism and cultural mixing that is the basis of a contemporary and hybrid London working class culture. Jimmy Pursey's Sham 69 articulated a harder edge to London working class life with songs like the semi-comic "Sunday Morning Nightmare" (1978) but it was songs like "The cockney kids are innocent" (1978) which attracted a problematic right-wing following that led eventually to the bands demise. The Cockney Rejects and other Oi! bands were less embarrassed by their "white proletarian masculinity" and their songs

¹⁰¹ In terms of food and constituency, Londoners are more likely to indulge in food from the "imaginary landscape' of former colonies of the British empire that have significant numbers of white settlers. This is the imaginary of the (post) colonial white British." Savage, Mike, David Wright, and Modesto Gayo-Cal 2010: 612.

attacked traditional cockney targets of the age - “hippies and the race relations industry” (Laing, 1985: 112). It is in the figure and music of Ian Dury however that the multi-valent cockney identity in this period reached its apotheosis. The son of a bus driver, Dury studied painting before evoking a music hall tradition that fused a cockney and punk ethos. His use of cockney speech, idiom and characters (“Clever Trevor” and “Plaistow Pam”) not only illustrate a modern, self-critical cockney but also the wider territoriality of the identity whose “...‘imagined’ centre” was shifting eastwards” (Newland, 2008: 151).

Despite the retrospective ascription of chaos in both culture and politics by the right to the 1970s, the New Economics Foundation found that 1976, in terms of national economic, social and environmental well-being was the best year since 1950 (Shah, Hetan and Marks in Beckett, 2009: 3). Class however had certainly not disappeared. If this was the era of ‘Workerism’, it was also the era that the reactionary Middle Class Association (1974) was formed.¹⁰² This was an organisation set up by a Conservative MP, John Gorst and the Ulster Unionist Captain Lawrence Orr that sought to represent the “persecuted, vilified and sneered-at ... minority of managers and the self-employed” (Bechhofer and Elliot, 1978: 57). After less than a year however it descended into a far-right pressure group and disbanded. Yet, the fear of working class gains fed an increasing notion of economic Declinism within the elites that echoed the Victorian and Edwardian cultural and racially inflected fear of Degeneration.

This powerful and melancholy trope was aided by hegemonic messaging from an ascendent New Right through The Monday Club and The Centre for Policy Studies. In 1974, Keith Joseph, a disciple of Friedrich Hayek and Monetarism, gave a speech in Edgbaston where he suggested that the “human stock” was threatened by the over-breeding of the poor and their chaotic lives.¹⁰³ This image coincided with both widescale employment changes and economic insecurity brought about by rapid

¹⁰² For Workerism, see - Edgerton, 2018: 408. For the Middle Class Association, see - Bechhofer, and Elliott, 1978: 57-88. For wider middle class campaigns of the era see - King and Nugent, 1979.

¹⁰³ <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/§document/101830>.

For more on Joseph, his “home-made casualties” and the transmission of deprivation between generations, see - Welshman, 2006: 107-126.

deindustrialisation and globalization.¹⁰⁴ There was further, as Emily Robinson *et al* (2017: 268-304) suggest, a growing frustration across society at the slowing trajectory of people gaining control of their own lives. Modernist solutions - and the 'experts' behind them that had scattered working class communities - were increasingly seen as failures.

For the traditional cockney, disillusionment with the largely unaccountable and remote forms of Wilson's technocratic government had perhaps chimed with deep artisanal roots within their own radical Enlightenment heritage. More, it spoke to their suspicion of bureaucratic and 'corrupt' local labour authorities and traditional politics in general.¹⁰⁵ The death-knell of technocratic modernism was the acceptance of an IMF loan in 1976 by a Labour Party bereft of new solutions within 'The Marketplace of Ideas' that opened a new consensus dominated by the Right. This intersected with a general paranoia around conspiracy, corruption and 'shadowy elites' that characterised the decade (Wheen, 2010).

Unlike the multi-valent and youthful cockney of the parallel popular culture, the traditional cockney formulation was increasingly used in mainstream texts of the period in the form of a nostalgic proletarian masculinism. The television film *Regan* (1974) opens to an East End pub full of grotesques singing the Marie Lloyd music hall song "My Old Man" before an undercover police officer from the Flying Squad ('The Sweeney') is abducted and murdered by East End gangsters.¹⁰⁶ Regan, the 'avenging copper', is thwarted by 'rules and regulations' in his pursuit of the villains. He is a moral cockney figure, but now, congruent with British Noir (and American Western tradition), he doesn't play by the conventional, discredited rules of the establishment 'do-gooders'. This theme of the so-called 'dishonesty' of liberal elites was a key narrative in this period of what Schwarz (1996: 65-67) calls the 're-

¹⁰⁴ The decline of London's manufacturing base in this period was shockingly rapid. In 1961, Greater London had a manufacturing workforce of 1.6 million. By 1974 this had shrunk to 900,000. See - Inwood, 1998: 895.

None of these issues were necessarily unique to Britain. The long post-war boom of capitalist economies was coming to an end and growth was slowing. It was not specifically that Britain was slowing down, rather than the rest of the world was catching up. See the arguments in Edgerton, 2018.

¹⁰⁵ For housing corruption in Hackney, see - Wright, 2009. For a revision of the corruption narrative of Labour leaders, especially with reference to housing issues, see - Griffiths, 2019.

¹⁰⁶ The Sweeney is itself a cockney slang for the fictional pie house murderer Sweeney Todd.

racialization of England'. Robinson *et al* (2017: 297-298) place race relation legislation squarely within the contexts of the critical intersection of the rise of popular individualism. They trace this law-making framed through state planning and consumer rights complete with "whole new professions of race experts and advisors... within *market relations* [my emphasis]... and equality of opportunity." The resentment that this sowed amongst the white working class, fanned by a hostile right-wing press, was allied to growing disillusionment with the framing of the Welfare State itself. If welfare had come "wrapped in the Union Jack" for a London working class that had been made 'white' only a century before, the identities it defined were being "marshalled... in ways that challenged the multicultural narrative of the social democratic project" (Hall in Robinson *et al*, 2017; 297). These narratives of compulsion were also antithetical to the increasingly every-day negotiations between traditional communities that, although problematic, were organic. For the Right in the 1970s and 1980s, the idea of 'unfairness' and 'white victimhood' picked up a key thread of Powellism and became a way to court the white working classes via a contract that would eventually re-categorise them again as largely 'unmodern'.¹⁰⁷

An antipathy to these state-imposed racial narratives was also to be found in the 1970s in what would become known as 'Thatcherism'. Whilst Margaret Thatcher blamed societal decline and the 'crisis of authority' in the 1960s on a Keynesian social democratic state that enabled permissiveness and profligacy, her austere monetarism was simultaneously and fortuitously (partially) congruent to the generational aspirations of a working class, consumer-led individualism enacted within the cockney identity. It (again fortuitously) chimed with a long dissatisfaction with traditional Labourism among some conservative sections of the London working class that it saw as largely remote and antithetical to its nascent entrepreneurialism but also the failure of a corporatist Labour Party to offer solutions to a state in crisis. The adoption of an 'authoritarian populism' allowed Thatcher to condense multifaceted popular discontents and channel them through an increasingly right-wing state. In this way, the project managed to construct a 'historical bloc' of contradictory forces - a reactionary, nationalist section of the white working class, an

¹⁰⁷ See the arguments of - Hewitt, 2005 and Rhodes, 2010: 77-99.

entrepreneurial, managerial petit bourgeois and older elites - that remains largely intact.¹⁰⁸

Fundamentally, the Thatcher project was about creating a new 'common sense' that simultaneously transformed the basis of British capitalism by colonising the past with what Stuart Hall (1988) categorised as a "regressive modernisation." Thatcherism sought to reconfigure (specifically English) memory to "erase the melancholy of a dead empire and to address the fears, the anxieties [and] the lost identities of a people."¹⁰⁹ As Hall suggests, it did this through simple imagery: the stiff upper lip, the Dunkirk Spirit - 'the Good Old Days' - all of which could be regained, though sacrifice, from the opium sleep of the degenerate post-war settlement. With the lack of an alternative mainstream narrative, the possibilities of a wholesale generational renewal of cockney receded and an older identity, reprised through comic caricatures like the self-employed East End plasterer 'Loadsamoney' (an updated version of the jingoistic Victorian, 'Arry from *Punch*) began to proliferate.¹¹⁰

The Thatcher project further re-valued the notion of class from an economic to a *moral* position and thereby, as Hall noted early on, constructed "an enemy within". This pitched the 'trade union bully boys' against, amongst others, the 'hard working cockney sparrers' so that eventually, "on council estates, a freshly painted front door and a copy of the *Sun* in the letterbox was a signal of Thatcher's achievements in remaking the Conservative party" (Clarke, 2004: 400). Cockney was, once more largely a nostalgic scaffold linking rulers to ruled. The pie shop, it's food, history and the lives it contained were now again congruent to a hegemonic message of a rediscovered Victoriana as a marker of stability and propriety in a changing working class landscape. The contemporary reimagining of the eel and pie shops as a totem of a lost white, working class London are firmly anchored within this nostalgic haunting.

¹⁰⁸ For a contestation of the exactitudes of this formulation of Stuart Hall's 'Authoritarian Populism', see - Jessop, Bonnett, Bromley, and Ling, 1984: 147.

¹⁰⁹ Hall, Stuart. "*Gramsci and Us*". <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2448-stuart-hall-gramsci-and-us>

¹¹⁰ 'Loadsamoney', the thuggish cockney plasterer who made a fortune from renovating and gentrifying homes for the middle classes was the product of the comedian Harry Enfield from around 1984. See - Biressi and Nunn, 2013: 32-37.

This trend however was not entirely linear. If mainstream texts were congruent to a regressive Victorian cockney, the conversations on inner-city streets of London were starting to sound different. In 1985, David Emmanuel, a black South London DJ who performed as 'Smiley Culture', recorded "Cockney Translation", a song that spoke to another valence of the identity - a more-or-less successful hybrid racial mingling. The song, largely in Jamaican patois (literally) translated the experience of black Londoners who were by now melding with a younger generation of cockneys and adding another cultural layer.

When New Labour came to power it largely accepted the parameters of the neoliberal state seeking only to blunt its sharpest edges.¹¹¹ However, central to its polity was the notion that struggle was now based, via what became known as Late Modernity, around culture not class.¹¹² Correspondingly, the Blair administration adopted a language of "aspiration... [that] attempted to exploit the fissures in the working class that had emerged under Thatcherism" (Jones, 2011: 91). It instituted a programme of cultural reconstruction to reabsorb what it saw as an incorrigible, recidivous white 'underclass' hooked on a 'dependency culture' into a modern, globalised, multicultural modernity. It did this by challenging the notions of welfare on which a racialized proletariat had been incorporated into the nation targeting "the white working class poor as symbols of a 'backwardness' and specifically a culturally burdensome whiteness" (Haylett, 2001: 351). According to New Labour, now associated with an increasingly professionalised political class, 'ordinariness' was no longer to be found in the stoic cockney of the 1940s but rather in a construction of middle class values (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst, 2001). According to Owen Jones (2011: 102), now that class had been superseded, "multiculturalism became the only recognized platform in the struggle for equality."

In this way, Blair's Labour Party forced the white working class "to think of themselves as a new ethnic group... [and refused] to acknowledge anything about [them] as legitimately cultural [which led to]... "a composite loss of respect on all fronts: economic, political and social" (Jones, 2011: 102). More, it ignored not only

¹¹¹ When asked her greatest achievement, Thatcher replied, "Tony Blair and New Labour. We forced our opponents to change their minds." Burns, Connor. 11 April 2008 - <https://conservativehome.blogs.com/centreright/2008/04/making-history.html>

¹¹² See - Giddens, 1990.

the heritage of very real residual racism in some London working class communities but also an organic, 'deep multiculturalism' - an unofficial assimilation, experienced and "negotiated" on a daily basis by the capital's inevitably mixed communities and the successful anti-racism of the previous decade, embedded in popular music and wider working class culture.¹¹³ It also stoked working class resentment by its "advocacy of immigrants and formerly marginal cultural groups... [which became the] ... moral justification of a layer of cheap labour and enforced entrepreneurialism" (Winlow, Hall and Treadwell, 2017: 70).

Through bureaucratic distance, an increasingly powerful 'liberal' commentariat and a 'fickle parent' style of governance, New Labour issued cultural and moral diktats that took aim at the working class gains of the 1970s.¹¹⁴ It demarcated the whiteness of the middle classes from those classified as 'chavs' or 'dirty' whites contaminated by violence and poverty within their zoned, concrete estates. One of the main arenas of this cultural demonisation was around the working class body and the traditional foods it consumed. I will deal with this notion, as a form of memory, in the following chapter.

Conclusion

The cockney, and his allied signifier the eel and pie shop, is the historical outcome of an intersectionality of identities. This ongoing dialectic is the result both of the interplay between an internal group identification and the categorisation of others; between an emergent nineteenth century working class, its indivisible bourgeoisie partner and modernity.

The identity that categorised the cockney who emerged from the Blitz rubble to stumble, jive, twist and then pogo into the 1970s, simultaneously forgotten and remembered, was not merely palimpsestic in a linear sense but rather the result of

¹¹³ For "negotiation" see - Back, 2017.

The re-written and imposed narrative of New Labour also ignored the very real anti-racism gains of the 1970s and 1980s that revolved around campaigns in music like Rock Against Racism, Red Wedge and the anti-racist / anti-fascist work of East End Trades Unionists like Micky Fenn - see - Fekete, Liz, 2016: 55–60.

¹¹⁴ For the 'fickle parent' argument see - Winlow, Hall, and Treadwell, 2017.

multiple junctures of memory and identity traces. In this way cockney, by the mid-twentieth century, consisted of (amongst many others) mediaeval notions of urbanity, eighteenth century assumptions around developing petit-bourgeois ascendancy, nineteenth century Irish immigrant entrepreneurial anti-authoritarianism and late Victorian propaganda around race and empire.

However, within a framework of mid-twentieth century modernity, the cockney began to play several simultaneous roles. It remained periodically useful to capital as a largely reactionary and patriotic force through which was channelled opposition to American consumerism and the expanding EEC. More, in defence of its Welfarist gains, adjacent to the forces of decolonialisation and amidst mass immigration, the cockney was used to bolster the colonial frontier that “came ‘home’” (Schwarz, 1996: 73) via Powellism. Additionally, however, the cockney developed multiple internal valances around the expanding horizons of choice and individuality via an expanding popular modernity. These were linked largely to its changing age demographic which were partly antithetical to its traditional role, again altering the course of the notion of ‘ordinariness’ within British society.

By the late 1970s cockney continued to embrace a vigorous low-cultured populism but simultaneously began to embody a more moneyed, conservative upwardly mobile element, birthed of a nascent proletarian entrepreneurialism which was valorised and subsequently liberated as politically expedient by forces of the Right, both elements held within dual class trajectories.

These contradictions, I suggest, highlighted by the neo-liberal ascendancy, provoked an increasing internal instability: a confusion around the changing physical and cultural loci for the cockney that accelerated its Great Trek eastwards towards Essex. Here, a simultaneous, adjacent but declining culture had been incubating. Originally birthed within the pioneering, progressive optimism of the Labourist New Towns this enjoined within the precarious memory forms of the new settlers to create a simulacra of what used to be ‘jellied eel London’ (Sinclair, 2004: 58).

Synchronously, within the active crucible of a modernising capital, cockneys changing territoriality, migratory composition, linguistics and transformed meanings

were central to the formation and experience of a new, composite and parallel identity. This was a stratified, multi-layered, modern cockney, increasingly racially mixed and as much contained within a structure of feeling or looser group identifications of cultural signifiers, as the traditional tropes of geography and occupation. These signifiers might be palimpsestic layerings of half-remembered music hall pub songs, a dropped 'h' to the fading "chalky villains, swollen knuckles, liver spots, back from a seven in Parkhurst" (Sinclair, 2004: 37).

As Calvino (1997: 14) had it, "[A]s this wave of memories flows in, the city soaks it up like a sponge and expands." The eel and pie shops, as a unique historical text, inscribed and re-inscribed with these ebbs and flows reflect a cockney whose London and its 'imagined centre' now points eastwards but whose history reminds us of its complicated past.

4. Tastes and spaces of resistance

Introduction

In the almost complete absence of any significant contemporary body of literature surrounding the workings and wider significances of the eel, pie and mash shops, I employ, in the first half of this chapter, a sensory ethnography utilising a ‘democracy of the senses’ (Rhys-Taylor, 2020: 6) to examine the sights, sounds and smells of the F. Cooke’s eel, pie and mash shop in Hoxton. The research was carried out during the autumn of 2019 but is additionally informed by years of work and visits to this and more than thirty eel, pie and mash shops over the last decade or more. Cooke’s is one of the last surviving London shops, its owner a direct descendant of one of the earliest Irish migrant dynasties that dominated the trade from the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Sensory ethnography is a phenomenological methodology that is influenced and guided by the senses, perceptions and experience. It is an emergent research field at whose heart is a growing interest in “new forms of ethnographic knowing and routes into other people's experiences” (Pink, 2015: 187).

I explore the space of the shop as a unique site of a hyperlocal, performative territory of working class culture that through ritual and the ‘secret habits of the home’ are zones of resistance to the modern neo-liberal city “from a stubborn past” (De Certeau, 1998). I suggest that these rituals are mythologised, signified and coded through the senses and the sedimentation of gestures. These remain unwritten but are, I suggest, part of the ‘true archives’ of the city (De Certeau, Giard and Mayo, 1998) that link hospitality, conviviality and memory within and upon the bodies of the customers (Connerton, 1989).

I examine the cuisine of the shops, the ingredients, the preparation and unique serving methods linking them to sensual “generous and familiar” ‘foods of necessity’ (Bourdieu, 1984). I consider the food’s unique historical significance within the British

working class diet using both historical reportage, contemporary theory (Bourdieu, 1984; Douglas, 2003) and examples from popular modernity. I place the food, especially the eel, in historical and cultural context and additionally within contemporary notions of disgust (Falk, 1991; Lupton, 1996) relevant to a changing and problematically memorialised habitus that surrounds them.

I use the sense of smell to conduct an olfactory and sensory history of London's proletarian sensibilities, poverty and memory which, in addition to parallel, embodied gesture, "brings the past into the present" (Serematakis, 1994). I further use the sense of smell to examine changing ideas of cleanliness, so vital to the culture of the historical shops.

The second half of the chapter situates the work within a theoretical framework that examines the significance of the shop, its food and memorialisations within a wider context of a changed and nostalgic working class identity. I examine how the food is an arena "for that most ubiquitous signifiers of class", the performance of respectability (Skeggs, 1997: 1), but also of a particular 'working classness', subtly delineated from the refinements of bourgeois dining and manners as 'microresistances' (DeCerteau, 1998). These I suggest may point to changes in how the contemporary working class may perceive itself (Bellah, 1985; Maffesoli, 1998) around a conflicted cockney identity leading to an inter-class contestation. Finally, I explore how pie, mash and especially eels by their class contestations are a crucial insight into why class tastes have not wholly declined with modernity as Stephen Mennell (1985) has previously suggested but rather, as Beverley Skeggs (2004) notes, are subtle, changeable and subject to a process of constant production.

4.1 Resistances from a stubborn past

It's lunchtime. In the market, people move rhythmically, meandering between stalls selling fruit and vegetables in colourful bowls, cheap winter coats and catchpenny cutlery. The greasy spoon café is filling up and several people wait in soft rain for complicated coffee orders at a mobile barista. A small queue of three elderly women has formed outside the pie and mash shop. One has a tartan shopping trolley and is having some difficulty negotiating the small step at the entrance.

F. Cooke is a former bank refitted in 1987 and owned by Joe Cooke and his wife Kim. Joe is the fourth generation of Cookes to sell pie and mash and grew up with his brother in the family's pie shop (now closed) in Broadway Market, several miles to the east which opened in 1900. The Hoxton shop has Victorian inspired green signage and a glass front with windows inscribed in gold type advertising "jellied eels, tea, coffee, mash, pie mash, fruit pie, ice-cream, cold drinks".¹¹⁵

The space inside is cavernous; high ceilings with white walls lined with white and green tiles. Rows of plain iron and wooden communal benches sit beneath heavy marble tables. There is a scattering of sawdust in the floor. The long counter to the right stretches across the whole of the width of the shop and leads to the kitchen at the back from where food is carried in to be served. The space is utilitarian: clean, bright, functional and unfussy. The movement of the food through to the serving area is linear, fast and efficient. Pies are carried from the kitchen in steel baking trays and emptied, still in their piping hot individual pie cases into a lidded, hinged metal receptacle under the counter ready to be plated by hand. The mash and liquor are brought from the kitchen as needed and emptied from steel buckets into antique heated urns on a ledge that overlooks the street. Cooked eels are brought to the plate when required from the kitchen.

As one enters, one is surrounded by noise and bustle: the clatter of plates, the clack of cutlery. These create a wall of echoing noise that competes with shouted orders and chatter and laughter. There is heat and the room smells of warmth, hot ovens, baking, pastry and because of the drizzle outside, very slightly of damp clothes. There is a constant flow of people coming in, ordering at the counter, being served, sitting, eating and leaving. There are multiple, overlapping conversations. In the far corner an infant is being fed with a mixture of mashed potato and liquor. By the wall, a man devours a pie covered in white pepper and vinegar. Another has a bowl of eels in liquor that he swirls around his mouth indulgently sucking at the flesh. He

¹¹⁵ For a visual comparison to an earlier historical taxon that echoes the plate glass, see - "The Betting Interest, its origins", *The Sporting Life*, 30 May 1861: 1.

uses his spoon to spit out the bones back onto the plate underneath. In another corner, a waitress stacks and clears empty plates and wipes down a table.

This is a transactional space full of action. On the one hand it is "...a social world, taking part in a play of sociability within the confines of the marketplace" (Erickson, 2007: 22), on another it is I contend, a unique and living archaeology of an early industrial feeding station caught and ossified in the transition to modernity where habits, rituals and preferences have inscribed upon and within the body.

There is a sense that the food served here could *only* be served here, the space inimical to the gustatory offering. This is, to paraphrase Marx's notion of 'species being', a place where the historical and contemporary socially constructed cockney body is being fed; an "entity in the process of becoming" (Schilling, 2012: 24).¹¹⁶ Here the (cockney) body is a nexus of class and modernity; the food a negotiation between the worker and the owner. The shop is the interstitial space of that negotiation.

The eel, pie and mash shop and the food it serves might also be defined by what it is not. Based on the specificity of its menu and the nature of its temporality it is neither restaurant nor a café. The eel, pie and mash shop is not a place for daydreaming where time is measured in Prufrock's coffee spoons nor the 'layabout' cafés that Quentin Crisp (1981: 33) remembered where "you would sit through lunch, tea and supper without ordering anything more than one cup of coffee..." In very clear terms, "You're meant to queue up, get it [the food], find an empty table ... hopefully if you're a good shop that chair's still warm ... eat it as quick as you possibly can and fuck off..."¹¹⁷

London's dwindling pie shops are almost what Ray Oldenburg (1999) calls a *Third Place*. These are social spaces that are not 'home' (first space) nor work (second place). Third places - like barbershops for example, are sites that anchor communities through informal ties that stimulate and nurture broader social

¹¹⁶ Shilling refers to Marx's notion from *The German Ideology* (1846) that the full potential of the body as a biological *and* social entity could only be realised in a future communist society.

¹¹⁷ Greg Camp, joint owner of T.J. Kelly, Debden. Interview by author, 5 October 2021.

convivialities. They are “public place[s] that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work (Oldenburg, 1999: 16). Anna Marie Steigmann (2017: 46) also suggests that within late capitalism “retail and gastronomic facilities” have blurred distinctions between private and public life. Accordingly working class spaces are arenas that have become “important symbols in postmodern life.” These are spaces where different social classes may meet, and entry isn’t based necessarily on social capital - a place where people might “rub elbows” (Rosenbaum in Steigmann, 2017: 47). In some respects, because of the gentrification of places like Hoxton Market and its surrounds this is increasingly true.

Rainer Kazig (2012) suggests that in all of these type of businesses, the owners often exhibit the behaviours of a host and create an atmosphere where everyone feels at home.

The old lady at the door, a regular for many years, is still having trouble getting her shopping basket over the threshold. “Come on in love” shouts Joe from the kitchen, “we don’t bite.”

The eel, pie and mash shops have become semi-secret spaces where only locals may tread. These are territories that in a sense cannot be seen from the “normal globalised street”: where locals, or “ordinary practitioners” make use of spaces that are only semi-visible (De Certeau, 1988: 93). The pie and mash shop in this sense becomes a sort of secular *eruv* - a Jewish tradition where an outside space is temporarily and ritually redefined as part of the home. This religious loophole is usually made by natural or man-made boundaries and is sanctified by the sharing of food that merges the spaces. Within this space, ‘home-like’ behaviour is tolerated, and, in that sense, the shops bridge a space that exists between “the public world of the market and the private world of the home and family” (Erickson, 2007: 22).

Historically, the early eel, pie and mash shop, as a response to working class hunger around the capitalist temporality of labour, sat between the home and workplace. As Hoggart (1957: 35) has it, “‘home cooking’ is always better than any other... café food is almost always adulterated ...” Yet of course, ‘home’ cooking often wasn’t an option for some of the shops’ original customer base. As we have already seen, working class Londoners were often forced to eat away from where they slept either

because of work pressures or lack of cooking facilities. The 1911 Census of England and Wales showed that in London, Finsbury, Shoreditch, Bethnal Green and Stepney were all areas where a third or more of the population were living two or three in a room, while in Southwark, Holborn and St Pancras just over a quarter lived in overcrowded conditions (Oddy, 1971: 265). Unsurprisingly then, as Maude Pember Reeves (1914: 103) recounts, in similar areas, “The Lambeth woman has no joy in cooking for its own sake. The eating of food then was therefore seldom a social occasion and, in terms of diet, “the limited consumption of animal foods indicated their uses in working class diet as a vehicle for consuming larger amounts of carbohydrate foods.” Meat, in Benjamin Rowntree’s (1913: 308) words, was often “a flavouring rather than a substantial course.” That said, “potatoes are an invariable item. Greens may go, butter may go, meat may diminish almost to vanishing point, before potatoes are affected” (Reeves, 1914: 98). Yet, “a good deal of pastry consumed. Some housewives make nearly half the flour into pastry, ... It is usually regarded by the worker as more satisfying than bread; and it saves butter” (Rowntree, 1913: 39).

Inevitably, by the turn of the nineteenth century, the food offerings of the eel, pie and mash shops reflected these basic tastes (largely jettisoning additions like pea soup and baked potatoes for example) and seem to have settled for easily available and cheap ingredients in a simplified meal that in some sense mirrored the food of ‘home’.¹¹⁸ The ‘homeliness’ of the shops was a result of an intimacy that nodded to notions of bourgeois hegemonic ‘respectability’ but represented a ‘sensual’ food pleasure - a food that was warm and filling, eaten in the spirit of the “generous and the familiar” (Bourdieu, 1984: 179). Indeed, in 1938 *Picture Post* quoted a customer in an eel-pie shop in Lambeth honestly remarking that the plain food was “... something that fills you and after all, that’s the chief thing.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ In an interview with Graham Poole from Manze’s he explained that “we stopped doing that (soup) just after the Second World War because that was a meal in itself ... we still make it at home as a family... you get a marrowbone, cook all the marrow out, add the split peas and handfuls of mincemeat. It was almost like a ragu – so by the time they’d had that, customers wouldn’t want pies.” Graham Poole. Interview by author, 14 December 2020.

¹¹⁹ Barber, Ada. “Life in the Lambeth Walk”, *Picture Post*, 31 December 1938: 47-53.

These spaces were not ‘posh’ (an adjective that encompasses an entire gamut of ‘non-working classness’) but because of their origins they contain within them negotiations with a bourgeois respectability where we “speak and act against our feelings and ... control our passions” (Finkelstein, 1989: 130). They are also places where in the words of the “Lambeth Walk”, you might (within limits) “do as you darn well pleasey”. Here, people might additionally indulge in the ‘secret’ habits of the home. People might eat with spoons; they may slurp their tea - laugh and eat with their mouths open. These are zones of *de facto* working class rules and respectability that have organically formed within these spaces. Indeed, within living memory people spat eel bones on the floor and smoked at the table.¹²⁰

Although the less sanitary eating habits may have disappeared, the performative element within this ‘cockney eruvim’ means that people (especially men) appear to become *more* cockney here. Once temporarily freed from the strictures of the globalised city (and perhaps more so in the new out-of-London pie shop locations like Essex, the Kent coast and Norfolk to where the London diaspora has emigrated), one may experience an over-emphasised, almost caricatured behaviour, ironically mirroring the original music hall creation of the character. This is particularly noticeable within a demographic of the post-war generation of the 1950s and 1960s (a generation largely, although not entirely, responsive to Thatcherite and subsequent Brexit messaging). This over-emphasised behaviour is evidenced by men gruffly ‘bowling’ and ‘strutting’ in from the street and affecting a slang dialect where they might exaggeratedly drop their ‘h’s or replace the ‘th’ sound for an ‘f’ sound.¹²¹ They become, as Paul Kelly reports of many that come to his shop in Debden, Essex, “more ‘London than London’... they hear the stories... that’s how things should be, pie and mash, West Ham. That’s what they aspire to be and that’s how they portray themselves.”¹²² Prescient here is Marcel Mauss’ seminal essay, *Les Techniques du Corps* (1934) that showed how societal membership meant that people use their bodies in situation-appropriate activities like walking, sitting, eating

¹²⁰ Rita Arment. Interview by author, 20 November 2019. Rita, now in her 90s recalled people spitting eel bones onto the floor into the 1950s.

¹²¹ For the cockney ‘bowl’ see - Kersh, [1938] 2007: 38. “... the swagger of the Cockney costermonger, the indomitable fruit-vendor, tougher than leather, more indestructible than the stones of the City...”

¹²² Paul, Kelly joint owner of T.J. Kelly, Debden. Interview by author, 15 December 2020.

and marching. The food served within this TARDIS-like space is a sensory and gustatory conduit for this behaviour: a foci for an increasingly re-imagined city and a temporal and spatial anchor for a projection of a past identity.¹²³

In this way the meal, as Margaret Visser (1991) contends is multi-faceted, simultaneously a social interaction, a commercial transaction and in some cases, a form of art. Within the space of the contemporary eel, pie and mash shop, staff and customers appear to collaborate (self-consciously or otherwise) in a thoroughly post-modern performance where they bring together these elements together. For the eel, pie and mash shops, these foods and behaviours are according to Michel De Certeau (1988: 133, 141) like “resistances” to the planned city “from a stubborn past.”

4.2 No mate, this is a pie shop...

A young, fashionably dressed man with a fashionably dressed beard who has been queueing behind the elderly women comes to the counter and asks Julie, one of the staff, what kind of pies are served. Joe Cooke, on his way out from the kitchen and, wiping his hands on a tea-towel simply but politely answers, for her. “Meat” he says and then almost as an afterthought, “but we can do you a vegetarian one.”

The man’s eyes look upward to the (limited) menu on the wall in front of him. He sees:

1 LARGE PIE & MASH 4.50; 1 SMALL PIE & MASH 3.90; 2 LARGE PIE & MASH £7.60; 2 SMALL PIES & MASH 6.40; VEGAN PIE AND MASH £3.40; SMALL EELS & MASH £4.90; LARGE EELS & MASH £8.30; JELLIED EELS £3.50.¹²⁴

¹²³ TARDIS is a reference to a time machine and spacecraft in the BBC television series *Dr Who*. I use it to signify an expansive and expanding internal space that defies logic where a whole re-imagined world of the past is performed and glorified.

¹²⁴ This menu echoes Malvery’s description of an East End eel shop. “The windows of these places were generally placarded with printed slips which conveyed the information that hot stewed eels were to be obtained at *3d.*, *2d.*, and *1d.*, a basin”. See - Malvery, 1908: 74.

“Do you do anything else?” he asks. “No mate” says Joe plainly still wiping his hands, “this is a pie shop”. With that, the man turns and, without another word, leaves. The space and the food remain untranslated for those who are not local in the geographic and cultural sense. Within this cockney *eruv*, there is a “... collective convention, unwritten but legible to all dwellers through the codes of language and of behaviour...” (DeCerteau, 1988: 16). Behaving in a certain way is expected. De Certeau calls these “miniscule repressions”, and they are I suggest, a code for hyper-local and hyper-situated behaviours.

The next customer is another young man but one whose paint-splattered overalls suggest that he might work locally, perhaps renovating one of the many ex-council properties that have found their way onto the open market and are being traded for huge profit.¹²⁵ Clearly a regular, he orders in a code that few outsiders would understand. “Two and two and a coke please love.”¹²⁶ Kim, who has taken his order shouts to the kitchen for more pies to be brought out of the oven.

This insider language is reminiscent of that used in an earlier taxon of working class eateries at the turn of the twentieth century. Olive Malvery, the Anglo-Indian investigative journalist writing about working class life, reports that whilst working undercover in a cheap coffee house, customers would order from her in similar terms:

- Now then miss, ‘arf of thick, three doorsteps, and a two-eyed steak”
- Rasher an’ two, three and a pint”
- Large tea, two slices and a neg, my dear (Malvery, 1906: 152)

¹²⁵ The so-called ‘Right to Buy Scheme’ was a cornerstone of Conservative government policy in the 1980s. By the end of the 1970s, almost one in three homes were owned by the state. The policy subsequently forced the remaining council rents to rise to cope with a shortfall and contributed to some working class families leaving the area completely. The current market rates for ex-council houses around areas like Hoxton are prohibitive and even small properties now occupied by gentrifiers are exorbitantly priced. The situation has created much anger and resentment amongst the remnants of ‘traditional’ communities that either still cling-on in (very) diminished social housing or come back to the market and the pie shop to reminisce.

¹²⁶ The figures simply refer to the number of pies and servings of mash potato: two pies and two helpings of mash.

Now, mashed potato is brought from the kitchen in a steel bucket. The potatoes are usually *Maris Piper* that are boiled and mashed in huge pots without the addition of either salt or butter. “It’s plain and honest” Kim tells me. Crucially, it is *never* scooped onto the plate with the help of an ice-cream scoop as some pie shops use, rather it is *smear*ed and *scrap*ed over the side of the plate. “Joe’s mother taught me (how to do it) ... you stand your mash up on the plate... its tradition... it’s my way or no way...”¹²⁷ This performative culinary exceptionality is, for regular customers part of the attraction. The anticipation of “seeing them smarm the potato on the plate on the pie and what I’d call rubbery pastry and the liquor... you wouldn’t dream of doing it in your own home...”¹²⁸

These repetitive ‘movements’, these ‘ways of doing things’, these ‘gestures’ are a living ethnographic archaeology that links generations together. For De Certeau (1988: 141) they are “... the true archives of the city” and are the “bricolage” of a palimpsestic cockney identity “that Lévi-Strauss recognised in myths.” They are echoed in the way that Joe Cooke still bones out his own meat bought from Smithfield; in the way that he mixes the pastry, the way that he moulds (“podding”) pastry pie tops onto filled pie tins. They recollect the worldview of Bourdieu’s (1984:173-174) old cabinetmaker: “... the use of his language and choice of clothing are fully present in his ethic of scrupulous, impeccable craftsmanship and in the aesthetic of work for work’s sake which leads him to measure the beauty of his products by the care and patience that have gone into them.”

With deft, practised hands, Kim empties two pies from their scalding tins onto a heavy, white china plate and, with a wooden spoon, scrapes two piles of mashed potato onto the side. With a ladle she spoons a liberal amount of liquor from a steel urn over the entire plate. She leans back and grabs the customer a tin of Coke from the shelf behind her. She takes his money, proffers his plate as he walks further down the counter to collect his cutlery.

¹²⁷ Kim Cooke. Interview by author, 2 December 2020.

¹²⁸ Eileen Errol. Interview by author, 22 October 2021.

The meal “brings diverse factors together... [and] in doing this, no one factor, not even nutrition or attentive experience to the food, is the [whole] point of a meal” (John, 2014: 258). According to Mary Douglas, the mid-century British anthropologist, pie and mash is an anomaly. Douglas, sought to classify working class meals within a set of rules by delineating their serving order and ingredients. The working class cooked meal - a ‘proper’ meal - with a centre piece of meat, fish or eggs must, according to Douglas’ research, be served with a carbohydrate like potato from below the ground. This is usually accompanied by another (green) vegetable from above ground like peas, beans, brussels sprouts, cabbage or broccoli. Gravy is the “essential but last ingredient of the meal, the element which links the other components together to form a plateful (Douglas, 1975: 273). No addition of cold foods like jellied eels are accepted on or with the plate. Additionally, meat and fish cannot be mixed so that meat pies and (hot eels) should not exist simultaneously.

The role of gravy is substituted for liquor in the shops as a sort of false green vegetable. Liquor is a simple sauce that contains fresh parsley and historically (although generally no longer because the shops do not keep fresh eels) the juice from the boiled eels. Douglas suggests that in working class households, if these dietary ‘rules’ aren’t followed, disharmony will result. Yet eels, pie and mash are an example of a London gustatory exceptionality that additionally defies eating times for main meals. Indeed, the food is still eaten for breakfast, lunch and evening meal further revealing its historical roots as fuel for workers.

The young man in overalls reaches noisily inside a plastic tray to collect his cutlery as the cash register crashingly rattles shut. He slides into an available bench and shuffles along to make room for others, nodding to his near neighbour - a stranger - in an unspoken yet meaningful micro-conversation of mutual recognition and acknowledgement of spatiality. This simple movement speaks to the heritage of communal eating. Once painfully associated with soup kitchens or the workhouse, the contemporary pie and mash shop excavates a pre- or early- capitalist “conviviality that sweeps away reticence and restraint” (Bourdieu, 1988: 179). A place where “those who choose to eat together tacitly recognise their fellow eaters as saliently equal” (Korsmeyer, 2002; 200). Falk (1994: 25, 20) suggests that

although “the role of the meal as a collective community-constituting ritual has been marginalized”, this kind of space-sharing signals “the incorporation of the partaker into the community simultaneously defining his/her particular “place” within it. The contemporary eel, pie and mash shop is, by definition a negotiation between a premodern “eating-community” and a modern individualised space: between what Pasi Falk (1994: 20) suggests is an “open” and “closed” body that is both “eating into one’s body/self and being eaten into the community.” In that sense, the shops are a kind of living tableau of older London solidarities that in some senses pre-date the restaurant form completely.

After delivering a tray of hot pies to the serving area, Joe Cooke has emerged from behind the counter with a large mug of tea inscribed with the words ‘salaam alaikum’. He jokingly shouts over to a woman who is a regular customer sitting eating with a friend, “You back again? I thought we banned you...” Several heads turn and there is a general murmur of laughter. Joe squeezes onto a bench next to another man with an exaggerated movement and a comic expression of pain and enters into a conversation that starts with him enquiring about the health of the customer’s mother.

These interactions are as much genuine conversation with frequent customers as they are what Anne Marie Steigemann (2017: 49) refers to as “alibi practices” that allow for small talk with people that are known or not yet known. These “... small social life worlds are created ... through ... social practices on a very local level, yet each life world is always linked to broader national and global levels.” Specifically, “the on-site practices link the global (e.g., sold products - in this case the food) with the national (e.g., the legal framework) and the local level (e.g., the business ethos) ...” (Steigemann, 2017: 49).

Karen, the shop girl weaves in and out of the tables, delivering a mug of tea that has been ordered and picking up a fallen fork from the floor. The pie shop seems to run like a machine: no-one runs, no-one bumps into each other; everyone knows the rules that have been passed down through families within this hyper-local community. There is an almost *performative geography* - a sort of dual *dance* of service and of customers. Steigemann (2017: 50) suggests that there is a kind of

“business ballet” where staff ‘dance’ for the audience who wait to be entertained or served. This almost echoes June Jacobs’ (1961) “intricate city side-walk ballet”: the pie and mash shop as an interiorised fossil of the faded coster markets.

The customers and owners have their own unwritten rules and unspoken regulations to which outsiders are not party. There is a “consensus - a tacit understanding between consumer and shopkeeper” (De Certeau, 1988: 20-21). These are the rituals for ordering, the recognition of regulars and the *structure* of exchange. These, especially in the pie and mash shops, signal to both a theatre and performance that recall the late nineteenth century music hall. This echoes Erving Goffman’s (1949) notion of ‘front’ and ‘backstage’ behaviour where the ‘self’ is a performed, if collaborative, character. This approach is reproduced in Philip Crang (1994: 696) writing of his work as a waiter on the English south coast where the *context* (my italics) of interaction “was...’located’ through a range of meanings of there and here, presences and absences.”

London’s eel pie and mash shops are, however, a unique type of space. They can be seen as a version of Oldenburg’s ‘third place’ yet they are additionally arenas where “... rather intimate practices, such as touching, shouting or teasing, along with other practice that are considered to belong to rather private social settings, such as hugging, child-caring and nursing... create a different type of sociability” (Steigmann, 2017: 53). Although the shops are primarily businesses, it is their heritage of ‘working classness’ that delineates them as uncommon. These are spaces, hidden in plain sight, where generations of the same family still visit and the continuities of the family dynasties of their owners provide a unique backdrop to working class family life. Indeed, the shops, by their warm, intimate welcome to regulars are in some senses linked to the distillation of the physicality of the lost Bakhtian carnivalesque of an earlier London. This embodied closeness and affection may mean that “[m]oving in or through a given place, the body imports its own emplaced past into its present experience (Casey in Feld, 1996: 93). Simply put, people eat where they are comfortable and, within the communities that use the eel, pie and mash shops that is largely based in memory. These ‘embodied’ memories become part of our habitual physical movements as well as part of particular environments (Pink and Mackley, 2014). It is to that bodily memory I shall turn shortly.

4.3 Too heavy to steal

As two o'clock approaches, the flow of customers has begun to lessen but is still steady. An elderly man shuffles onto a bench and places his plate, replete with a single serving of pie and mash, onto one of the distinctive marble tables that look like "slabs of old streaky bacon" (Sommerfield, [1936] 2010: 163). When Olive Malvery takes a temporary job in an eel-pie shop in Lower Marsh in Lambeth at the turn of the century, she describes the shop's interior in an exceedingly rare piece of reportage.

... the shop was furnished somewhat after the manner of an ordinary coffee-house with a number of pew-like compartments, each containing a small wooden table flanked with benches. The shop, however, was more bare; and the fittings and appointments were poor and scanty. Tablecloths were superfluous luxuries, and the eel stew and pies were served in basins on the bare tables. (Malvery, 1908: 74)

Gerald Kersh in his *The Angel and the Cuckoo* ([1966] 2011: 57) recalls the remnants of these furnishings, still common to various taxons of cheap London eating places in the Edwardian city and now much prized by the remaining eel and pie houses. "There were tables of cast-iron frames and marble tops, such as used to be favoured by the keepers of poor men's eating houses because they were too heavy to steal, required no cloths, showed no dirt, and might be wiped with the corner of an apron." The benches themselves are wooden, iron and old. They *look* simultaneously antique and Italian which is of little surprise given the immigrant experience of those that came to work in London's burgeoning catering trade in the second half of the nineteenth century. Graham Poole, one of the brothers descended from Michael Mansi, who now runs the Manze shops in London and Essex, recalled a visit to Italy on holiday.

... last year we were walking round a market in Florence, and we went past a shop, and it was Tower Bridge Road to a spit. They weren't selling pies but

Italian food - but it had the marble tables, the benches the mirrors, the sawdust... it was all the same...¹²⁹

in

Not all of the pie and mash shops evoke a *fin de siècle*, Italianate style. The Castle's shop in Camden dates from 1934 but at some point, in the early 1970s it was re-decorated with plastic, orange seating and a Formica counter. Although this would no longer be considered a 'classic' pie shop by purists, the styling nods to the utilitarian outlook of working class space that often attempts a pastiche of bourgeois fashion of the time. The (now closed) Cooke's shop on Kingsland High Street epitomised for example, the late Victorian aesthetic with stained glass and ornate mirrors. The (now also closed) Manze's shop in Walthamstow was resplendent with a pressed tin ceiling. Newer shops, (mostly in Essex or the London suburbs) or recently renovated shops like Harrington's in Tooting have re-interpreted their look to match a contemporary zeitgeist of bare brick walls and industrial lighting.

The pensioner stills himself in front of his plate of food and picks up his cutlery. Instead of a knife and fork, he has chosen a fork and a spoon. This, according to Joe Cooke, is a tradition across all traditional eel, pie and mash shops although few people seem to know from where it originates. Some suggest that it stems from a shortage of metal during World War One, others that knives were discouraged for use in the shops for fear of stabbings (although their use in other working class eateries would suggest that this was not the case). That said, the echo of criminality was reflected in the writings of Malvery (1906: 165-166) who recorded at the turn of the century that "[I]f they were to eat in, the customers were given knives and forks inscribed with 'stolen from Mrs A'. This chimes with the recollections of Rita Arment, ninety at the time of interview, who remembered some pie shops did indeed have their names stamped on cutlery to deter pilfering.¹³⁰ From a utilitarian point of view, it seems likely that the spoon is simply a remnant, first of eel-eating - a vehicle to convey the fish to the mouth and a temporary receptacle to discard its bones back to

¹²⁹ Graham Poole. Interview by author, 14 December 2020.

¹³⁰ Arment, Rita. Interview by author, 20 November 2020.

the bowl - and secondly a relic of the almost-forgotten dish of soup that some shops historically sold.¹³¹

Fully equipped with his cutlery of choice, the man turns over the pie on his plate so that the crust is facing downwards and pauses.¹³² Anticipating. This "... brief ritual prayer is a striking deferral of eating by very hungry people" (Eileen, 2014: 258). He smothers the entire dish in vinegar from a bottle on the table and dissects. As the spoon enters the pie, there is a puff of steam, and the man takes a second to breathe deeply.¹³³ An aroma of pastry and meat and ovens and heat and consolation and family and pleasure is cut by the vinegary tang. The man breathes it all in and starts to shovel. The meal is bland and unseasoned and comforting: it has a 'pre-globalization' smell and has all the madeleine-esque connotations of childhood that may likely be understood fully only by those that were weaned on this culinary (allegedly) 'uninspiring' fuel. The man smiles. He is at home and surrounded by the sensory bouquet of his past.

4.4 The lower classes smell

'What's wrong with the East End anyway?' she demanded as they walked along...

Sure, it smells. It smells of public houses and marketplaces and fried-fish shops. I love the smell of fried-fish shops, don't you? Come and have some chips. (La Bern, [1945] 2015: 153)

Although Georg Simmel ([1907] 1997: 119) saw the sense of smell among the 'lower senses', he suggested that "they penetrate so to speak in a gaseous form into our

¹³¹ Arment, Rita. Interview by author, 20 November 2020. Arment remembered that during the Second War, her mother-in-law buying meat bones to make a hearty broth that was sold in the shop. In a story in *Picture Post Magazine* from 1938 a poster in a pie shop clearly advertises pea soup as a main dish. See - Barber, Ada. "Life in the Lambeth Walk", *Picture Post*, 31 December 1938: 47-53.

¹³² This seems to be an odd but reasonably common affectation (along with some customers' preference for burnt pies) for which I can find no reason except perhaps a sensory preference for soaking the thicker upper crust in liquor for longer and making it softer.

¹³³ Some customers douse the entire plate of food in plain, non-brewed condiment vinegar (sometimes chilli vinegar) others use it only to season a cut-open pie. Often (white) pepper is additionally added to the food. These are traditionally the only condiments that are offered. Some customers 'open' their pie from the crust, others from the base. Some prefer - ask for and receive - pies that are blackened (slightly burnt).

most sensory inner being.” It was significantly for Marcel Proust not only the taste of the madeleine that evoked memories for Charles but also its aroma.¹³⁴ Indeed, the senses of taste and smell are interrelated in a ‘synesthetic’ dance and in this I use the word, following David Sutton (2001: 312), to define a unity of senses that work together to evoke something larger.

The sense of smell has long been associated with notions of moral probity and as a judgement on social rank (Largey and Watson, 1972; Low, 2005). As George Orwell ([1937] 1975: 112) ironically had it, “... the real secret of class distinction in the West [is that] ... *The lower classes smell.*”

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Henry Mayhew described the ‘smell’ of the working class that was the imprint of labour on the body and the olfactory residue of the herring that poor Londoners ate in huge quantities. These were doubtless the aromas that surrounded at least some of the customer base of the early taxons of the eel-pie shops that mingled with the warm, doughy breath of the baking ovens. The smell from bodies that knew hard manual labour and the warmth of sustenance.

The East end of London itself of course had for centuries been the site of polluting and foul-smelling industries situated far from the genteel western seats of power and influence. Dickens highlighted this nascent threat, neatly condensing the bourgeois fear of the vapours of the poor, their work and ultimately their humanity in a speech in 1851 when he suggested that “The air from Gin Lane will be carried, when the wind is easterly into Mayfair” (Fielding, 1960: 128). The wealthy were able to escape from the East wind: a situation that only recent gentrification in London has to some extent alleviated (Heblich, Trew and Zylberberg, 2021). During the nineteenth century, these progressive middle class migrations from the source of their wealth meant that on a very basic level, the olfactory textures of the city were no longer shared across classes and the sensual codes of common taste, still visible in Hogarth’s illustrations, were broken. Whereas once gentlemen like Egan’s Jerry Hawthorn might have eaten a street pie, his descendants would likely not have crossed the class threshold into a pie *shop*. The pie itself, its smell and taste, would

¹³⁴ In Proust’s drafts, the madeleine started life as toast and then *biscotto*. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/oct/19/proust-madeleine-cakes-started-as-toast-in-search-of-lost-time-manuscripts-reveal>. See - Proust, 2015 (the edition contains Proust’s early drafts).

still be enjoyed in different circumstances by different classes marked by an aesthetic delineation of taste and proximity: a culinary nod to a romanticised 'Olde England' but not one to be shared with the residuum. The working class pie, their arenas of sale and consumption were now zones of corruption and defilement.

At the start of the twentieth century, the East End still literally smelt of poverty. As John Sommerfield had it in his *May Day* ([1936] 2010:30), it was "... [a] zone of smells - stale cooking and wet washing, cats, old clothes, sweat and urine, the odoriferous motifs in a symphony of poverty." In James Curtis' *They Drive by Night* ([1938] 2008: 36) an inter-war London caff, certainly a historic taxon of the eel, pie and mash shop, is described in comparable olfactory terms: "Sweaty bodies, an open coke fire, cheap clothes drying from the rain, coarse, dirty fat used for frying eggs. Why, the joint smelt exactly like a cheap kip house." During the Second World War, the air-raid shelter was a salon of smells. In Robert Poole's *E1* ([1961] 2012: 169) Pinkie rankles at the suggestion she should sleep in one. "With everybody eating fish and chips and scratching all the time? No thank you."

In his *The Spiv and the Architect, Unruly Life in Postwar London* (2010: 3), Richard Hornsey describes the incongruity of the malodorous, fetid, almost unofficial working class side-street cafés that lingered as a response to the city's devastation. These were increasingly at odds with the post-war "collective moral project ... to (re)construct [London's] social stability." The cafes were seen as largely 'unsavoury' by the authorities: they had been hang-outs for spivs and black marketeers and were as disreputable as the mobile coffee stalls that they competed with. They were contrasted with the now almost 'staid' image of the eel and pie shop. Although inevitably catering to different sections of the London working class, the shops remained, largely I believe due to dynastic control, primarily a family-friendly space that sold hygienic and hearty food. The 'caff' spaces were delineated as much by the smell of the food as of the customer. Now extinct, some of these cafes mutated into the mid-century modernism of the Formica milk and coffee bars, early high street competition for the pie shops, that in turn have largely disappeared.

We might only conjecture what an historical eel pie shop, or more precisely what their customers, smelt like but the shops were always, and continue to be, judged by their (neo-Victorian) propriety that was partly dependent on cleanliness. The shops certainly smelt of the changing patina of London working class life. They smelt of the food and the people and their complex lives but were also the repositories of subtler aromas. Up until perhaps the 1970s, there would have been a definitive scent of smoke, smog-damp and coal fires. Personal hygiene has certainly changed in the last fifty years and weekly baths in working class homes or public baths have been replaced by daily showers and indoor plumbing. Men's clothing, from cheap gabardine to de-mob suits, worn until frayed or kept for Sunday best were always imbued with tobacco memories. Now the streets of inner London are more likely to be suffused with the spicy tang of curry houses, the spiky, oily piquancy of numerous fried chicken shops and the sickly-sweet stench of e-cigarettes.

Today, the Cooke's shop smells of baking, warmth and contemporary working class domesticity; a subtle whiff of pine disinfectant, a customer's slightly too-strong perfume and vaping residue on someone's coat. There is a nippy piquancy of vinegar that competes with an aroma of meaty gravy and an indistinct but definite grassy odour of the chopped parsley that goes into the liquor. There is none of the greasy smell of fried bacon from the market café opposite nor the slightly burnt hazelnut notes of the artisanal coffee shop a few doors down: commonplace, strong smells. The perfume of Cooke's is more nuanced and less familiar to the uninitiated, yet the pie shops are part of a long olfactory history of classed spaces within the city and the general consensus within epidemiology and the sociology of food is that class differences are still clear enough and that they flow from particular orientations grounded in possession of resources (Atkinson and Deeming, 2015). As Graham Poole, the heir to the Manze shops recalled.

My earliest memory as a toddler is opening the door to the kitchens at Tower Bridge and the smell that would come up... and I can still go into the shops now and I can still smell... it's just a lovely smell... it just reminds me of my

life... I've known nothing else... I've known no other constant in my life except the pie shop.¹³⁵

As Deborah Lupton (1996: 124) suggests, these sensoria and sensibilities are points through which “disparate cultural histories, and the bodies carrying them *potentially* converge” but the pie shops remain almost exclusively white and working class spaces, hyper-local and defended by opaque traditions and what might be seen as boring, plain food with the addition of exotic eel. Only so much of the modern world bleeds into the pie shops and the past is always near the surface.

The lunch-rush in Cooke's is over but people are still ordering pie and mash. Kim shouts to the kitchen to enquire if there's enough mash left. She does this in an indecipherable argot that is another ancient cockney *cant* known as 'back-slang'. Originally mentioned by Mayhew in 1851 it was definitively charted by John Hotten in his *A Dictionary of Modern Slang, Cant and Vulgar Words* (1860). The language utilises a simple reversal of letters in a word to frustrate the uninitiated. Although rare, back slang remained alive in (especially) London butchers' shops until perhaps the 1980s. It is now, as far as I am aware almost completely extinct outside of the Cooke's family shop.

Two teenage girls from one of the local estates, sit together on a bench, robotically scrolling through their smartphones whilst simultaneously spooning food into their mouths. Their colourful acrylic nails clack in a measured staccato that is echoed by their spoons cutting through their lunch. Although side by side, they ignore each other, their historical, human gestures in stark contrast to their rhythmic response to modern technology. These embodied, almost instinctive movements are sensual memories, not fixed as mere repetitive behaviours, but are a “transformation that brings the past into the present as a natal event” (Serematakis, 1994: 6). In a parallel of Edward Casey's (in Feld, 1996: 93) suggestion that “[M]oving in or through a given place, the body imports its own emplaced past into its present existence”, the digital messaging, the temporality of the immediate past relayed through technology, is

¹³⁵ Graham Poole owner of Manze's Pie Shop, Tower Bridge Road. Interview by author, 14 December 2020.

simultaneous with the corporeality of the experience of growing up eating this iconic food and the way in which one does so. These concurrent habitual movements, the modern and the traditional, are - or become part of - particular environments, “[T]hus, our experiences of place - and its social, physical and intangible components - are inextricable from the invocation, creation and reinvestment of memories” (Pink, 2015: 44). These memories are triggered by a “world filled with smells, textures, sights, sounds and tastes” (Stoller in Serematakis, 1994: 119).

As the teenagers are finishing their pies, Kelly, the shop girl brings a bowl of jellied eels to an elderly customer who has sat patiently at an adjoining table. Another woman and her friend who clearly know the man comments “I don’t how you can eat that mate... oooh, no...” and visibly shudders.

Turning, the man smiles and salutes them with a spoon full of quavering fish and aspic, grey in the afternoon light.

“Lovely” he says. “You dunno wha’s good fer ya...”

4.5 The Eel and the East Ender

Hunger is the best sauce in the world. (Cervantes)

Although the pie has immense gustatory and cultural significance for London’s working classes it was the eel that had been the staple of their food.

Eels had been caught for centuries in the Thames either by line or by eel-bucks (wicker baskets thrown across whole sections of the river), yet it was only in 1922 when Johannes Schmidt’s paper on ‘The Breeding Places of the Eel’ was read at the Royal Society in London that it was finally and definitively proved where and how this mysterious and secretive creature spawned (Fort, 2003: 209,103). As their immense popularity had mirrored the growth of London, local eels had eventually to be supplanted by imports. According to the Victorian naturalist, Frank Buckland (in Fort, 2003: 212), it was the Dutch that had largely controlled this lucrative trade. Eels were brought up the Thames in great quantities by eel *schuyts* from the Netherlands and

these were commended for helping feed London during the Great Fire of London 1666. Although their eels were seen by some as inferior to the domestic variety, the British government rewarded them by Act of Parliament in 1699 granting exclusive rights to sell eels from their barges on the Thames thus bypassing the notorious middlemen at the fish market in Billingsgate.

Malvery (1908: 74), writing of a turn-of-the-century eel-pie shop for *Pearson's Magazine*, describes the process of buying eels from the Dutch. As she recounts – “Nell says ‘We’ll git ‘em on the *Dutchman*...’ She hails a boat at the river’s edge and is conveyed to a Dutch boat at moorings ‘under the very shadow of London Bridge.’” From the bottom of the flat - but carefully perforated boat, Dutch crewmen use a wicker basket to weigh the eels from the hold. She takes twenty-eight pounds of eels “all alive” The two eel boats she visits “may constantly be seen lying off Billingsgate”.

According to Katsumi Tsukamoto and Mari Kuroki (2014: 7-8), the decree to allow the Dutch to sell directly to Londoners was in place until 1938 “when the last remaining barges packed up and left due to declining trade.”

If, by the mid-nineteenth century, the itinerant pie-man was becoming a rarity, eel sellers were not. David Badham, a Victorian curate writing in the book *Ancient and Modern Fish Tattle* (1854: 383) notes:

London from one end to the other, teems and steams with eels ... turn where you will and ‘hot eels’ are everywhere smoking away ... and this too at so low a rate, that for one halfpenny a man of the million ... may fill his stomach with six or seven long pieces, and wash them down with a cup full of the glutinous liquor in which they have been stewed. The traffic of this street luxury is so great, that twenty thousand pounds sterling is annually cleared by it. One million one hundred and sixty-six thousand eight hundred and thirty pounds’ weight, on average, are brought from Billingsgate every year by itinerant salesman, who cook and retail them on their different beats: customers are not entirely confined to the lowest orders; some of the inferior ‘bourgeoisie’ condescend to frequent the stands of the most noted retailers; and there are instances reported by some of these hawkers, of individuals coming twice a

day for months, and eating to the alarming extent of tuppence of time, or, in other words of devouring from 30 to 40 lengths of stewed eel, and decanting down their throats six or seven teacupfuls of the hot liquor.

Though our sellers of cooked eels have no disgraceful exemption to boast of, of unpaid taxes and city dues, like their ancient brethren of the same calling at Sybaris yet are they too men of importance in a small way and generally make a good thing out of this savoury calling.

It seems that at least the prosperous sellers even had a recognisable outfit. Badham recalls their outfit which included a “white hat with black crape [sic] round it, and his drab paletôt with mother-o’-pearl buttons, and his black kid gloves, with the fingers too long for him...” (Badham, 1854: 383).

An itinerant pie seller suggests that the poor would even eat the scraps of this popular fish; “... the boys often come and ask me, said an eel pie man ‘if I’ve got a farden’s worth of heads; now I don’t sell heads; the woman at Broadway, they tells me, sells them at four farden, and a drop of liquor; we chucks them away, for there’s nothing to eat on them - but boys though can eat anything” (Badham, 1854: 383).

It appears that what would become liquor in the eel, pie, and mash shops - the cooking liquid - served the same function as the liquid refreshment found at the coffee stalls. Badham sympathetically notes that “there can be no doubt that a warm cupful at early dawn, in a November fog must be a wonderful comfort to the working classes in London” (Badham, 1854: 384).

By the early nineteenth century however, the Thames was so polluted that it could no longer sustain significant eel populations and the Dutch ships had to stop further upstream to prevent their cargo being spoiled, “... first to Erith, then to Greenhithe, then to Gravesend” (Fort, 2003: 103, 215). Yet as Malvery’s earlier testimony demonstrates, some *schuyts* clearly continued to moor adjacent to Billingsgate in fouled waters.

Local lore suggests a Dutch trader, John Antink, sold fish, eels and perhaps pies from a makeshift shop at undetermined dates during the middle of the 1800s although *Kelly's Trades Directory* doesn't mention this business, situated at 331 Caledonian Road, until 1880 (Hunt in Hawkins, 2002: 16). In the same year another Antink, Elise Gerrard, almost certainly an immediate family relative, has a shop listed at 12a Kentish Town Road.¹³⁶ It seems that the Antink family certainly has a claim (albeit an unofficial one) in opposition to the Cooke's as progenitors of the eel and pie shops via their connection to the fish trade - although without further written proof, this remains conjecture. However, by 1898 the Antinks had bought an old fried fish shop at 74 Chapel Street (Market) in Islington and converted it to an eel and pie shop. They sold the lease in 1902 and the shop was re-leased with repairs and improvements (and conjoined with 73) by Luigi Mansi, a relation of Michele Mansi (of the Manze dynasty) who had also been involved in the eel and pie trade. This business (although no longer owned by the Manze family for some years) only closed in 2019.¹³⁷

Mayhew in 1851 had suggested that by the middle of the nineteenth century an estimated 932,340,000 tons of fish and seafood were sold by London street vendors each year. Although the eel had long been a popular and nutritious dish it was modernity that seems the driver for this extraordinary profusion of fish into the Londoner's diet. Changes to fishing boat design and propellers replacing sails and paddles meant that by the 1890s industrial amounts of seafood were being landed and transported by the new railways to the capital. These advances had certainly made many types of seafood plentiful and cheap, yet working class London does seem to be an outlier in its avowed taste for the sea. The Daily Telegraph in 1910 reported that "old superstitions die hard, and the poorer classes in England have long fostered a prejudice against fish, on the supposition that it doesn't contain anything like the amount of nutritive value as meat. The idea has been that there is

¹³⁶ *Post Office London Directory for 1880, Eel Pie Houses: 1721.*

¹³⁷ *British History Online*, accessed 19 March 2020. <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol47/pp373-404>.

"M. Manze closes: Chapel Market punters 'terribly sad' as historic pie and mash shop closes." *Islington Gazette*, April 30, 2019.

Currently, The Noted Eel and Pie House in Leytonstone is the last pie shop to store and slaughter eels on the premises. The owner, Peter Hak's great grandfather was a Dutch eel fisherman and married into the Newton pie shop dynasty around the turn of the twentieth century.

no strength in fish and that it is rather food for children and weaklings than for grown men” (in Oddy, 1970: 136).

It would seem however that the East End in particular did have a penchant for seafood. As Alex Rhys-Taylor (2020: 102) suggests of the now-closed but iconic Tubby Isaacs’ seafood stall in Aldgate, this account of a cockney craving for the fruits of the sea is seemingly “transmitted intergenerationally through the blood and culture of an ‘island race’, [only] interrupted by the city’s new global connections.” For the cockney, along with pies and mash, eels might be seen as a self-defined and so-called ‘cuisine of origin’ (Panayi, 2008) that are “specific flavours generated by environmental factors ... integral to the rituals that bind discrete communities of people together” (Martens and Warde in Rhys-Taylor, 2020: 102). More, these foods signpost how cultural communities are “‘sensed’ and experienced” within national and local mythologies (Howes and Classes in Rhys-Taylor, 2020: 102). Seafood in general as Rhys-Taylor suggests was a potent symbol for a London working class, co-opted into Empire that spoke of a clearly-defined island geography, imperial ambitions and a maritime tradition. Eels spoke also to a deeper, earlier colonial history of the high seas, ‘discovery’ and trade. This older chronology whispered by a preceding Catholic England that demanded fish on a Friday but also to the glories of Tudor sailing (and piracy) that had been “technologically and economically implicated in the advancement of the navy and the emergent colonial trade in commodities and humanity” (Loades in Rhys-Taylor, 2020: 106). It also spoke of the mediaeval commerce of the Hanseatic League that became enormously wealthy from, amongst other things, herring.¹³⁸

However, to relay Panikos Panayi’s notion of ‘cuisine of origin’ that suggests (specifically jellied) eels are quintessentially ethnically British fails to recognise the role of the migrant entrepreneurs (specifically the Irish and Dutch) and their food negotiations that were responsible for the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops.

¹³⁸ The Hanseatic League was a defensive guild-based trading bloc that at its height comprised 194 cities (including Kings Lynn and London) spread over 16 countries.

These negotiations have for many Londoners continued apace since the post-war period, increasing the diversity of foods and tastes available. The steep decline in contemporary eel stocks mirrors in some ways the dwindling appetite for the traditional cockney taste for seafood and eels in particular. Eel stalls, usually outside eel-pie shops and seafood sellers in pubs were a relatively common sight in London until perhaps the early 1980s when the forces of globalisation and immigration changed the food landscape of the capital. Robert Poole's novel, *E1* ([1961] 2012: 34) evokes this very well.

Outside the pie-shop near Bethnal Green Road, was a live-eel stall. They always stopped there for a few minutes so that Jimmy could watch the blue-black eels slithering round the pieces of ice in the shallow metal trays. You just picked out the eels you wanted and the vendor, dripping with blood and guts, chopped them on a wooden block into still-quivering two-inch sections.

The eel remains a re-occurring trope of the 'slippery' cockney. In Robert Westerby's *Wide Boys Never Work* ([1937] 2008: 189), 'The Eel' was a cockney criminal "who made a living out of phoney passports." Innumerable 'spiv' characterisations from popular culture exhibit this threatening, sometimes comic, sometimes lubricious, always deliciously unreliability figure. From Private Walker in *Dad's Army* to George Cole's Arthur Daly to any number of Ray Winstone's roles, the eel acts as an important metaphor in the shifting and unstable role of the historical cockney itself.

4.6 A Regime of Disgust

I'm not a great lover of cold things in jelly.¹³⁹

Although the eel was historically at least part of the bourgeois table, it was essentially a food of the London urban poor. Live, the creatures could be kept in puddles of water for extended periods, boiled and then jellied. With the addition of a common herb like parsley to its cooking juices, it could be served hot. In the Bourdieusian sense, the eel in this form was a 'food of necessity'. Indeed, Malvery

¹³⁹ Graham Poole owner of Manze's Pie Shop, Peckham. Interview by author, 14 December 2020.

(1908: 73) suggests that this food was “indulged in generally by sections of the poorer working classes.”

The decline in eel-eating since the end of the Second World War, but particularly within the last thirty-or-so years has been marked. Although most contemporary eel, pie and mash shops keep at least some stocks of jellied eels in their refrigerators (which can be easily converted into a hot dish by warming and the swift addition of liquor) according to Robert Kelly, “nobody eats it now” and it is reasonably rare to see it ordered.¹⁴⁰ The question is why?

It seems clear that by the 1960s what people meant when they talked about class began to change. The expansion of education, growing individualism, and the decline of deference meant that the axis of traditional class boundaries now appeared blurred (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2018). People increasingly saw themselves as ‘ordinary’ (Savage, 2005) and the subsequent Thatcherite hegemony conflated this with a panoply of middle class values. For the aspirational cockney this process was crucial in delineating a nascent individualism separating those in work from those on benefits and was synchronous with the final decline of its late nineteenth century incarnation. Essex became its spiritual home as a place for people who wanted to ‘better themselves’ and this seemed to engender “a privatised, as opposed to solidaristic civic culture” (Butler and Watt in Millington 2016: 275).

The gustatory de-centring of the eel was coterminous with this process linking a developing dynamic of taste within the London working classes with how they saw themselves. The decline in eel-eating I contend is encapsulated in what Stephanie Lawler (2005: 434) significantly suggests is “a decline in the *worth* of the working class itself.” The eel was a poor man’s food of necessity. Those that continue to eat eels are typically elderly or tend to be male and from a specific demographic that have a political interest in doing so. Many in the pie shops still call themselves working class (“I’m working class because I work”).¹⁴¹ However, this definition likely differs substantially in cultural (and sometimes economic) terms from that of their

¹⁴⁰ Robert Kelly. Interview by author, 15 December 2020.

¹⁴¹ David H. Interview by author, 14 April 2022.

Fordist parents' generations and for some, generally relies on solidarities that do not (largely) extend beyond their own ethnicity.

Whereas the pie is still popular as a moniker of a vague working classness, in general younger people, male or female, below the age of around forty will simply not countenance eating eel in any form. Much of that can be further evidenced by excavating the unstable sensory notion of disgust.

The eel appears to affect people on a distinctly *visceral* level and the gut itself - the viscera - has long been used as a metaphor to describe and gauge innate bodily thought processes: hence the notion of 'gut feelings' (Probyn 2003). In the cartography of the body, the mouth can be seen as a guardian and functions like a "safety chamber" (Rozin and Fallon, 1981).

For Mary Douglas ([1975] 2003), disgust - as evidenced through dirt or 'impurity' - was a cultural construct theorised from the Old Testament. The eel was an abomination because it came from the sea but had neither fins nor scales. The creature is encoded as a *moral* object of disgust - doubly so as it looks and moves like a snake, another Judeo-Christian symbol of sin. Of course, the basis for such 'socio-biological' explanations tends towards a 'common sense' idea that revulsion is inculcated in certain foods (or creatures) because they may be poisonous. Despite the fact that, as in the case of the eel, such ritually 'impure' foods may well be entirely nutritious (Fischer 1988: 285), this coding may easily result in feelings of disgust, revulsion and nausea.

The idea of 'uncleanliness' and morality combined within the Victorian bourgeois psyche with the discovery of the microbe and psycho-sexual hesitancy around bodily orifices. This axiom was decoded and interiorised by the proletariat themselves resulting in a self-policing hierarchy that inevitably valorised probity as a mark of their own respectability within capital. In a typical post to a private Facebook group about pie and mash shops, a customer reviews Maureen's in Crisp Street market with particular and favourable attention to its cleanliness.¹⁴²

¹⁴² The Pie Mash 'n' Liquor appreciation society, August 30, 2021. Accessed August 30, 2021. Maureen's is a popular pie shop opened in the 1950s by a husband and wife, Dave and Maureen and

This 'common sense' remains largely current within the eel and pie shop community with the valorisation of 'clean' British restaurant spaces and food as opposed to 'dirty' and 'brown' (potentially adulterated) immigrant food ("none of that foreign muck").¹⁴³

Food has the potential to corrupt the body according to Lupton (1996: 113) "because it passes through the oral boundary of the 'clean and proper' body; it becomes abject when its nature is ambiguous." More, as Lupton suggests, food, like sexual fluids occupy a sort of 'liminal' state in relation to the body's porousness. Food can be simultaneously exterior and interior and may be seen as threatening when its form is unclear and ill-defined thus threaten the integrity of the whole. Eels as both phallic and slimy, may represent this 'intimate fluid' analogy and Rhys-Taylor (2013: 234-235) further notes that the (cold) jelly surrounding the eel, and its ability to adhere to the skin, further limits our body's sense-boundary. This aspect does to some extent appear however to be highly culturally determined. As Michael Ashkenazi (1991) suggests, the Japanese appear to delight in the sticky and the slimy. Similar arguments are made for increasing hesitancy around the green liquor that is served over pies and mash and over hot, stewed eels. "My girl won't touch it - she says it looks like bogeys."¹⁴⁴

To some extent of course, we *become* what we eat by the simple act of the absorption of food into the body. Claude Fischler (1988) suggests however that it might be more correct to speak of 'incorporation' into the body and this has an ironic aspect to the mono-cultural cockney identity as the eel of course is multinational. The mouth, the symbolic gateway for bodily control is the ultimate arena for disgust and in an apposite allusion to the cockney's accent and speech pattern, Marion Halligan (in Lupton, 1996: 18) points out that the "... tongue names and the tongue tastes." What we do with our mouths, *how* we eat, is also significant. Constraints over methods of eating were, as Mennell (1985) suggests, slowly internalised as

was originally located in the East India Dock Road but moved to its current locale in Chrisp Street Market in Poplar in 1993.

¹⁴³ In the BBC series, *Till Death Do Us Part*, the cockney bigot, Alf Garnett often rails against 'dirty' foreign food as "foreign muck".

¹⁴⁴ Freedman, 2017: 212.

practises of self-control and moderation, based on emergent bourgeois notions of propriety. The eel was always a difficult fish to eat, and, in a recall of older table behaviours, bones were, as we have seen, spat onto the pie-shop floor. As a Victorian etiquette manual records, “eating is so entirely a sensual, animal gratification, that unless it is conducted with much delicacy, it becomes unpleasant to others” (Kasson in Grover, 1987: 125-126). In this way, discriminatory behaviour both about types of food and also the manner of its consumption was class-based and crucially progressed and confirmed distinction.

The humble eel and the eating of it is then an unlikely indicator of the formation and re-formation of change within the cultural sensibilities and tastes of the London working class. For the contemporary cockney, imbued with notions of social mobility, eel eating is generally identified with a squeamishness that links pastness and poverty. Simultaneously however for a very few customers, especially in Essex and within the ‘newer’ pie shops the continued eating of (especially jellied) eel as a ‘food of ordeal’ particularly as a pre-football match ritual has become a performative cultural re-enactment of a selective memory-scape based largely within the post-war 1950s and 1960s whose ‘white diaspora’ identities combine with localisms found in food (Floya in Watt, Millington and Huq, 2014: 124).

4.7 A Working Class Taste and Space

Perhaps in a nod to earlier forms of polite, communal working class eating, at the end of the meal pie and mash shop customers have traditionally taken their plates and cutlery back to the counter. In Cooke’s, this gives some of the customers a further opportunity to chat to Joe or Kim underlining the specificity of the space. These are pie *shops* or pie *houses* with their own class rituals and manners. “Be lucky... and don’t come back” says Joe laughingly to a former East End couple who regularly return to Hoxton from their adopted home in Essex to see friends and walk the old streets.

If, as Loïc Wacquant (in Skeggs, 2004: 28) suggests, it is “the location of the *cultural* practice within a system of objects and practices that define its social meaning and significance”, then for the owners and customers of the eel, pie and mash shops,

knowing the 'rules' of bourgeois society - how to 'behave', what to eat, how to eat, how to hold cutlery and to conduct oneself with 'refinement' in a restaurant space - is only half the issue. What actually matters is how these foods and practices are objectified and approved in relation to the dominant culture. And of course, they never can be. According to Bourdieu (1986: 511), the working class in the eyes of bourgeois culture will always lack "taste" and "the right ways of being and doing" - the result partly of their initial, denuded educational habitus, and more fundamentally of course because we "are born into unequal social relations."

For Marx ([1848] 1980: 44) the working class, and indeed, the very notion of class itself, is brought into existence by the bourgeoisie ("the special and essential product of the bourgeoisie"). This group was consolidated by its need for overtly political - and hence cultural representation - that Dror Wahrman (1995) evidences by the solidifications around the 1832 Reform Bill. Yet, "whereas the middle class were able to use the term 'class' to make claims on the state for recognition and to draw moral distance from the aristocracy, they depicted the working class as immoral and forced them to become accountable to the state" (Skeggs, 2015: 5). Skeggs suggests that one of the ways that the working classes were able to gain even meagre recognition as a group with an identity (as opposed to an amorphous mass) by the state, was appeal via welfare claims. To do this it had to 'perform' respectability in order to survive (Butler and Shusterman, 1999). The eel, pie and mash shop and its food are one of the very few remaining working class arenas (which additionally include football culture) that evidences this dual and complicated navigation around a relationship with propriety and virtue.

As Lawler (2005: 434) suggests, "An entire social and cultural system works to continue the constitution of white working class people as entirely devoid of value and worth." Yet, as Angela McRobbie (2002: 136) has it, "...even the poor and the disposed partake in some form of cultural enjoyment which are collective responses which make people what they are." Crucially, "working class culture ... has a different value system, one not recognised by the dominant symbolic economy" (Skeggs, 2004: 153). Indeed, London's traditional working class, as seen through the prism of their fading eel and pie shops "appears to have an alternative understanding of cultural judgement, seeing it as they practice it, as a group matter... They are not

in awe of legitimate culture and find no value in refinement (Bennett *et al*, 2009: 205).

Skeggs (2016: 5) echoes Bourdieu when she suggests that this classification “brings the perspective of the classifier into effect” and then captures “the classifier within the discourse.” Class and its allied notions of taste and acceptability depend therefore on who defines it. Ultimately, ‘working classness’ for the overwhelming majority of London’s working class is valued *more* than by London’s bourgeoisie. Further, I suggest, even for the eel-pie shops’ customers who consider themselves no longer working class in the sense of meritocratic success, this ‘essence’ of background, this vague but pertinent memorialization of the past, is vital in their self-definition and self-mythologising. That is one of the reasons why the shops still remain spaces that are significant (and more so in the current so-called, ‘culture wars’) and the food valorised. That is also why the middle classes in general, except for some vague notion of ‘heritage’, see the shops as irrelevant and their food - at best a neo-peasant cuisine and at worst - as a disgusting slop. There is simply no need for the middle classes to define their own culture in relation to it because it has no exchange value for them, is no threat and ultimately insignificant. More succinctly, the working class is marginalised from the channels of cultural engagement dominated by the middle classes and rendered invisible from them (Savage, 2000).

However, just because some working class people who use the shops can’t or are reluctant to talk in class terms doesn’t mean that they don’t recognise class, their position within capital or its signifiers. More, just because some working class customers of the eel and pie shops believe themselves to be middle class that “does not mean they stop being exploited by the capitalist class” (Skeggs, 2016: 3).

Class, more than simply an economic qualification is additionally an arena for competition around the uneven distribution of *value* that may be charted by delineating different symbolic matrices (for example, gender and race) that dispense fluid and changeable advantages (Skeggs 2004: 3; Savage, 2015: 22). The shops and the food evidenced within are a rare oasis where working class Londoners have been largely free of the historic legacy of the imposition of bourgeois meaning and accountability or at least have been able to negotiate its limits. Indeed, I would argue

that eel, pie and mash shops remain largely intimidating and exhibit the sort of reverse symbolic violence that Raymond Williams (1958) experienced in a Cambridge teashop where he was made to feel inferior to the 'cultivated people'. As Adam Boutall has it, "When you go into a pie and mash shop you've got to have an old East Ender behind the counter ... I think it'd seem weird otherwise if there'd be some posh person serving you ... all the staff look a bit rough-and-ready; you know what I mean? Every pie and mash shop I've ever been in there's someone in there that looks like they was born and brought up on it ... everyone's a bit rough ... but it's like the old pubs: it's like 'ooh, you wouldn't go in there.'"¹⁴⁵

In essence, the food and the culture that surrounds them are *differently* valued by the working class people that use them in different and unique ways to navigate a specific kind of culture. So, what might constitute an essential and authentic working class food culture represented by the London eel, pie and mash shops? Michel DeCerteau in his *Practice of Everyday Life: living and cooking* (1998: xxi) uses food as evidence of 'subordinate' people's resistance strategies. Within the contemporary neoliberal city working class food, and especially eels, pie and mash I conjecture, offer a refuge from the dominant forms of cultural production. The shops are essentially, hyper-local microresistances, "... which in turn form microfreedoms, mobilise unsuspected resources hidden among ordinary people, and in that way displace the veritable borders of the hold [of] social and political powers." In this vein, Paul Kelly recalls his childhood in the 1980s when the pie shops in Bethnal Green were local hubs where "everyone knew each other; people were talking across tables and there was a real good buzz... if they weren't down the pub, they'd be down the pie shop... you didn't have to be respectable, you could be half-pissed if you wanted to." The shops were "full of hooligans, rough houses, you know the type - what most people would say [was] an East Ender... and everyone was the same... everyone was trying to nick a pound note..." They were places "where someone's knocked over a butcher's van..." and would then try and clandestinely sell the meat.¹⁴⁶ The pie shops remain, as Greg Camp puts it, an arena "of ducking a

¹⁴⁵ Adam Boutall. Interview by author, October 19, 2021.

¹⁴⁶ Paul Kelly. Interview by author, December 15, 2020.

diving... a place to hear the banter; to hear the sounds - to know that you're socially with people..."¹⁴⁷

The shops, the sites of these resistances, are now perhaps in some ways closer to what Jukka Gronow, (2018) suggests are 'social worlds in themselves' - similar to Robert Bellah's 'enclave culture' (Bellah, 1985) and Michael Maffesoli's ideas of 'neo-tribes' (Maffesoli, 1998). Here, new forms of solidarity have emerged into a post-modern *sociality*. The Marxist model of a 'class-in-itself' may no longer necessarily be a 'class-for-itself', rather a more relational model is postulated that is more loosely formed through a series of external identifications. Individuals form overlapping, temporary subcultural (interest) groups that are based on taste, choice and everyday interactions - like eating. Cohen (2017: 114-115) suggests that collective identities associated with becoming working class, such as 'informal' apprenticeships constituted by family, school or workplace have become "decentred" into individual, atomised interest groups, grievances or desires/demands. In this way there is a sentimental nostalgia for past solidarities - but this is simply a "material sensation of mobility" that is "an evanescent momentum which mirrors an underlying socioeconomic stasis." The failure of these endeavours, however, often result in a 'centripetal' trajectory - where groups may reform to redefine themselves as the sole or 'rightful heirs' of these traditions through a performative habitus, that may appear as a stable point for "re-formatting working class identities" but remains "haunted by a sense of their social dislocation." The 'tribes', formed around groups within the London working classes - from so-called 'chav' to self-declared 'middle class' property-owning Essex 'refugees' - bond around "common filiations, fixed identities and more or less fictive kinships, as well as shared memoryscapes linked to local places of pride" (Cohen, 2017: 116).

The shops are also perhaps a living archaeology of some elements of what remains of the pre-capitalist conviviality, lost to the 'internal enclosures' of the mid-Victorian street-market clearances. These remnants in turn echo earlier, largely rural festivities that celebrated the season's changes. This fading reverberation flickered in the Pearlies' street parties before they were banned in the 1920s; it was re-kindled in the

¹⁴⁷ Greg Camp. Interview by author, October 5, 2021.

welcome of the Victorian coffee stall and lives still in the warmth of the steamy-windowed eel-pie shop.

The shops and their food are then portals to a certain past - but not a direct one. Bourdieu (2011) echoed Marx when he suggested that the social world is “accumulated history.” These are multi-headed gateways: different shops have different heritages and different shops and their locales evidence slightly different tastes and traditions. Much depends on their specific hyper-local history. Social media post about rivalries between shops reflects this and that history leaves traces on the actions of social actors - but also on the *context* of their actions so that the shops are also a palimpsestic negotiation with a disputed and reimagined authenticity “... *and* the lived traditions and practices through which these understandings are expressed” (Hall in Samuel, 1981: 26).

There remain the myriad inscriptions upon the working class so that one might be simultaneously a ‘cheeky, lovable’ cockney as well as an East End gangster. This dual projection has enabled the working class to “generate their *own* [my italics] use-value *and* to exist beyond moral governance, enabling a critique of the constraints of morality (Skeggs, 2004: 22). This duality is the basis for the anti-pretentiousness of the food and the culture within the eel and pie shops, simultaneous with music hall performers who (carefully) satirised the ‘snobs’ and the ‘affected’ bourgeoisie (Vicinus, 1974). This notion remains a cover-all mechanism against the ‘posh’ and defends the ‘ordinary’: the home-cooked, the comfort and the warmth of a simple meal and a way to “de-value the valuers” (Skeggs, 2004: 114).

Anti-pretentiousness also remains an armour against conceit - a resistance against the “false consciousness bred into the bones of the workers” (Engels, 1953: 522-523). This is of course double-edged. In one sense it has somewhat insulated a working class movement yet has failed to articulate a resistance to capital which has kept the London working class entombed within and constrained by the acceptance of social hierarchy. Typical of this is the character of Jimmy’s mother in Robert Poole’s *E1* ([1961] 2012: 98) where, “She wished ‘e won the scholarship, but what was the good? They only got their ‘eads full o’ strange ideas and got too big for their boots.”

For all that, the pie-shop exhibition of the ‘piss-take’; the ‘having a laugh’ (and also the contemptable modern, ‘banter’, so often a cover-all for politically incorrect, micro-aggressions) remain a way to reject authority. Paul Willis (in Skeggs, 2004: 114) suggests that this kind of humour isn’t just about getting through the monotony of the working day but a kind of ‘doubling’ where the real is simultaneously taken to be fictitious but also “as a practical cultural form in which the variable and ambiguous nature of labour power is articulated.” Oddly, these ‘micro-resistances’ may have reshaped contemporary cultural capital in that the form “now takes cosmopolitan and ironic forms that appear to be pluralist and anti-elitist (Savage, 2015: 51). In this sense the identification of class as evidenced in working class spaces like the eel and pie shops is part of a process of evolution. For Skeggs (2004, 117), this “is central to understanding contemporary class relations. The significance of representations lies in the way in which they become authored and institutionalised through policy and administration, how they produce the normative, how they designate moral value and how they are positioned by negative and pathological representations are both aware and resistant.”

So, the accrual of taste, even within different circles of the working classes themselves, is ascribed by middle class values that are enforced within a reproducing power relationship to differentiate themselves and attribute value. For example, to making oneself ‘tasteful’ through judging other people as ‘tasteless’: this is *exactly* the process that is aimed at people from Essex described as ‘vulgar’ and unmodern. Yet, working class culture is *differently* valued amongst itself, and the eel, pie and mash shops offer a rare glimpse into a realm of space, taste, freedom and relaxation that are at least a negotiation with the hegemonic culture.

Conclusion

Food is a universal signifier for membership, solidarity and belonging. As Falk (1994: 70) remarks, “...members of the same culture eat the same kind of food.” Within this contemporary framework, pie, mash and eels are simultaneously ‘the London ambrosia’, a legitimate and proud working class institution as Michael Collins (2021) has it, and a living gustatory link with an early-capitalist past and a gastro-nationalist present.

If the eel, pie and mash shops and the food they serve are anything, they are arenas of security. They are one of the few places where working class people are not silenced both literally and metaphorically. The shops are a foci for lived bodies that are framed by cultural practices in which identity is performed through a sensual inscription that constitutes “a realm of shared intelligibility” (Charlesworth, 2000: 17). This freedom, exhibited through palimpsestic gestures and gustatory taste, is held in the physical body of the customers through a sort of ‘comportment’ as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (in Charlesworth, 2000: 17) suggests where the body goes through a kind of “postural impregnation” sensing and ‘feeling’ signification. This is a classed experience of place and taste: the body relaxing when it enters a space apposite to its class background evidenced by the changed, ‘classed’ behaviour of the customers. In this way, the physical landscape is inscribed by working class bodies and the working class bodies are inscribed by the space and the food (Bourdieu, 2000: 141).

I suggest that the food literally ties the East Ender to the ‘terroir’ of the London street with its complex notions of cleanliness and anti-pretension but gives us a unique insight into what the convivialities of a closed, almost secretive heritage of traditional working class culture in late capital actually looks like. This simple, historical dish, built from ‘foods of necessity’, is a prism through which an urban proletariat and a decamped suburban diaspora dispute authenticity and originality in an ironic Appadurain dual over a dish that no-one is interested in appropriating because it is unable to travel outside its ‘field of exchange’ (Bourdieu, 1997).

In conclusion, I suggest that the shops are a living archaeology of early capitalist conviviality, the remnants of Victorian feeding stations and a successful taxonomic descendant of London’s first popular working class eating houses. In the contemporary neo-liberal city, they offer an insight into a private ‘working classness’ that is a negotiation with, and a micro-resistance to, the hegemonic culture memorialised within a largely insular, conservative cockney culture infused with a local patriotism (Tuan 1974) that signals to the contemporary ‘culture wars’ around issues of immigration and gentrification.

The eel, pie and mash shops show us a glimpse of a different way to live and a different way to taste.

5. The cockney saudade

Introduction

“Walking through streets that were memories of streets, correct in some details, quite wrong in others, down through Bethnal Green and Whitechapel...” (Sinclair, 2004: 112).

In this chapter, I explore the contemporary landscape of the eel, pie and mash shops and their concomitant interrelated cockney identity through the different types of memories and nostalgias that are performed within them.

The memories that breathe and multiply within the present day shops are linked to the historical specificity of London and their unique but largely overlooked place within British gustatory and political culture. The current memorialisations partly derive from the primary source of the largely invented Victorian music hall character of the cockney. The shops also simultaneously embody earlier, potentially antecedent capitalist notions of conviviality as well as the cultural repercussions of nineteenth century class privation and defeat that led to them as zones of consolation (Stedman Jones, 1974).

The memories of the shops are further entangled and complicated within the simultaneous memorialisations of a separate owner and customer class. The former, largely the historical product of an ideology of the small masters concomitant with notions of Radicalism and individualism has melded with an entrepreneurial proletarianism. This group valorises working class culture, largely sharing customs and language but is generally economically superior. The latter is a customer base that currently comprises of a white, proletarian precariat clinging to their traditional hyper-localities against a backdrop of globalisation, immigration and gentrification. They are further enjoined by a diaspora of re-located Londoners and their descendants found mostly within Essex and the Medway towns who are (generally

but not exclusively) conservative and Conservative in their culture. It is this group, self-defined as the heirs of past class solidarities through re-imagined performities and shared, hybrid memoryscapes linked to historical hyper-localities (often via football team loyalties) that remain “haunted by a sense of their social dislocation” (Cohen, 2017). These tangled, interrelated and often contradictory memorialisations increasingly encounter and compete with each other on (especially) social media and I refer to them as ‘polyphonic’.

The cockney is by nature an essentially nostalgic and sentimental creature. From its humbled, primary incarnation as a rebellious horde of the abyss to its rebirth as a theatrical, largely loyal hostage-servant of the elites within early modernity, it was made to perform respectability to gain even meagre welfare claims (Butler and Shusterman, 1999; Skeggs, 2016), being remembered and forgotten concomitant to its usefulness to capital. Throughout its numerous incarnations it has always looked backwards, yearning for a better time and valorising its privations as central to its integrity and spirit. Each episodic memory epoch, from the jingo of ‘Arry to the brave cockney of the Blitz has contributed a palimpsestic layer to its nostalgic self-remembering and testament.

Memories of cockney and the shops were, I contend, historically mediated by each generation apposite to their own context but largely congruent with their predominant contemporary hegemony. This confluence begins to break down by the 1990s and I argue that the present reimagining of cockney and recent valorisation of the eel, pie and mash shops was initially provoked by the cultural ruthlessness of New Labour’s embrace of globalisation and its acceleration of neoliberal reforms which further undercut the traditional structures of working class life.

I argue that the contemporary cockney memory scripts being performed and reinscribed are those of a largely ageing post-war generation confused and bitter at the ending of the gains of the *Trente Glorieuses* - an ending for which as enablers of, and a conduit to, an initial neoliberal embrace via Thatcherism, they hold part responsibility, the culmination of a sort of working class death drive. These confrontations coincided with an established melancholia around the loss of the fantasy of a British omnipotence crystallised as a post-colonial nostalgia.

These were the underlying causes of the Brexit vote, the alleged turn to populism and the contemporary so-called culture wars. In this chapter I trace the contours of this contemporary memory epoch and thereby simultaneously examine the changing nature of the twentieth-first century cockney.

I take as my starting point the “slippage of terms from the personal to the cultural” (Radstone, 2010) to consider how personal memorialisations of a humble but ritualised food impact on a wider culture that identifies through what Yi Fu Tuan (1974) refers to as a ‘local patriotism’ with a national referent. In this way I move from the personal to the political. First, I trace the context of, and what I identify as, the trigger for the contemporary anger of London’s white working class.

5.1 “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.” (Brillat-Savarin, [1825] 1970: 13).

In the 1970s as Wolfgang Streeck (2017) has it, capital had begun to seek expansion and flow outwards from the protected markets of the recovering post-war economies turning “nation-states into markets”. As an antidote to economic stagnation and the growing power of workers, what was to become known as neoliberalism came to be seen as fundamental to the reimposition of a capitalist hegemony. The role of food and diet, undertheorized in this historical context, was a small but significant arena that was part of the social landscape of neoliberal change. Initially, and concomitant with the ‘relative’ decline of a national agriculture policy that mirrored a growing internationalism of imported food, the eating habits of an increasingly affluent working class remained broadly unchanged (Edgerton, 2018: 479). Especially true of what would become known as the ‘non-aspirational’ working class, people invariably ate a version of what their parents had eaten. These were the meals that Douglas (1975) had explored and charted, the configuration and rhythm of which had remained largely consistent for a century or more. By the Thatcher era, the food landscape had begun to alter significantly. Local markets had been largely superseded by supermarket conglomerates and so-called ‘fast’ and frozen foods began to affect the footfall around the eel, pie and mash shops. Diet, like the pace of life itself, was becoming increasingly based on speed of preparation

and 'sophistication' - an idealised, cosmopolitan vision that mirrored the aspirational, hegemonic striving of the 'competitive individual'.

The everyday food landscape of the London working class had always differed slightly from national norms in that it included large immigrant communities whose diet inevitably spilled into its culture and onto its plate. In that sense, and because of what patronisingly might be called the valorisation of 'ethnic food' by the gentrifying middle classes, the Londoner's palate was by definition slightly more diverse. The entrepreneurial cockney, from the Victorian 'counter-jumper' to the Mod of the 'Swinging Sixties', always had a taste for 'the finer things in life' that might be found in abundance not far away, 'up West'. However, whilst family-focussed communities in the East End remained, the traditional cultures of greasy-spoon 'caffs', dingy, smoke-stained pubs and eel, pie and mash shops lingered on in the ever deepening penumbras of old ghost markets and crumbling, neglected council estates.

At the tail end of Thatcherism and the during the Major interregnum, a complex nostalgia centred around this 'traditional' way of life flowered and was simultaneous with a partial bourgeois colonisation of popular culture. By the end of the 1990s this revived valorisation of 'ordinariness' would feed into the larger political phenomena of the so-called 'Third Way' to become the dominant cultural motif of the era adjacent to the ideas of the End of History (Fukuyama, 1992) and the collapse of the Soviet Union. This was an era where a generation traumatised by the failure to find an alternative to a seemingly never-ending Conservative polity disavowed politics and embraced culture: a rebellion against the seriousness and allegedly dour 'worthy causes' of the 1980s. The Blair years were marked by an initial and expedient but ultimately deceptive cultural convergence with the symbols of working class life. Its re-joining to an authoritarian populism (Hall, 1978) was, I argue, ultimately at the root of current disillusionment with much of the contemporary political process.¹⁴⁸ As Stuart Hall and Martin Jaques (1998) would suggest, Blair embodied "...the ultimate pessimism - that there is only one version of modernity, the one elaborated by the Conservatives over the last 18 years."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Dahrendorf, 1999: 13–17.

¹⁴⁹ Stuart Hall and Martin Jaques on Blair quoted in Harris, John. "Marxism Today: the forgotten visionaries whose ideas could save Labour". *The Guardian* 29 September 2015

During the early Blair years, and led predominately by the style press, there was a brief and complicated colonisation of some of the textures of proletarian life, its food and its locations. Set largely in the fading, physical detritus of the post-industrial city, they were used as props in editorial features but also as a marker of ‘authenticity’ for the young and hip.

As far back as 1912, Thorstein Veblen had recognised that class distinction could be quantified through conspicuous consumption and during this period what became known as ‘poor chic’, an inverted appropriation of “multiple symbols traditionally associated with working class and underclass life” (Halnon Bettez, 2002: 503) became a significant trend. Celebrities affected what might be called a “lower class masquerade” of impersonating poverty in what Karen Halnon Bettez (2002: 516) suggests was a “rationally organised type of class vacationing” which treated poverty as a destination to visit that temporally (and safely) objectified the fear of downward mobility. One might encounter the ‘heroin chic’ of Corinne Day’s models posing in a fish and chip shop or Blur, a British band that partly came to symbolise the era, photographed initially as “dandyish fops” and then “streetwise casuals” lounging in a greasy spoon cafe, their lead singer affecting a ‘mockney’ accent (Maconie, 1999). This further pointed to a convenient cultural appropriation of popular modernism which the cockney youth of a previous generation had, in their own way, authentically embraced but in whose 90s iteration Mark Fisher (2014) would later presciently describe as ‘the slow cancellation of the future’. Not for nothing would Blur’s second album be titled *Modern life is rubbish*.

Chris Clunn, a working class photographer shooting mostly music in this period saw his chance however and managed to publish the first book about the (then) fast disappearing pie and mash shops in 1995 with the help of the Museum of London who briefly saw the shops as an object of heritage. “In hindsight” he recalls, “I think they might have taken it on because it was a novelty ... something that they didn’t know about.”¹⁵⁰ However, the shops made no real imprint on lasting bourgeois

¹⁵⁰ Chris Clunn. Interview by author, 17 February 2022.

consciousness unlike London's decaying 'caff' scene having little exchange value apart from their novelty amongst an increasingly gentrified landscape.¹⁵¹

The 'New Lad' phenomena which segued into Britpop and Blair was almost entirely retrogressive and sought comfort in the cultural ephemera of its devotees own 1970s teenage years.¹⁵² It celebrated a retrenchment of sexual stereotypes and sought (alleged) alliances with a long-established and largely conservative proletarian culture from which its parents had emerged and challenged. It was acquisitive and once again danced to "the joyous ringing of capital's cash tills" (Blackwell and Seabrook, 1986: 10).

Football, a corresponding and traditionally central feature of London working class life and identity, historically linked to the rituals, memorialisations and masculinities within the eel, pie and mash shops, also experienced a significant cultural colonisation by forces of capital. Dogged by hooliganism for decades, both the Taylor Report (1990) and the launch of the Premier League (1992) marked turning points that meant the sport was no longer to be regarded as simply a part of what Stedman Jones (1974) had referred to as a 'culture of consolation' but as a reborn arena of distraction around the middle class dinner table. Nick Hornby's memoir, *Fever Pitch* (1992) concomitant with the capture of the television rights by Rupert Murdoch's BskyB and the developing internationalism of the game made football a palatable dish for the chattering classes - a bone of contention that continues to rankle with working class fans to this day.

These allegedly class-transcending notions were almost all however, according to the critic Andy Medhurst, invented personas created by those on the fringes of the cultural industries. "Loaded, Fantasy Football, Men Behaving Badly [were] all created by middle class men with degrees. This celebration of working class culture is an assumed identity" (Turner, 2012).

¹⁵¹ For an exploration of the resurgent interest in London's post-war modernist café culture, see Maddox, 2003.

¹⁵² The term 'New Lad' was coined by Sean O'Hagan in *Arena Magazine* in 1993.

By the dog days of the Major administration there had also begun the framing of a long delayed cultural contestation around the notion of Englishness itself. Blair had situated himself apart from the former premier's invocation of "long shadows on county grounds, warm beer [and] invincible green suburbs" by draping his party in the Union Jack.¹⁵³ New Labour, utilising both Elgar's *Nimrod* and *Land of Hope and Glory* in party political broadcasts, unashamedly sought to reclaim the flag. As Peter Mandelson had it, "[I]t is restored from years as a symbol of division and intolerance" (Davey, 1999: 11). Indeed, despite a furore around the singer Morrissey's lyrics ("England for the English...") on songs like *The National Front Disco* and his appearance against a backdrop of skinheads at Madstock in Finsbury Park 1992, the iconography passed into passive acceptability with Oasis and the Spice Girls appropriating it as an 'ironic' nod to the Carnaby Street 'Swinging' 1960s. Hywel Williams writing a leader piece for the *Observer* around the fiftieth anniversary celebrations for VE-Day in 1995 drew a line from Blair's walk down a flag-festooned Mall to Atlee's post-war landslide as the creation of "a seductive, subterranean folk memory" (Turner, 2013: 304). Yet this patriotic renewal would grow deeper roots, not only in the gathering pace of (at this point largely irrelevant but growing) Euro-sceptic sentiments on the fringes of the Conservative Party but also in the generational angst about masculinities and fatherhood combined with an invocation of nostalgic military pride of a generation untested in combat. This was the first era in which those in politics or public life had not directly fought in a war but ironically in an age of 'liberal' interventions subsequently started several very significant ones.¹⁵⁴ John O'Farrell's *The Best a Man Can Get* (1997) and Tony Parson's *Man and Boy* (1999) largely echo the sentiments of Gary Sparrow, a character in the BBC sitcom *Goodnight, Sweetheart* (1993) who journeys back in time to the East End Blitz and reflects how, "Our fathers, they did national service... experiences that marked their shift into manhood". The show, interesting in itself by its use of condensed temporalities around the character of the cockney, articulated gendered fears that masculine purpose like the 'stoic' East End itself was disappearing - "fading in the light of late capitalism" (Millette, 2017: 127). At the Labour Party conference in 1997, Blair suggested that he wanted to make Britain "pivotal" in the world and "to use the

¹⁵³ John Major. Speech to the Conservative Group for Europe, 22 April 1993.

¹⁵⁴ For the context of these neoliberal conflicts see - Ali, 2015.

superb reputation of our armed forces, not just for defence, but as an instrument of influence.”¹⁵⁵ This salute to an overt militarism would inhabit the next decades eventually genuflecting towards a crude racial reductionism, a resurgent British nationalism and an anti-immigrant polity which would once again find favour within the white working classes of the East End and Essex.

By this time, “...some of those creators of this culture were starting to have their doubts, concerned that what had been a nuanced retreat into the security of a middle class adolescence was now little more than an ill-educated caricature”. As Simon Nye had it, “I do feel like I’ve created a monster... I despise job culture” (Turner, 2012: 54-55). As it gathered momentum, the culture grew less ironic and started to appeal to a younger, more proletarian audience. This moment was however profound for Britain’s working classes as within a couple of years the notion of the ‘chav’ would enter into the class lexicon to describe “those who behaved like lads without the income or education to justify their conduct” (Turner, 2013: 55). ‘Chav’ became a new orthodoxy in the language of class and went well beyond Orwell’s much quoted line about the working classes as either objects of pity or comic relief. This, a revitalised distinction through contempt as if the ‘popular’ gains of the 1960s and 1970s had never happened was deployed against a backdrop of increasing poverty and declining social mobility marking the passage of appropriation of working class culture to its overt demonisation.

In the first few years of New Labour, and despite the denigration of the terminology of class in favour of ‘inclusion’ and ‘social mobility’, food and indeed working class corporeality re-emerged as a main arena of social distinction (Cheng, Olsen, Southerton and Warde, 2007). The term ‘obesogenic’ became current to describe social and environmental factors that pointed to what in 1995 the UK Low Income Project Team described as ‘food deserts’ where poverty led to diminished access to sources of healthy food (Colas, Alejandro, Levi and Zubaida, 2018: 197). Indeed, Will Atkinson and Christopher Deeming (2015: 878) suggested that it was clear within the contemporary sociology of food that not only “particular orientations [continued to be] grounded in possession of resources” but that for a large section of

¹⁵⁵ Accessed at <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=203>

the community - and despite Richard A. Peterson's (1992) suggestion of a growing 'omnivorousness' - "[T]he heavy, the substantial, the functional, the cheap, the sugary/salty ... [were] most closely associated with the dominated class, indicating a prioritisation of matter over manner rooted in particular conditions of existence..." (Atkinson and Deeming, 2015: 878, 886). In an ironic reversal of Gilray's satirical cartoons from the late eighteenth century, it was the working classes that were now likely to be fat but the attachment to a behavioural and especially moral perspective of this was still prevalent. Once again, the working class culture and body, regardless of circumstance, was perceived as deficient.

The Blair years increasingly saw within culture a retrenchment of 'ironic', politically incorrect satire that mercilessly parodied the working classes. These drew on much older stereotypes of criminality, fecklessness and miscegenation and came to re-project bourgeois disgust back onto an 'ordinariness' that only a short time before they had culturally valorised. Its widescale application might be seen as a class revenge on the gains of proletarian popular culture of the previous two decades. Imogen Tyler (2008: 31) succinctly points to the role of laughing at the poor as "boundary forming" to situate them as 'lower' and 'othered'. Food and its signalling was a prime battlefield.

Whilst the New (Labour) Establishment ate at Granita and the River Café ("... a very expensive restaurant where you eat peasant cuisine and drink out of cheap beakers"), it proclaimed meritocracy and equality of opportunity.¹⁵⁶ For the neoliberal managerial and corporate classes that now held cultural ascendancy across the political spectrum, those that concentrated on "getting fed" and focused on the "here and now" were deemed insufficiently aspirational (Atkinson and Deeming, 2015: 878). Within this formulation and Blair's advocacy of a 'European café culture', middle class denial was contrasted with "working class excess... [that was] represented through vulgarity" (Skeggs, 2004: 102).

Congruent to this language, the celebrity chef Jamie Oliver, perhaps the era's epitome of 'Cool Britannia', lambasted parents, who, for whatever reason, failed to sit

¹⁵⁶ De Lisle, Leanda. "New Labour, same old snobbery" *The Guardian*. July 8, 1999.

around a table to eat dinner as "what we have learnt to call 'white trash'".¹⁵⁷

Anticipating the contemporary so-called 'culture war' by two decades, Oliver linked the economic choices of millions to a moral judgement. As Katie Beswick (2020: 82) has stated, these crude representations of working classness became "totalising narratives" increasingly damning those whose identities had been formed around, for example, pie and mash shops and the original communitarian culture they represented.

The broad brush strokes of derision painted by a Third Way bourgeois evangelism however failed to articulate a London-specific context of an increasingly global city with its concomitant cultural transmission where a cockney might well now not be white nor simply the clichéd shaven headed 'white-van man'. More, it failed to articulate the delineations (and indeed confusions around definitions) within and around the London working class itself. It was not uncommon and remains the case as Nicola Ford suggested of the pie and mash shop where she works in Harold Hill, that one might see "a Jag or a Roller" parked outside a pie shop, it's owner revisiting his (or her) past food heritage.¹⁵⁸ Robert Cooke regularly sees in his Chelmsford pie and mash shop "... bricklayers from Brentwood... wearing Rolexes"¹⁵⁹ Indeed, the owners of both the Cooke's and the Manze's dynasties always had a penchant for expensive cars and large houses, emblems of their extraordinary wealth.¹⁶⁰

Cockney was always about, as Dick Hobbs (1988) has it, "entrepreneurial proletarianism" and some had done as Ian Dury sang, "very well". It wasn't that the cockney working class was necessarily antithetical to contemporary gustatory fashion (or 'posh food') rather they relied on a memorialisation and self-valorisation of a food that was based on comfort, and which held within it its origin story. Indeed, initially Blair as an heir to Thatcherism had largely carried the conservative, aspirational working class cockney, historically suspicious of the state, expounding dreams of home ownership, enhanced individualism and financial opportunity. The

¹⁵⁷ O'Neil, Brendan. "Roasting the Masses" *The Guardian* 27 August 2008.

¹⁵⁸ Nicola Ford. Interview by author June 12, 2022.

¹⁵⁹ Robert Cook. Interview by author, September 10, 2021.

¹⁶⁰ Graham Poole. Interview by author September 16, 2021. At his prime before the Second World War, Michael Mansi, the founder of the Manzi dynasty had fourteen businesses and a collection of Italian cars.

image of the 'welfare scrounger', a well-designed folk devil as articulated by Stuart Hall, was (and remains) very appealing to the cockney working class. Here potentially was a place where 'Mondeo Man' and 'White Van man' could meet. However, the (alleged) initial championing of working class culture and its subsequent demonisation was, I argue, an early trigger point for the beginning of a rebellion against the project of what became to be seen as an over-educated, remote, metropolitan liberal elite. As Streeck (2017: 10) succinctly puts it, however this was "a cultural struggle of a special kind, one in which the moralisation of a globally expanding capitalism goes hand in hand with the demoralisation of those who find their interests damaged by it."

When Blair declared the class war over in 1999, a statement confirmed by subsequent Conservative governments, he accelerated a de-coupling of class and vote and indeed ushered in the emergence of "class non-voting" (Evans and Tilley, 2017: 193). Here perhaps was a start of a nostalgia for a pre-globalised world, a disillusionment and rage at what became to be seen as 'cartel parties', succinctly noted in an Essex pie shop as "...all these pricks, the politicians... [with their] ... general elections and fucking bye-elections and all the rest of it... fuck 'em they're not worth it."¹⁶¹ Here perhaps were the hazy beginnings of a polity that opposed so-called 'experts' that would lead eventually to an age of 'post-factual politics' (Katz and Mair, 1995).

For the cockney, distinction, the denigration of class habitat and a cuisine of comfort was entirely significant: it meant that despite the fact that many had become wealthy during the previous decades, they were still largely unable to join the 'respectable' table. The cockney East End turned increasingly to Essex down the A13 carrying with it a "freight of memory" (Sinclair, 2004: 58) that would become "a key political signifier in contemporary British culture" (Dave, 2006: 152). Here it would combine and synthesise with older, reimagined, fluid but contested polyphonic memories of what cockney culture was and 'should be' creating an odd simulacra of that which Sinclair (2004: 95) suggests "used to be jellied-eel London."

¹⁶¹ Ken, (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 20 May 2022.

The sustained attack on working class corporeality, food and wider culture that began under Blair but continued under successive Conservative governments was in no small way a starting point for both the contemporary indignant populism evidenced amongst some sections of the London working class and its allied, multivalent, reinscribed and performative nostalgias. This populist anger saw its fruition in the vote for Brexit.

The Brexit narrative significantly correlates to the constituency of reactionary populism that can be found within the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops, especially in Essex. As Danny Dorling (2016) has conclusively shown, only 24% of social classes D and E and voted to leave the European Union giving lie to the statement that Brexit was simply a cry from the economically impoverished, 'left behinds'.¹⁶² Rather the vote united two significant contemporary trajectories congruent to a modern cockney identity.

The first was an Empire nostalgia valorised largely amongst an ageing post-war demographic birthed within the security of a national economy that significantly ignored (or more succinctly I suggest, were never taught) the projects' colonial past (Virdee, Satnam and McGeever, 2018). The second, the result of a continued cultural demonisation of the working class and the politics of austerity following the 2008 crisis, led to the resurrection of a dormant, racist Powellite English nationalism framed within the politics of white working class victimhood (Ware, 2008). This had (very long) roots within a significantly earlier inculcation of a racialised national identity by the elites within the working classes that started after the defeat of Chartism. This had been periodically deployed over generations by the State through one of the many subsequent cockney identities as the 'defensive trench' of Empire. This fusion of a 'whitened' working class into an Imperial Britain was historically a Conservative project but had been sustained by a Labour Party historically loyal to the State. When Thatcher declared that there was no such thing as society, let alone class, a new social contract predicated on race had to be built to consolidate the nation (Barker, 1981; Gilroy, 1987). Now,

¹⁶² The National Readership Survey classifies social classes D and E as the unskilled working class and the non-working (state pensioners, casual low-grade workers and the unemployed claiming benefits).

race became the modality in which class [was] lived, the medium through which class relations [were] experienced, the form in which it [was] appropriated and 'fought through' (Hall, 1980: 341 in Virdee, 2014: 163).

Significantly, the defeat of traditional working class political structures, including those of anti-racism during the 1980s, led to a realignment of the forces of the nationalist right that seeped across mainstream political parties and the press to form an emergent consensus.

After the 2001 riots, largely framed as racial, Maurice Glassman's Blue Labour faction, in pursuit of 'traditional', largely right-wing Labour voters, championed the social conservatism of 'flag and family' against the now Muslim 'other'. This was aligned with a growing discourse against multiculturalism, the nebulous 'political correctness' and for immigration controls (Virdee, Satnam and McGeever, 2018). After the 7/7 bombings in London, a narrative grew that "Muslims were the beneficiaries of a weak state and a misguided liberal multicultural policy" (Rhodes, 2010). In 2007, the Labour MP for Barking, Margaret Hodge deployed the language of the BNP to decry "the legitimate sense of entitlement felt by the indigenous family overrides the legitimate need demonstrated by new migrants."¹⁶³ The following year the BBC screened the notorious 'White Season' that in part reintroduced and 'beatified' the ideas of Enoch Powell (Bourne, 2008). This was as Bottero (2009) suggests, nothing less than the construction of a new and excluded 'cultural' minority - the white working class.

Between 2005-2010, despite the financial crisis, immigration was deemed a priority by the electorate (Evans and Chzhen in Sobolewska and Ford, 2020: 163). The concomitant national 'sovereignty' narrative, confined so long to the fringes of the Euro-sceptic Right, re-emerged within the mainstream of the Conservative Party. Indeed, "[I]n domestic elections UKIP was mobilised in the same kind of voters, with the same kind of concerns, as the BNP" (Ford and Godwin in Sobolewska and Ford,

¹⁶³ Hodge, Margaret. "A message to my fellow immigrants", *The Observer*, 20 May 2007.

2020: 167). This trajectory was adjacent to Nigel Farage's allied UKIP rhetoric around the elite's benefit from neoliberal globalisation against the 'common man'.

In 2005, David Cameron an old Etonian married to an Astor had become the leader of the Conservative Party. Formerly the Director of Corporate Affairs at Carlton Television, Cameron fitted well Farage's subsequent populist jibe about voters being "fed up to the back teeth with cardboard cut-out careerists in Westminster".¹⁶⁴

Cameron, at heart a social liberal, attempted to steer his party away from its growing libertarian right wing and the burgeoning grassroots Eurosceptic insurgency of UKIP. These he had previously described as "fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists".¹⁶⁵ On becoming Prime Minister in 2010 as part of a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats, and despite his attempts to mollify the right of his party with plans for a new immigration and asylum policy, Cameron found it increasingly difficult to quieten Farage's triangulation of identity politics, patriotism and working class opposition to globalised mass immigration.

In 2013, to placate his Eurosceptic backbenchers and win back Tory defectors to UKIP, Cameron promised an 'in' or 'out' referendum on membership of the European Union if he won the next election. This did not entirely appease his distrustful backbenchers nor UKIP voters whose "primary demand was immigration control" (Sobolewska and Ford, 2020: 185). Re-elected in 2015 with a Conservative majority he selected the 23rd of June 2016 as the date for the referendum on whether the UK should remain within or leave the EU. Cameron campaigned for Remain with 'Britain Stronger in Europe', a cross-party lobbying group whilst Boris Johnson, a populist politician, journalist and former London mayor recently returned to the Commons, became one of the figureheads of the Vote Leave campaign. The subsequent slim victory for Leave led to Cameron's resignation. He was replaced by Teresa May whose 'hostile environment' strategy became the cornerstone for ongoing immigration policy. Her premiership, dominated by the Brexit withdrawal agreement was ended after a vote of no confidence in her negotiations with Brussels. She was succeeded by Johnson in 2019 with the populist mantra 'get Brexit done'. His victory

¹⁶⁴ Accessed at <https://www.ukpol.co.uk/nigel-farage-2013-speech-to-ukip-conference/>

¹⁶⁵ Carlin, Brenden. "Off-the-cuff Cameron accuses Ukip of being 'fruitcakes and closet racists'". *The Daily Telegraph*, 5 April 2006.

symbolised the annexation of the Conservative Party by a libertarian faction wrapped in a flag of xenophobic nationalism.

What became known as Brexit did not however happen overnight but was rather a culmination of decades of coalescing forces. Growing public distrust of a political class recruited increasingly from a professional, managerial background was felt especially (but certainly not exclusively) amongst older, less well-educated working class communities. In addition, a re-racialisation (Schwarz, 1996) of British politics from the immediate post-colonial era had been revived in an age of neoliberal precarity. Apparently ‘Enoch was right’ after all. This focussed working class anger especially onto recent Eastern European immigrants and the murder of Arkadiusz Jozwik in the Stow shopping centre in Harlow, Essex in 2016 “encapsulated the febrile summer of the European referendum” (Cowley, 2018: 128). Much of this was articulated by the radical right’s UKIP messaging of ‘Brussels plus’. This succeeded in channelling the deep post-war racial disaffection of a generation that had additionally lived through the legacy of deindustrialisation and saw a memorialised way of life slowly fading. In this sense, the EU simply “came to represent all of the ills of modern society” (Ford and Godwin, 2014: 275).

Reflecting largescale demographic changes around class, income, education and ethnicity, 59% of London voted to remain in the European Union.¹⁶⁶ Two of the UK's five districts with the highest percentage of people which backed Brexit were in Essex.¹⁶⁷ London had irrevocably changed for the cockney who nostalgically identified with a mono-racial, post war landscape. For some who had made the Great Trek eastwards, Essex was now a place for those like ‘Brian’ where “We've got our own kind down here... and you do try to hang on to it.”¹⁶⁸ Eels, pie and mash had increasingly become a comforting link to a mythologised East End past.

¹⁶⁶ <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/elections-and-referendums/past-elections-and-referendums/eu-referendum/results-and-turnout-eu-referendum/eu-referendum-results-region-london>

¹⁶⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36617396>

¹⁶⁸ Brian (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 14 May 2022.

5.2 “Nothing tastes as good as the past” (Serematakis: 1996: 1)

“Sometimes emotions are stirred into food and become what you feel.”¹⁶⁹

As the anthropologist Daniel Miller suggests in *The Comfort of Things* (2008) the objects that we value help form a bridge between ourselves and the people we love. Food is one such object and it is central to understanding how the eel, pie and mash shops and wider cockney culture are memorialised. For some this is simply a meal that reconnects them with their past, their family traditions and historic geographic location. For most people like Tommy B, “pie and mash was the food you went for because you couldn’t afford to go and have other stuff... it sort of encapsulates everything about the East End.”¹⁷⁰ For John Bradley it remains a central part of a cockney identity and “about the people that are here, you go to the shops and ... you can hear the [cockney] voices.”¹⁷¹ For others however it has, concomitant with the rise of identitarian politics, become a symbol of -

“... an ordered past in which they were exploited and pauperized, but nonetheless knew who they were [rather than] to a chronically chaotic present in which even those limited certainties have been stripped away by the new corporate mandate of interminable, regressive change.” (Gilroy, 2005: 109).

Pie and mash for some I contend, conveys well the linkage of the personal to the political (Radstone, 2010). Its humbleness evokes the melancholy of a romanticised poverty and the rituals that surround it speak to the soothing but unreachable routines of mid-century working class life. It’s eating is a comfort for an imagined past that can never be recaptured. This absence is the cockney saudade.

Indeed, food, and the eating of it, is rarely just about the food itself. What we eat, how we eat it and crucially how we remember it is, as Lupton (1996:6) proposes, “... mediated through social relations ... [and] a thick layer of meaning is accreted around every food substance, and a physiological dimension of food is inextricably

¹⁶⁹ Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight’s Children*. Mehta, Deepa. 20th Century Studios, 2012.

¹⁷⁰ Tommy B. Interview by author 25 March 2022.

¹⁷¹ John Bradley. Interview by author 25 May 2022.

intertwined with the symbolic.” These cultural ‘meanings’, these ‘interpretations’ of the truths of the exterior world, are however primarily experienced as involuntary and largely invisible sensory perceptions through the biological body.

For C. Nadia Serematakis (1996: 5-6) this is a reciprocal and dialogical process between the individual’s “inner states... [and] the socio-material field outside of the body... [where] sensory interiors and exteriors constantly pass into each other in the creation of extra-personal significance.” What she calls “social aesthetics” are “embedded in, and inherited from, an autonomous network of object relations and prior sensory exchanges” which are beyond language and crucially fluid so that sensory memory is not “mere repetition but [a] transformation which brings the past into the present as a natal event.” This exchange with what Rhys Taylor (2017: 4) calls “wider cultural significations” likely results in the ‘performance’ of gestures and embodied acts which are “elicited by externality and history as much as ... from within.” Serematakis (1996: 9) further offers that each sense perception is rendered as a “re-perception” - the result of the activity between “co-implicated sensory spheres” and material objects which further places memory within time. The prosaic eating of a plate of eels, pie and mash is in this way an extraordinarily powerful sensory mnemonic experience for the cockney because it contains a multitude of sensory meanings overlaid in a matrix of culturally and temporally mediated transactions that is crucially (if subtly) flexible and changing.

Memory is the landscape of the sensory cultural transmission of food between the personal and the political. The plotting of the co-ordinates of its flexible conductance will enable us to chart both how it is memorialised and subsequently why. I identify three central sites on which this transmission takes place. The first is childhood.

As Maureen Mahoney and Barbara Yngvesson (in Lupton, 1996: 58) suggest, the child engages in a process of creating meaning with its primary caregivers. This predates language and rests on the bond between (usually) mother and child whereby intimacy triggers emotions via sensory touch, smell and sound. Here, it becomes clear that food memory is more often than not principally located within gender. Lupton (1996: 39) notes that it is the woman’s primary (expected and traditionally socially normative) role in the nuclear family to provide some sort of

emotional stability for the group and acculturate children into appropriate behaviour including the conventions of their eating habits. More, women are largely responsible for feeding and nourishing infants and in this way throw a kind of “*cordon sanitaire*” around the infant mediating what is allowed into (and policing what comes out of) the child’s body (Murcott in Lupton, 1996: 40). As Holtzman (2006) attests, the collective memories that pass through these arenas are inevitably “quintessentially gendered” and cockney culture is, as both Young and Willmot (1957) and Cohen (2013) suggest, matrifocal and matrilinear.

Within this panorama, the family kitchen is a central location for nurturing, and according to Carol Counihan (2013) a place where memories are stored. However, the externality of the East End street also provided an arena for the development of the child and the concomitant historical absence of cooking facilities also likely meant that the eel, pie and mash shop became in some senses an expedient and proxy ‘home from home’ further solidifying significant memorialisations. Even in the contemporary period this ‘homely food’ is brought into the house as a substitute for home cooking.

It was like one of those foods when your nan says ‘I can't be bothered cooking’ ... me Great Nan ... I used to take her pie and mash on a Saturday morning... I was only like five or six ... they give me the pie an’ the mash and the eels (from the shop) sent me round her house. We used to have like, half a lager and lime together and I was only little, so I was out me nut... and we used to watch the films on Saturday afternoons...”¹⁷²

The space of the pie shop remains subject to similar restrictions as the domestic home: a rule-based hierarchy of manners often ‘overseen’ by a (usually) male figure that sets a ‘tone’ for service, language and indeed atmosphere. Both casual and formal, the shops are a microcosm of a domesticity where men are almost always the central artisanal figure and women take on a largely service role.¹⁷³ It is in this

¹⁷² Johnny Griffiths. Interview by author, 5 December 2021.

¹⁷³ Of all the contemporary pie shops, I can think of no woman cooking, and the only female owned shop is Harrington’s in Tooting. The Cooke’s shop in Hoxton Market does employ a female cook but she is largely supervised by the owner, Joe Cooke.

way that Sarah Pink (2015: 44) concludes that "... experiences of place - and its social, physical and intangible components - are inextricable from the invocation and re-investment of memories." People expect the shops to be gendered in this 'traditional' way. "... normally when you go in it's like 'hello darling, all right?'... they're like that with everyone and they've got time for people and that adds to the atmosphere ..."¹⁷⁴

Within this context it is almost a rite of passage for a cockney child to be weaned in a pie shop by his or her mother on a combination of either blended pie and liquor or simply liquor and mashed potato. As Nicola Ford recollects, "... my mum couldn't wait to spoon feed it to my babies - literally - I remember her pureeing [it]... the pie and mash and feeding it literally ... [it] put the smile on her face."¹⁷⁵ Johnny Griffiths concurs that "Me nan says it was the first thing you cut your teeth on, a bit of pie - like a pork bone."¹⁷⁶ Rita Arment similarly recalls the pie shops of the 1940s and 1950s which "in those days had a 'baby bowl' - that was 4d - mash with liquor over it and babies seemed to love it."¹⁷⁷

Lupton (1996: 6) links the memorialised bond between mother and child as a symbiosis of sensual pleasure from infancy because of the close human contact with the food provider; the maternal link of bodily security a seedbed of memory. "[T]he bodily warmth, the touch of the other's flesh, their smell, the sounds they make - and the emotions and sensations aroused by this experience." Some mothers chew pies and spoon tiny pieces of it to their infants whilst others will test the heat of the dish with their own tongues before giving it to their babies. Visser (2015: 312) has suggested that "already chewed food, mixed with saliva is polluted... [and] is an anathema in polite society." However, Serematakis' (1994: 24) account of her own grandmother's feeding ritual is instructive.

¹⁷⁴ Adam Boutall. Interview by author October 19, 2021.

¹⁷⁵ Nicola Ford. Interview by author, 6 June 2022.

¹⁷⁶ Johnny Griffiths. Interview by author, 5 December 2021.

¹⁷⁷ Rita Arment. Interview by author, 20 November 2020.

Grandma used to mash with her fingers carrot, potato, macaroni and feel it with her lips and even her tongue and then give it to the child... When the food was hard, such as a bread crust, the old women would soften it with their saliva.

The sharing of food and saliva can, in this way stow within the child a “sensory acculturation and the materialization of historical consciousness” (Serematakis, 1996: 37).

The Taiwanese film *Eat, drink, man, woman* (in Lupton, 1996: 49) features a character who suggests “my memory is my nose” linking the olfactory sense to the eliciting of memory. Sutton (2005: 304) has it for the Greeks of Kalymnos that even “[A] flowerpot of basil can symbolise the soul of a people better than a drama of Aeschylus.” For Londoners, the smell of eels, pie and mash or indeed the odours of the shops themselves can bring to the fore a cacophony of memorialisation. As Rhian Atkin (2020: 83) suggests of the Portuguese *refogando*, its meaning “is contained in its smells and the memories that smell evokes.” For Rita Arment, the “lovely warm smell” reminded her of walking into her husband-to-be’s pie shop in 1957.¹⁷⁸ For Anthony Bradley, “the smell of the meat pies ... and the stale penny cakes we used to buy afterwards” every Saturday growing up on the Hackney Road is a direct path to his childhood and his late older brother.¹⁷⁹ The food is a memory pathway that cuts backwards in time and can recreate past experiences and resonate with different levels of consciousness.

However, not all children were socialised into eel, pie and mash through weaning and their senses appear to have compensated with memorialisations from different memory periods. Anthony Bradley who has eaten the food all his life was sent off every Saturday morning in the late 1960s with his brother to a (long gone) pie and mash shop on the Hackney Road. He recalls that his mother “never had it ... no idea why ... she was born in Bethnal Green ... I don’t remember me Dad eating it either. I dunno why us kids started eating it because normally you eat what your parents give you...”¹⁸⁰ His memory script involves the food *in spite* of weaning experiences.

¹⁷⁸ Rita Arment. Interview by author, 20 November 2020.

¹⁷⁹ Anthony John Bradley. Interview by author, 25 May 2022.

¹⁸⁰ Anthony John Bradley. Interview by author, 25 May 2022.

Eileen Errol went to school in Leytonstone in the early 1960s but lived in Hainaught and started eating pie and mash in her teens with friends. Hers was a classic act of rebellion against her family's ideals. "... [We] moved to Hainaught because my Mum said that she heard that people (in Dagenham) kept coal in the bath".¹⁸¹ As Lupton (1996) reports, this classically disaffected behaviour may occur when a child's feelings, in the context of eating, are embodied. This appears, according to Julia Brannen *et al* (1994), to be a more prevalent behaviour amongst young women than men as they may have fewer arenas in which to exhibit frustration. Indeed, even now Errol says she cannot mention pie and mash to her sister who sees it in very negative terms. "My sister is like Hyacinth Bucket (a working class snob who featured in a BBC TV sitcom). They've gone up in the world and she would *die* if I ever mentioned pie and mash [and] how lovely it is... they're a bit fine dining... they've worked very hard..."¹⁸² Ken, an ex-docker born in 1938, came from a family who were "a little unusual in the East End as they had an upstairs bathroom." He ran away from his parents and married at 19. His wife's family were 'on the stones' (casual dockworkers) and because dock work was almost entirely hereditary, he entered the profession with their help. He also encountered eels, pie and mash from his wife's family which became a "life-long habit".¹⁸³

These memorialisations based within sensory artefacts give an intriguing insight in the micro-class divisions within London's proletariat throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. More, they situate the dish within previous memories of the very poor and of a casual, largely unskilled working class. These memorialisation are themselves a likely reverberation of early Victoriana with regard to notions of propriety, manners and who valorised the food as both fuel and comfort.

Eels, pie and mash are also memorialised and remembered through the everyday rhythm and ritual performances of working class life. Paul Connerton (1989: 4, 25) implies an *incorporating memory* within ritualised ceremonies where a kind of 'sediment' is generated via what he refers to as "habit memory". These ritual performances are psychologically encoded and can be both verbal, visual or beyond

¹⁸¹ Eileen Errol. Interview by author, 22 October 2022.

¹⁸² Eileen Errol. Interview by author, 22 October 2022.

¹⁸³ Ken, (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 20 May 2022.

language but leave behind traces that are perceptible to the senses. In the pie shops, one might mention the accretion of meaning around *evolving* human interactions, performative gestures or slang but also the worn floors, the chipped tiles and the dented utensils. In the newer shops (for example) in Essex, the physical environments wait expectantly for memories to accrue in the materiality of new tiling, pristine kitchens and spills and scuffs on the unspoiled floors where “prescribed bodily behaviours” and the “choreography [of] an identifiable range of repertoires” automatically implies continuity with the past” (Connerton, 1989: 44, 74).

The challenge for these contemporary shops, as what one might euphemistically be called ‘traditional’ is articulated by Connerton (1989: 51) in his idea of “historical position”. Here, ritualised behaviour is not necessarily understood in isolation but in affinity to past events and “thus [crucially] susceptible to a change in their meaning”. Indeed, although Sutton (2001: 19) is critical of Connerton and his “fairly inflexible” approach where these “limited gestures” have to be repeated exactly “like a spell”, this is entirely apposite to the process of ossifying “formalised” ritual meanings into the new generation of eel, pie and mash shops away from their historical geographic and class roots.

Luce Giard (1998: 183) suggests that eating as an everyday practice “solidifies particular modes of relations between the person and the world that form the foundations of landmarks in space-time.” Indeed, although the ways people behave in the newer shops are a “cognitive memory of a communal lexicon” that lexicon is within a subtly changed material and temporal environment.¹⁸⁴ Largely gone are the childhood memories of mothers coming together with their children after a lengthy march around almost disappeared hyper-local street markets enmeshed in a matrix of known, formal and informal obligations. Increasingly (for example) Essex eel, pie and mash shops are sites for more general meetings and partially sketchy remembrances of how a previous generation might have acted or ordered or eaten. They form and will continue to form in their more recent guises, future memorialisations in the “constructions of [newer] worlds” (Sutton, 2001). They are the site of overlapping temporalities creating hybrid memory.

¹⁸⁴ Connerton, 1989: 88.

Lastly, we might gauge how memorialisations of the eel, pie and mash shops are formed through this temporal focus analogously to how Serematakis (1996) describes the role of coffee as a *sintrofia* (a friendly companion). She narrates how the taking of a Greek villager's coffee is essentially a pause in the day and how it "generates a moment of meta-commentary in which the entire stenography of present and past social landscapes are arrayed..." (1996: 13). Eels, pie and mash and the spaces that serve them also have narratives that are "frequently non-synchronous with the immediate continuum of socially constructed material presence and value" (Serematakis, 1996: 12). The shops in this way become a similar temporary portal (Serematakis would describe them as "islands of historicity... in stillness") that can act as an interruption and an interval in the everyday through which the cockney can breathe within his or her own evolving culture. Like the villagers' coffee sips, the pie shops and their food in this way might be seen as a temporary intermission on a neoliberal street "where micro-practices leak through the crevices and cracks of official cultures and memories"(1996: 13).

Increasingly however as the shops, both traditional and contemporary, are by demography, age and fashion themselves slowly divorced from long-established patterns of work, leisure and usage they are increasingly used for non- and neo-traditional purposes but still act as an (imperfect) aide mémoire to a partially invented historical past.¹⁸⁵ It is within this space that the cockney, like the Greek villager, may experience the mixing of temporalities, where the present and past meet in experiential, performative and sensory dialogue. The food of the pie shop is like the partaking of this Greek moment in that as a 'friendly companion' it generates, in its consumption, a conversation and commentary on for example, the weather, the family, how the local football team are faring and often, via social media and reminiscence, 'ways of doing things'; how London 'used to be'. Within this interlude and within the recent past, an extraordinary gustatory nostalgia has evolved around the eel, pie and mash shops. As Hasia Diner (2009: 366) has suggested, "as hungry people found food within their reach, they partook of it in ways which resonated with

¹⁸⁵ Some shops become bars at night and the Cooke's shop in Chelmsford regularly becomes a comedy venue. Older, more traditional shops are frequently used as backdrops in films or editorial photoshoots.

their earlier deprivations. How they remembered those hungers allows us to see how they once lived them, and how they then understood themselves in their new home without them.”

It is to those formulations and crucially nostalgic re-constructions of the eel, pie and mash shops in a critical political sense that I now turn.

5.3 Don't mention the War...

“Memory is ... a complex cultural and historical phenomenon constantly subject to revision, amplification and ‘forgetting. Memory is, therefore, a construction.”

(Bromley, 1998: 1)

There are now only a handful of eel, pie and mash shops that remain within the traditional cockney areas of inner London, but pie and mash is currently thriving with many new shops opening in the zones of white working class diaspora (especially) in Essex and the Medway towns. As these exodic memoryscapes, themselves the result of previous palimpsestic remembrances, travel beyond their original locations they merge with older solidarities and memorialisations brought with earlier decampments.

The worn wooden benches of London's oldest remaining shop, Manze's on Tower Bridge Road might evoke the memory of mid-Victorian class comradeship, itself buried beneath a trace of Victorian music hall cheerfulness. More likely, the memory of a meal savoured in gratitude after an air raid all-clear might still be experienced within the touch of the shops loose brickwork.

As Aleida Assman (2010: 97) suggests, each generation stands on the shoulders of its predecessors whose “... knowledge they can reuse and reinterpret.” Yet these new incarnations of the traditional shops and the culture that they signal to are contested and reveal fault lines that disclose less about the historical past and much more about the contemporary cockney identity.

In spats fought largely within closed networks on social media, seemingly trivial but essential debates centre around location, the rituals and intricacies of how and what the shops serve and what those memories mean. The central question for this dichotomy is whether the new shops are an extension of the original establishments, a simulacra or part of a new culture? This is really a struggle over whose memories will define the future of the shops and how the cockney as both a character and an idea will maintain. More, they signal to a larger contested narrative of white working 'classness' that perceives itself to be in existential crisis.

Joe Cooke's eel, pie and mash shop in Hoxton market is, as he unswervingly puts it, "absolutely traditional" and he sees himself "as very much a sort of a caretaker of a dynasty, or a culture and a tradition... that is a big part of the history of London and of the East End."¹⁸⁶ Although the actual shop was refashioned from a Victorian bank in the 1980s the styling and the menu are exactly as his great grandfather would recognise. Cooke's panorama of wooden benches and marble tables is as Bromley (1988: 4) suggests, "a coded sentimentality [that has a] "stabilizing and conciliating function." As Cooke sees it, it is impossible for eel, pie and mash shops to be anywhere else than the East End of London because they are so intimately tied to that city's past and cartography. As Phil Baker (2012: 279) suggests, "The feeling of place is inseparable from the meaning of place, often within personal cartographies that have their own landmarks."

For Johnny Malone however, an Essex native who has just opened a pie and mash shop in Southend, this isn't strictly true. Malone used to be a bricklayer but a shoulder injury at work meant that he was looking for something new to do. He had "sometimes" eaten pie and mash and admired the "... humbleness of it... it's a simple food that fed a lot of people back in the day, when it was tough, for not a lot of money."¹⁸⁷ His knowledge of the culture came to him largely from "the memories of me great nan and grandad... they were original Londoners...from Hackney." He admits that for him, "there's a few [personal] memories of it [but] what I got from my great Nan was a glimpse ... there'd be people out in the streets playing a piano ... it

¹⁸⁶ Joe Cooke owner of F. Cooke Pie Shop, Hoxton. Interview by author, 16 September 2021.

¹⁸⁷ Johnny Malone owner of Brickie's Pie Shop, Southend. Interview by author, 15 June 2022.

was a different world to what we live in now.”¹⁸⁸ Malone caters to working class people, many who have emigrated from London or who have visited in a traditional ritual to the seaside on holiday. He says that his shop is full of the stories of these people reminiscing about their own pasts and their favourite London pie shops – “...someone came in yesterday with a story and that’s what I love about it... With some of these Eastenders... you’ve still got a nan that’s telling a story.”

Jan Assman’s (2010) two-fold concept of memory is useful here. He defines a ‘cultural’ memory of rites and texts crystalizing collective experience that reacts to, and dances with, a ‘communicative’ memory, limited to a more recent generational past, encapsulating the informal transference of autobiography. Yet between these two is what Vansina (in Erll, 2011: 28) has called a “floating gap” (originally theorised through oral remembrances) that moves with the passage of time and between generations. For the pie shops, the contestations around what they are and will be is contained within this gap: an interregnum where the stories of Malone’s customers crystallise and become accepted and foundational to the modern cockney community. Indeed, although memories appear to change by ‘consensus and canon-building’ it’s more likely that they change by moulding along social fractures engendered by this volatile gap (Olick, 2003). The fissures are in part the work of hegemonic memory groups invading and capturing the memory landscape by selectively narrativizing and reconstructing their past (Bell in Bond, Craps and Vermeulen, 2016: 3). Because the cockney identity, especially its manifestation within the eel, pie and mash shops is largely absent from mainstream cultural texts it has been relatively straightforward as much as through a process of omission and exclusion to reify certain aspects of the culture and denigrate others. Sometimes these changes to ‘common sense’ are part of internal community machinations and sometimes they are responses to external pressures and ‘programming’. Either way, historically these ‘social fractures’, like the cockney character, have emerged parallel with, and reactive to, the passage of modernity itself (Legg, 2005).

The contemporary transmission of the cockney identity and the concomitant history of the eel, pie and mash shops are in a large degree, captured by these social

¹⁸⁸ Johnny Malone owner of Brickie’s Pie Shop, Southend. Interview by author, 15 June 2022.

fractures. Today, remembrances of the shops are, within living memory, significantly constructed via the memorialisations of a post-war generation that recall as children the legacy of wartime privation, mass colonial immigration and the turn towards post-Fordism. Fundamentally, this thesis argues that it is this generation's sketchy memorialisations and political framings of the Second World War - of which they played no significant part - that holds the key to much of the structure of contemporary politics and by extension, the identity of the cockney and the eel, pie and mash shop.

The seeds of this re-memorialising of the Second World War were sown a generation or more ago. Apposite to Hall's (1973) notion of encoding/decoding (especially in terms of the cockney identity construction in music hall), Bromley (1988: 17) suggests that the Thatcher government "selectively plundered" the conflict to lever a "romantic nationalism" based upon a "selective revival of particular symbols... constructed specifically from 'stories' of war and the interwar period." As Wright (2009: 41) added several years later, war had been declared again, but this time against the post-war settlement. Paul Gilroy (2004: 96-97) points out that the reappearance of the War, the Blitz and rationing were all "obsessive repetitions... anxious and melancholic" - part of a "need to get back to the place or moment before the country lost its moral and cultural bearings".

For obvious reasons, these wartime valorisations were especially resonant to a cockney audience soaked for several generations in a military nostalgia of the dying embers of an Imperial state - these notions seamlessly complementary to the background noise of war films, TV situation comedies and children's comics during the *Trente Glorieuses* and of a generation 'playing soldiers' in the schoolyards of a 1970s East End and new town Essex. These constructions around the Second World War (and later the Falklands) and its colonisation within popular memory had, to echo Gramsci, become something that had 'always' been there. The flag became adjuvant to working class support for a Conservative government that lauded the proletarian entrepreneurship of the cockney whilst simultaneously selling-off the council housing that supported the solidarities of the white working class in London. A decade later, Blue Labour attempted to use the flag in an appeal to memory whilst seeking white working class votes by using the Blitz to beguile the 'forgotten tribe' of

white cockneys (Collins, 2004) whose NHS and Welfare State was being 'swamped' by immigrants.¹⁸⁹

Yet pie shop customers would recall in bitter terms the moment when the formerly heroic cheerful Tommy had become an impediment to 'progress' when "white working class communities had become an embarrassment to New Labour" (Beider, 2015: 18). As Andreas Huyssen (2003: 3) says of this period, "... the 1990s seemed to be haunted by a trauma as dark as the underside of neoliberal triumphalism." Once awakened, this military zombie of English identity within cultural memory has refused to die. Its recent resurrection in contemporary reactionary politics that surround Brexit where the war and contestations of empire are central have become as Peter Mitchell (2021: 66) suggests, a "metonymic stand-in for whiteness, patriarchy and a generalised national chauvinism."

The memoryscapes that coalesce within both the London and Essex pie shops are numerous and I refer to them as polyphonic. I suggest that the pie shops in both locations hold simultaneous memories that are distinct but synchronous: all playing - like the cockney barrel organ - at the same time. These are the partial reminiscences of a marooned, largely elderly precariat who still inhabit the dwindling stock of social housing in the fading penumbras of traditional cockney areas of London. They are also the exodic transmitted and transmuted memories of their contemporaries and scions in the pioneering townscapes of Essex and beyond. Within these voices are captured innumerable and incalculable modifications; other palimpsestic memoirs of individualised personal memory epochs largely valorising a lost landscape of a post-war period of gain and stability. They are legion but not simply a "matter of personal recall" (Bromley, 1988: 4). They all however point to a predominantly white, monocultural and inevitably 'better' past and share a 'geography of belonging' (Hodgkin and Radstone, 2003: 169) with a melancholic and often furious sense of loss.

¹⁸⁹ The term 'swamping' in relation to immigration was first used by the Far Right in the 1970s then repeated by Margaret Thatcher, first in a Scottish television interview and then on *World in Action* in 1979. Thatcher, Margaret. 27 January 1978. *World in Action*. Granada Television. <https://www.margareththatcher.org/document/103485>

That sense of loss was apparent to Pierre Nora (1989: 7) who has suggested that we now speak of memory so much because “there is so little of it left.” For Nora, we no longer live within a previous (utopian) era of *milieux de mémoire* (‘environments of memory’) and within modernity, its attendant democracy, mass society and more recently, globalisation, that there now remain only, “... *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory.” He postulates these symbolic sites, these *mnemotechnics*, capture in a shorthand, necessary ideas and memories. For Nora these sites can be “geographical locations, buildings, monuments and works of art as well as historical persons, memorial days, philosophical and scientific texts, or symbolic actions” (Erl, 2011: 3). Here, “memory crystallises and secretes itself” (Nora, 1989: 7). They could be a plate of warm eels in liquor, the tang of white pepper on a pie all condensed in the steam of a pie shop window.

The traditional eel, pie and mash shops in London can themselves be seen as *lieux de memoire* but crucially in a dual sense. For the very few historical ones that endure, they encapsulate a physicality. They are both a sanctuary and a place of excursion that is only reinforced by their sensoriality; their ability through gustation, to imprint upon the bodies and senses of those that eat there. Additionally, they encapsulate a dimension where, through the rituals contained within them and the slang spoken around them, they exhibit what Nora (1989: 19) refers to as a “symbolic aura”. In this way, the shops, as structures of feeling are an articulation of a ‘classness’. They contain symbolisms that break “a temporal continuity” by reaching backwards and forwards within memorialisations to both the past and the present (Erl, 2011: 24). These structures are unstable yet “collectively constructed and reconstructed in the present rather than resurrected from the past... the product of mediation, textualization and acts of communication” (Rigney 2008: 13-14).

Because the pie shops are de-facto working class arenas and because for very specific historic reasons there is scant scriptural memorialisations around them, the memories evoked by them I suspect are more able to be moulded to the present notions of what the past was. In this way certain memorialisations become more consequential for specific groups. Indeed, Ann Rigney (2008: 346) implies that Nora’s *lieux de memoire* are part of a mnemonic process where memory sites are

being constantly reinvested with memory and become a “self-perpetuating vortex of symbolic investment.”

In recent years these symbolic investments have been calcified in a very specific way through innumerable biographies that have sought to chart and celebrate the difficulties of London’s post war generations. Located in the laudable New Left tradition of ‘history from below’, titles like Gilda O’Neil’s *My East End: Memories of Life in Cockney London* (1999), Sally Worboyes’ *East End Girl: Growing Up the Hard Way* (2006) and Melanie McGrath’s *Pie and Mash down the Roman Road* (2018) have narrated a specific sentimentality, largely without wider contexts, that have tried to entrench an orthodoxy of a particular East End that speaks to conformity and the change between the individual, the emergent neoliberal state, manual labour and the challenges of a working class divided by precarity. This has much to do with a “post-war reconfiguration of the built environment that ruptured everyday patterns of life” (Waters, 1999) and can be seen as an attempt to “...slow down information processing, to resist the dissolution of time in the synchronicity of the archive... [and] ... to claim some anchoring space in a world of puzzling and often threatening heterogeneity, non-synchronicity and information overload (Huysen, 1995: 7).

More prosaically though, they can be seen as part of an overtly political reconstruction of ‘ordinariness’ since the mid-1970s came to view the social memory of the ‘other’ in terms of the ‘undeserving’ poor. Crucially as Ben Jones (2012: 124) suggests however, these historical accounts, “were the work of men and women whose own mobility rendered problematic their relationship with the communities they had left behind.” This as much as anything reveals the contestations between working class memory groups within the eel, pie and mash shops not only between London and Essex but between an inter-class division of those who have ‘made it’ and those who have not. More however they have become part of an archive of conservative emotions and patriotic signifiers. Raphael Samuel (2012: 163) conceded as much when he suggested that the project of history ‘from below’ might have actually spurred on the ‘whimsy’ of austerity.

The memorialisations that enmesh the eel, pie and mash shops have sought to mediate and set the agenda for future acts of remembrance within society (Erlil and

Rigney, 2009: 3). This is part of an active process of recollection and retrieval that is largely dependent on the aims of the dominant, hegemonic memory group.

Crucially this might mean that other less influential memory groups, those that for example remember eating with knives (as opposed to spoons) or more presciently those that have more varied multicultural memories of the shops might learn to identify, as Halbwachs (1997: 35-37) has suggested, with the memories of others if that is expedient. These days it is a brave soul that might question the online bullying that surrounds contestations of say, South London's best shop or whether the liquor served was how an emigre to Essex might remember it from his childhood ("I wouldn't serve that to my dog"... "only with a fork and spoon"... "not proper"... "you're not a real cockney").¹⁹⁰ As Robert, a fifth generation Cooke and the owner of the recently opened F. Cooke in Chelmsford, Essex explains if "someone was to come up and say in person 'you've got to turn your pie over' [to eat it]... they'd probably get a slap in the face... my family's been going one hundred years and my granddad never taught me that... it's ignorance... He's probably not from the East End, his Dad probably took him to West Ham, and he's probably been to Maureen's once, right?"¹⁹¹

In this way Rigney (2008: 346) indicates that that once a site has emerged as a focus for remembrance it pulls in a great deal of allied memories. Yet this may still not be enough to heal the rupture between that past and the present and into this void rushes the spirit of nostalgia.

5.4 We've had our jellied eels and our glass of beer

"We escape the trauma of history we happen to be living through by entering the mythic time of the history we didn't." (Mitchell, 2021: 23)

¹⁹⁰ This reproduces the bitter sense that many messages within several Facebook groups evidence around contemporary experience.

¹⁹¹ Maureen's pie shop now associated with West Ham football fans after the demise of Nathan's that was close to the old Upton Park ground.

In the late seventeenth century, a Swiss physician sought to classify and medicalise an affliction that had struck down, amongst others, Swiss mercenaries fighting far from home. Johannes Hofer joined two Greek words, *nostos* (to return home) and *algai* (a painful condition) to give a name to a longing for home that no longer (or perhaps had never) existed (Davis, 1979: 414)

Svetlana Boym (2001) suggests that this 'medical' condition of nostalgia was linked to a changing conception of time itself. Those afflicted by this nostalgia were caught between a largely personal, local conception of time that obeyed the rhythms of the natural world and an imposition of a universal capitalist time that signalled to a teleology of progress. Within modernity, the 'past' became for the first time a quantifiable notion that was "unrepeatable and irreversible" (Boym, 2001: 13). Nostalgia was a mental pause or even retreat from the acceleration of this new temporality.

By the close of the eighteenth century the notion of nostalgia had been overlaid by Romanticism. Here, the emotion of the individual and a cultural longing for nature was set against the dawning of the rapacious machine age. By the middle of the following century, the bourgeoisie had colonised and relocated the centre of this yearning from the individual to the nation and in doing so codified appropriate emotional responses to the extraordinary temporal changes that capitalism had attended. It achieved this partly by parasitically assimilating the pre-industrial *weltanschauung* of the peasantry (and its partial adoption by the landed elites) into an expedient ideology of *real politik* thus colonising and regulating the past as heritage (Boym, 2001: 14). In this way, Trollope ([1875] 1992: 64) could have Mr Cadbury lament that "... we belonged to a newer and worse sort of world." Tennyson however could engage simultaneously in a melancholic nostalgia within a fantastical, folkloric British history and concurrently valorise the achievements of a ravenous, brutal and mechanised Empire.

As the century progressed, one section of the ascendent bourgeois (as one half of the schism within British liberalism) came to view this nostalgia as an impediment to progress, part of a wider degeneracy associated with "defeatism and anti-modernity" (Pickering and Keightley, 2006: 920). The other, what might be called the 'peace,

economy and reform' section of Gladstonian liberalism appeared more sympathetic to the plight of the toiling masses. The character of the largely music-hall constructed cockney identity was partly captured within the divide of this framing. Its historical precursor, the violent abyss figure of middle class alarm, both of the atomised criminal and swarming mob, was reimagined as a cheerful and resilient casualty of inevitable class structure, the collateral damage of the machine age. This notion of nostalgia, coetaneous with modernity and now largely adjacent to the idea of nation was also crucial to how the cockney viewed itself and continues to do so.

Here was a community of largely self-employed, proletarian entrepreneurs striving to scrape a living against a backdrop of brutal poverty and destitution. Inevitably inward-looking, the cockney community had their own largely obscure, selectively hidden customs and traditions but were partially accommodated within capital as reward for their fealty. The archetypal late Victorian cockney was therefore a figure of both pity and (self) respect but also a creation transmuted into a patriotic servant of Empire. This was how the malnourished slum-coster could simultaneously be roused to fight the Boer with a rendition of "Goodbye Dolly Gray" (1897) and weep at the sentimental truth of their own inter-war destitution, "Underneath the Arches" (1932), without necessarily connecting the political linkage behind both that concealed, to paraphrase Fisher (2009), 'the horizons of the possible'.

Loss was always a central motif of the cockney. From the mid-nineteenth century clearing of the streets to *fin de siècle* waves of precarity and the 'moonlight flit' to the destructions of the Blitz to *Steptoe and Son*, the cockney was always a cultural foci for both spatial and temporal deficit. The fragmentary telos of modernity left few spaces for dealing with this loss but nostalgia like a remedial salve, was there to offer comfort. Nostalgia, not always the contemporary saccharine meme could also be an interruption to the present where "memories of past belonging can be used to create a sense of belonging *in* the present if not *to* the present" (Pickering and Knightley, 2006: 921). It could also be called upon in a curative sense to "... provide what the present lacks" (Bal, 1999: 72). It could be found in the singing around the pub piano, the cheer of the football crowd and in the warmth of the pie shop. It can still be found for Mark Wincott who uses the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops

when he's feeling fragile for "... a bit of banter ... talking shit for an hour with other people." ¹⁹²

Cockney nostalgia is realised well within Stuart Albert's (in May, 2017: 402) notion of a 'temporal comparison process' which moves back and forth through time to create "a culturally appropriate sense of a coherent self." In this way, the cockney might find consolation in multiple, palimpsestic nostalgic temporalities: the Victorian father-figure, the wartime Tommy or the sharp-suited Mod. Here, as Stuart Tannock (1995: 456) suggests, nostalgia functions as a search for continuity.

Nostalgia could also map a cockney cartography of the city in a particular and secure way. This was the metropolis invisible to most but layered with glimmers of personal landmarks in a similar way that Georges Perec's 'Places' describe locations in Paris associated with a former girlfriend thus imbued with hidden meaning. These, like the sites of closed pie shops, gentrified pubs and now privately owned council flats, "turn[s] the city into a personalised memorial" nostalgically commemorating what Perec refers to as "dead places that ought to survive" (Bellos in Baker, 2012: 277).

Yet nostalgia is also manipulative, reinforcing the romantic assumption that the cockney's lot was inevitably to suffer. This was the cockney fatalism of the Blitz or the low horizons that some still valorise as part of their heritage. As David H. suggests, "We know what we like, we know what we're used to ... there's not normally anything wrong with tradition, it's when they try to change it..."¹⁹³ In this way the cockney remains simultaneously nostalgic but also trapped by the forces of a nostalgia which had historically viewed it as either a Mrs Mop or a Kray twin cliché. These were the days when you could leave your door open or control "the bad behaviour of children simply through knowing who they were and where they came from" (Watson and Wells, 2005: 26). Yet these were also the days when people often kept their cultural and political preferences hidden for fear of ridicule or ostracism.

¹⁹² Mark Wincott. Interview by author 16 May 2022.

¹⁹³ David H. Interview by author 14 April 2022.

This community nostalgia is shaped by what Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer (2002: 256) call 'postmemory', that is a nostalgia-mediated link to, in Stefan Zweig's (1942) phrase, a lost "world of yesterday" largely transmitted from their parents. Although their work concerns memory traces and nostalgia within the Jewish diaspora after the Holocaust their note that children of exiles and refugees "have very peculiar relationships" to the places from which their families were removed is entirely apposite to the exodic parental transmission (culturally and sensorially) of the landscape of the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops.

In that sense the present-day cockney has been historically marooned between their traditional London and diasporic identities because modernity leaves little room for how the past may "*actively* [my italics] engage with the present and future" (Pickering and Keightley, 2006: 920).

Boym theorises and distinguishes two types of nostalgic tendencies. Firstly, a *restorative* nostalgia which emphasises *nostos* and "recreates the past as a value for the present" (Boym, 2001: 49) and secondly, a *reflective* version which abides in the longing of *algia*, lingering over "... ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time" (Boym, 2001: 41). Whilst the latter points to whimsy within individual (and cultural) memory, the former signals to political action. The latter is painfully captured by Collins (2017: 7) who tells of journeying back to the Southwark streets where he grew up and now walks like an 'ex-pat' to seek out "familiar relics on return trips... to remind ourselves we once existed on streets we now walk as ghosts."

Collins' traditional white working class cockney London has not declined as such, but it has migrated. South London now extends to the Kent coast and The East End stretches far into the bucolic countryside of Essex and sometimes to the flatlands of Norfolk. This displacement has created a real sense of what Tuan (1974) referred to as a rich 'topophilia'; a strong love of place that is imbued with and crucially, reinscribes a cultural identity. Cohen's (2014) interrogation of this cockney diaspora evidenced a dual class trajectory; the 'upward' a 'self-made' entrepreneur who has 'escaped' from the working class by his own volition and the 'downward', exhibiting

what a 'poor whites' syndrome' both valorising with the East End with its former glories.

These diasporic nostalgias are now largely recited in both physical and psychic pilgrimages to sites of former East End life largely buried within the landscape of the neoliberal city which John Clarke (1976) presciently referred to as a "magical recovery of community." The most significant pilgrimage is via that other great consolation of Victorian proletarian life, football. Here, fans travel back into former class territories and visit places affiliated with their club, be that pubs or cafes or eel, pie and mash shops. This is, as (Fawbert, 2011: 181) suggests is community persisting as "communion" through performative re-enactments of cultural tropes like pie and mash before the game.

Ronald Ranta and Yonatan Mendel (2014) submit a group identity may be constructed both around the foods of a particular diet and "the manners and methods, in which [that] food is prepared, commodified and consumed..." The eating of eels, pie and mash as a pre-match ritual has become performative cultural re-enactment of a selective memory-scape based largely within the post-war era, both an historic nod to Bourdieu's 'food of necessity' and, especially with jellied eels, as a 'food of ordeal'. Millwall fans generally congregate at Manze's on Tower Bridge Road and, as did their forefathers, still serenade their team onto the pitch with, "We've had our jellied eels and our glass of beer..." Eels, pie and mash here are revealed as what might be described as a 'local patriotism' (Tuan, 1974: 101) with a national 'referent'. They are of 'Enger-land' but they remain specifically of 'London' - although not necessarily the London of gentrification nor the tastes of multiculturalism in the same way that Catherine Palmer (1988) suggests food cultures can also articulate the boundaries of groups in opposition to the nation in competition to the dominant group. Here, the cockney is cast as a sort of Ulster Unionist in that they on the whole *desire* to be part of the national narrative, continue to evidence their uniqueness and historic loyalty to the nation but remain largely irrelevant to elite culture and the approbation and recognition that may bring.

This trend could be initially evidenced in the violence of West Ham hooligans known as "The Pie and Mash Firm" in the 1990s amidst and against the first flourishings of

the multicultural, managerial, 'audit society' politics of the first Blair government (Power, 1998). Their ironic calling cards advertised their meted-out violence to rival fans as 'liquoring'.¹⁹⁴ This pie and mash iconography built on earlier recruiting by the National Front in the 1970s and the British National Party in the 1980s on the terraces of football grounds across the country. This was evidenced as "... a deep racist sentiment... partly borne from a sense of grievance and perceived betrayal of post-war local authority promises, particularly with regard to housing policies" (Fawbert, 2011: 181).

For some, whiteness had become a badge of a true cockney and "conferred some sort of guarantee and entitlement" (Ware, 2008). Recently fascist groupuscules like the so-called 'Pie and Mash Squad' claim the meal and its surrounding culture as an appellation of whiteness.¹⁹⁵ Birthed from an earlier incarnation of violent football supporters known as Casuals United, they arose as a response to perceived Muslim 'extremists'. More prosaically, 'pie and mash' is a well-known phrase in so-called cockney rhyming slang for 'fash' - fascism. Whilst the vast majority of those that eat and work in the pie and mash shops are certainly *not* racists, it is undeniable that the shops themselves have been associated with and sometimes symbolically arrogated by those who are.

In this way, cockney memory has situated eel, pie and mash within the frame of what DeSoucey (2010: 433) termed, 'gastronationalism'. This was originally theorised as state-level lobbying against a globalising food policy but has also come to signify a grassroots opposition to the forces of gentrification identified by their victims as being "associated with foreigners or out of touch liberal elites who not only do not understand, share or respect local culture and traditions" (Ranta, 2018).

Mennell (1985) suggests that 'national cuisines' coincided with the formation of nation states in the late fifteenth century and the key ingredients of the foods that the eel, pie and mash shops serve have both a national and international perspective. The importance of British beef allegedly goes back to at least the sixteenth century

¹⁹⁴ These calling cards are essentially business cards left with or on the body of a beaten victim. See - <https://www.instagram.com/p/CPJJmwvDezm/?hl=en>

¹⁹⁵ See - <https://www.searchlightmagazine.com/2017/06/a-second-warning-for-antifascists-thousands-on-the-streets-of-london-as-far-right-reorganises/>

and the beef in pies was and remains a nostalgic motif: a connection with the *terroir* of British soil (Rogers, 2003). Menno Spierling (2007: 35) suggests that beef was about “Protestant honesty and simplicity” yet it was also tied to “war, sacrifice and liberty.” These significations became entangled with bourgeois concerns of freedom and in this way, beef could be interpreted by all classes as a coded if ‘banal’ nationalism (Billig, 1995).

This has become so ingrained that, as Jon Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss (2008: 540) contend, “... most of the time, the nation is not something ordinary people talk *about*; rather, it's something they talk *with*.” For the customers of the eel, pie and mash shops it's something that they talk *through*.

The shops were always a foci for displays of cockney loyalty with images of royalty, but this trend became increasingly evident through the years of the Cameron government's policy of austerity with the increasing ‘mundane’ patriotic flowerings of the Union flag and allied symbols of national patriotism (‘Help for Heroes’ badges and poppy collection boxes). As Joanna Tidy (2015: 224) has suggested, this tendency rehabilitated the British military through a “nostalgia that encompassed war, domesticity ... through the commodified discourse ... for all things vintage”.

Indeed, the shops and cockney itself have since this period become situated within a more undisguised narrative of right-wing populism: the food valourised on social media as simultaneously British and London-specific. Online advertising for takeaway delivery from the eel and pie shops with events like St Georges Day and the Queen's Jubilee link opportunities to perform the ‘local’ nation.

5.5 The pie shop archipelago

“Fantasies of the past determined by the needs of the present have a direct impact on the realities of the future. (Boym, 2001; xvi)

As a continuing response to the 2008 financial crisis, the coalition governments of 2010-2015 implemented severe economic austerity policies that had a devastating

effect on public services and the standard of living for most working people (Lupton and Burchardt, 2016).

Owen Hatherley (2016) characterised the attendant cultural response to this as an 'austerity nostalgia' which sought to reclaim post-war privation as an aesthetic liniment to the neoliberal economic assault. This was a partial repetition of the "coded sentimentalities" (Bromley, 1988: 4) of the Second World War used by the Thatcher administrations to anchor the country to an alternative historical reality where the struggles of class, whiteness and empire had never developed. Yet the memories valorised were not simply of the Blitz nor the misty nostalgias of the post-war baby-boomers but those of their parents or even their grandparents. This surreal reconstruction of the hardship of those years was made to 'haunt' the present, deployed as a non-synchronous temporality obscuring a modernity in what Fisher (2014) had referred to as the "return as rupture". Television shows like *Downton Abbey* and *Call the Midwife* extended the Thatcherite siren-call of *Brideshead Revisited* in celebrating even more distant eras where the working classes knew their place.

These yearnings were in a sense a more successful replay of the battles between *The Movement* and *The Angry Young Men* generations within British's pre-and post-war culture. This was a conservative revenge for working class gains during the *Trente Glorieuses* and was, for the cockney, a character desperately unsure of its role within modernity, akin to a "nostalgia for the state of being repressed" (Gilroy 2004: 96-97). The paternal, pubic-spirited authoritarianism of 'we're all in it together', was entirely attractive to the stoic cockney as a historically utile conduit of capital.¹⁹⁶ Adaptive slogans such as "keep calm and eat pie and mash" increasingly appeared to chime with a re-remembered cockney 'common sense' that valorised its own precarious historical frugality and drew a direct (but entirely inappropriate) economic line between 'prudent' domestic budgeting as a patriotic act and national spending.¹⁹⁷ Online advertising for takeaway deliveries coinciding with events like St Georges Day linked opportunities to perform the 'local' nation.

¹⁹⁶ Cameron, David. "Full text of David Cameron's speech". *The Guardian*. 8 October 2009.

¹⁹⁷<https://twitter.com/GoddardsPies/status/1240566210724540416?s=20&t=2bLFygfYhQ0gG372FLP> Sg.

In this reading the eel, pie and mash shops could be seen as reassuringly traditional, cheap and simultaneously patriotic - revived palaces of identitarian comfort and consolation for cockneys steadily relocating to Essex or the Medway towns - an archipelago of East End encampments on the capital's borderlands.

The regressive aesthetic was further simultaneous with a genre of reality television shows like *Benefits Street* that continued to demonise precarious sections of the working class with an increasing moral priority that welfare should be the responsibility of the self-sufficient individual or family, not the community. These notions taken together began to form what Mike Savage, *et al* (2010: 612) had presciently recorded as "... a remaking of British national cultural preferences."

Continuing austerity might also have been seen within the continual necessity of cost-cutting, an enduring narrative of loss. This was a loss of hope, a feeling that had been growing for decades that the political establishment had converged ideologically and no longer spoke to ordinary peoples' experience. This was a vicious circle where "...disenchanted voters become even more cynical about politics and... ever more reliant on markets, debt and the audit to undergird social life" (Davies 2020: 17). Into that void started to drip "volatile forms of political identification" (Flemmen, Magne and Savage, 2017: S235). The form of this was a populist 'common sense' and an insular conservatism predicated on ethnic identity and race.

Historically, as Ruth Levitas (1986) had suggested, the right, unable to access Powellite repatriation had accepted assimilation through the idea of unchanging Englishness. In the 'Seventies this was an imperfect but largely 'bottom-up' process for example, political 'blackness' and grassroots Trades Union activity with social solidarities taking deep roots within popular youth culture. As an interviewee in his 70s who moved from Deptford to Essex recalled about West Indians, "... you got used to 'em because they're with you and I've grown up with 'em... If they treat me alright, I'll treat them alright".¹⁹⁸ Those social structures were broken by the politics of

¹⁹⁸ Name withheld on request. Interview by author 15 May 2022.

the right in the 1980s, replaced by a different kind of top-down multiculturalism more concerned with 'managing' communities rather than shared political struggle (Hall in Proctor, 2000). In the London exit polls for the European elections in 2004, UKIP won two and a half million votes on a platform that Britain was 'full' and 24 per cent of respondents said they might vote for the BNP (John and Margetts, 2009).

After the 2011 (London) riots, the Conservative Prime Minister, David Cameron claimed that multiculturalism as a state policy had "failed".¹⁹⁹ The following year, Theresa May, the Conservative Home Secretary told a newspaper that she wanted to create a "really hostile environment" for irregular migrants.²⁰⁰ This policy, championed by an increasingly emboldened right wing populist press, essentially deputised immigration control "by erecting barriers to healthcare and undermining equality and social cohesion through encouraging xenophobia and racism" (Griffiths and Yeo, 2021; 538). This shifted the conservative discourse of 'race as culture' to 'race as cultural identity' and increasingly fixed all Muslims as the new 'enemy within' (Kundani, 2012). By 2016, nearly four out of ten voters would name immigration as one of the key issues facing Britain (Blinder and Richards, 2016).

Against the global backdrop of the 'War on Terror', *The New East End* (2011), a book based on the classic yet problematic *Family and Kinship in East London* [1957] was published by a New Labour Think Tank. It took the simplistic view that the white working class was being 'bred' out of their traditional home by Bangladeshi Muslims. It was a view that was widely accepted. According to John G. who now eats his pie and mash in Essex, "... they took Bethnal Green and Whitechapel off us... we was the last line."²⁰¹ David H. similarly suggested that he moved to Essex during this period "... because of the blacks... [they] was all moving in and fucking taking over... They were a noisy lot... they smelt and whatever... that's why we wanted to get out."²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ "State Multiculturalism has failed" *BBC TV News*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12371994>

²⁰⁰ Kirkup, James and Winnett, Robert. "Theresa May interview: 'We're going to give illegal migrants a really hostile reception.'" *The Telegraph*, 25 May 2012.

²⁰¹ John G. Interview by author, 5 December 2021.

²⁰² David H. Interview by author, 14 April 2022.

This policy tack sought to tap into a growing populist right conservatism that had allowed Collins (2004) to talk of a ‘forgotten white tribe’ still largely defined by accent, taste and tradition. Whilst the spatial and temporal confusion of the white East Ender, pushed and squeezed by the forces of late capitalism, may have been understandable, it ignored the colonial legacy of migration and the everyday convivialities (Gilroy, 2004) that continual immigration had brought to London (which included the Irish to whom many cockneys trace lineage). It also ignored large-scale, white middle class gentrification of the area, partly the result of Eastenders selling their council homes to move to London’s borders. More, it re-imposed a hierarchy of belonging and the contestable notion of ‘tolerance’ (Wemyss, 2006) that could be withdrawn at any time by the white working class that remained.

Crucially the process started to reinforce a homophily: a connection to cultures that look like ‘us’ and turned a national gaze from Europe to an Anglophone version across the Atlantic (Savage, Wright and Gayo-Cal, 2010: 612). When Teresa May in 2016 spoke about powerful “citizens of nowhere ...in thrall to international elites... who take on cheap labour from overseas...” she conflated conspiracy and immigration and showed that the New Right had understood and used working class frustration.²⁰³

The mood also played into a growing English obsession with Europe posited in a metaphoric phagophobia (fear of swallowing) that surrounded British food identity. Spierling (2007: 44) charts how the EU had allegedly been ‘chipping away’ at British food and recounts regular scare stories in the popular press about Brussels bureaucrats attacking ‘traditional’ British ‘fry-up’ breakfasts with regulations, so “...the Englishman is no longer eating but being eaten (Spierling in Wilson, 2007: 44).” In this way the nostalgic cockney was used as a bulwark against European bureaucracy but also to make sense of white loss and “phantasms of home” (Boym, 2001: 13).

However, it needs to be stated that some of the East End, specifically Bethnal Green as well as Shoreditch and Stepney, had historically been the centre of “racial

²⁰³ <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/full-text-theresa-may-s-conference-speech>

exclusionism” and a “laager” mentality in the form of earlier antisemitism directed towards “alien costermongers” (Husbands: 1982). From the British Brothers League in 1901 to the National Front in the 1970s, the area uncontestedly demonstrated a lineage of far-right vigilantism because it always had been a site of ‘super-diversity’.²⁰⁴ These areas were generally the most deprived in East London and for workers the most precarious with any additional labour at the behest of a changing capital, undercutting wages. They were also areas with large unofficial economies and coster social structures that were relatively weak in the traditional architecture of political, though crucially not cultural, solidarities.

As James Malcolm (2014: 654) suggests the area had become a site of memory “as ‘practice’ - as opposed to memory as fact or essence - history” ignoring the process of colonial whiteness and the fictions of autochthony that blended the Blitz and morality. These palimpsestic nostalgias for a ‘golden age’ traced over each other forming a diasporic memory that continues to link the East End to Essex in a self-perpetuating closed conversation of ‘how it really was’. One of the contemporary sites of those conversations are the new eel, pie and mash shops relocated to the capital’s edges. Here some, but certainly not all, residents talk of how their ‘old’ East End has been ruined by European regulations or how “all the original butchers shops, oil shops, pie and mash shops all got pushed out because of the Asians.”²⁰⁵

By the twenty-tens several simultaneous national processes also converged within the cockney landscape. Firstly, the changing age demographics that were starting to emerge across Britain began to de-link those that were born before the 1970s who grew up with an absence of tertiary education from those who grew up later and who were “dramatically more highly qualified and ethnically diverse” (Sobolewska and Ford, 2020: 22). A further separation was evidenced by a post-war generation with pensions and property who eulogised their own meritocratic rise at a time when the attempts to link economic inequality to neoliberal ‘striving’ had started to degenerate.

²⁰⁴ The BBL had 45000 members stretching from Hackney, Bethnal Green, Shoreditch, Stepney and significantly, Roydon in Essex. For figures see - Husbands, Christopher T. "East End Racism 1900-1980 Geographical Continuities in Vigilantist and Extreme Right-wing Political Behaviour." *The London Journal* 8, 1, 1982: 7.

For ‘super-diversity’ see - Vertovec, 2019: 125-139.

²⁰⁵ Ken (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 20 May 2022.

Against these seemingly intractable differences, one of the few frames of reference for many of the older white working class was a nostalgic return to the securities of the Empire (Satnam and McGeever, 2018). This was now additionally aimed against the free flow of migrant labour from Eastern Europe, allegedly ‘swamping’ and abusing the NHS and Welfare State. This narrative was the result of what might be called identity competition and as Gilroy (2020) would suggest, this particularly post-empire English anxiety stemmed from a realisation that they no longer knew, “... culturally speaking who they are.”²⁰⁶ Brexit, the political machinations to ‘remove’ Britain from globalised influence and re-establish a world that looked very much like the mythologised memories of the generations of the 1950s, became the context of all of these issues. The landscape of this for the cockney was Essex.

For a section of the populist Right, desperate for its vote, Essex became a symbol of an allegedly ‘left behind’ proletariat and indeed every area in Essex voted ‘leave’ and sixty-two per cent of the county backed Brexit.²⁰⁷ Yet, the reality of a singular Essex working class is more complicated. The Essex cockney diaspora is actually evidenced by a dual class trajectory. The ‘downward’ as Cohen (2008) suggests, exhibits the ‘poor whites syndrome’ negatively symbolised by the stereotype of the ‘chav’ and ‘the Essex girl’. The ‘upward’ is the ‘self-made’, self-employed entrepreneur who has ‘escaped’ from the working class by ‘hard work’.

However, for the Essex cockney, these classifications were a contradiction. In May 2019 The Campaign to End Child Poverty calculated that in ten Essex towns almost half of children lived in poverty and in 2020, Basildon was the joint fifth most unequal town in the UK.²⁰⁸ ‘Working class’ was simultaneously a memorialised badge of honour even for the new wealthy whose East London palimpsestic memories gave their own lives and rituals (like eels, pie and mash) validation yet additionally for those ‘who had made it’ (and even some who hadn’t), a mark of shame associated

²⁰⁶ Wade, Francis, “Whiteness just ain’t worth what it used to be,” *The Nation*, 28 October 2020, <https://www.thenation.com/article/culture/paul-gilroy-interview/>

²⁰⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36617396>

²⁰⁸ [https://www.basildon.gov.uk/media/10297/Basildon-Council-Draft-Economic-Growth-Plan-BEGP-2020-24/pdf/Basildon_Council_-_Draft_Economic_Growth_Plan_\(BEGP\)___2020-24.pdf?m=637395816147700000](https://www.basildon.gov.uk/media/10297/Basildon-Council-Draft-Economic-Growth-Plan-BEGP-2020-24/pdf/Basildon_Council_-_Draft_Economic_Growth_Plan_(BEGP)___2020-24.pdf?m=637395816147700000)

with cultural atrophy and welfare. As Gareth Millington (2016: 273) notes, Essex was historically London's "dark place" where the media's fear of an unrestrained, brutish capitalism could be observed and satirised. Here were Simon Heffer's 'Essex Man' caricature of the neo-Neanderthal City boy and Marks and Gran's simpleton consumers, Sharon and Tracey.²⁰⁹ In that sense, Brexit's 'Basildon Man' was simply the latest iteration of that as a ventriloquising of the middle classes' darkest fears. Constant signalling over decades and the hegemonic cultural enveloping of Essex eventually made this myth, compounded by the growing urban deprivation of the New Towns, into reality for many Essex people themselves. This was an acceptance of Brexit within the framing that the cockney had been abandoned by the 'educated elites' and might as well vote in spite; an echo of David Low's 'Churchillian' "Very Well, alone" cartoon. As 'Brian' reported, "We never thought we'd get ... out for all the posh bastards and all the government... but the working man came through."²¹⁰

The myth-that-became-reality was also signalled by the way in which class had been re-interpreted during the 80s and 90s across a post-Fordist, increasingly 'de-aligned' landscape. This led to a growing self-ascription of class (Savage, 2015) within an increasing framing of emotion and morality crucially "marked by memory, place and experience for each generation in a particular moment" (Biressi and Nunn, 2013:16). The Essex cockney largely valorised his 'working classness' within a culture that was defined to a large extent by a whiteness predicated on the created nostalgias of the monoracial East End. During the Brexit campaign, which contrary to assumptions, was not largely a working class revolt (Dorling, 2016), the media used the Essex cockney as "the mechanism by which a defence of nation could be spoken" (Biressi and Nunn, 2013: 148). This was a valorisation of Brexit by the Essex cockney as a popular revolt against 'multiculturalism'.

Here, in the narrative of a popular uprising, 'the people' were "a monoracial singularity" (Begum, Mondon and Winter, 2021: 223). In fact, Essex although still largely white, it is increasingly home to ethnic populations migrating from London.

²⁰⁹ Heffer, Simon. *Sunday Telegraph*. Heffer, Simon. "Maggie's Mauler: profile of Essex Man". *Sunday Telegraph*, 7 October 1990.

Marks, Laurence and Maurice Gran. *Birds of a Feather*. BBC TV, 1989-1998.

²¹⁰ Brian (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 14 May 2022.

Yet as Stephanie Lawler (2005: 430) has suggested, the working class has become “*emblematically* white even if this is contrary to its lived complexity.” In this reading non-white members of the working class are valorised by the “liberal, cosmopolitan elite (Hobolt, 2016) revealing a “deep sense of a loss of prestige” (Virdee and McGeever, 2018: 1811) amongst the *indigene*. This increasingly underpins claims of white victimhood (Begum, Mondon and Winter, 2021) evidenced by ‘Tony’ from Romford who “has worked my whole life, so if anybody tells me I’m privileged, I’ll just spit in their eye because it’s...woke nonsense.”²¹¹ As ‘Ken’ attests of Wickford where he has lived for twenty years since moving from the East End, “We’ve got our own kind down here... We’re probably trying to recreate what we had. Without all the blacks and all the others spoiling it.”²¹²

The borders between the East End and Essex are fluid: many people who now live in Essex commute into the capital to work and may have relatives who still live in their areas of origin. Some towns like Basildon though are, as Mark Wincott who still lives in Poplar observes, “...third generation Essex... pie and mash is a comfort for them [and] the only time they have it is when they go [to] West Ham.”²¹³ This is cockney identity based on a “simultaneous presence and absence” (Watt, Millington and Huq, 2014: 127). The diaspora cockney, I assert, is created through a kind of ‘call and response’ (Gilroy, 1993) where identity can be lost and found again and eel, pie and mash forms part of what calls *adhaan*-like from that lost re-imagined land.

These however are not totalising narratives: most white people in the East End or Essex are certainly not racists but the politically expedient narratives created around them fix them in ways that they are defined by their ‘lack’ (McKenzie, 2015). Most, like Jean in her 70s in her Bethnal Green flat *do* bemoan that “everything down Brick Lane is all Bengali” because it is historically a repository of poor immigrant communities that is culturally different to hers. But of her Bengali neighbours, she says, “You know, they’re really nice... when it was Ramadan, they was always

²¹¹ ‘Tony’(real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 25 May 2022.

²¹² ‘Ken’ (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 20 May 2022.

²¹³ Mark Wincott. Interview by author 16 May 2022.

sending food in and everything”.²¹⁴This is the real ‘conviviality’ of modern London in which different metropolitan groups might dwell in diverse contexts (Gilroy, 2004).

This emergent contemporary conviviality is however increasingly and inevitably modifying the language of cockney itself. According to Paul Kerswill and Eivind Torgesen (in Hickey, 2017), until the late nineteenth century, most migration had been from the south of England and linguistic changes resulting from contact were difficult to find. According to Eva Sivertson (1960), even mass Jewish immigration around the turn of the century did not much disrupt the cockney dialect, merely adding some additional Yiddish words. Yet, post-war immigration, largely from former British colonies like Jamaica, meant that by the 1980s, a discernibly new street sound was evidenced and “young Afro-Caribbeans [like the artist Smiley Culture] could clearly code switch between patois and local English. The local English itself ... [was] ... very much of its time, a mainstream *variety* [my italics] of cockney” (Sebba in Cheshire 2011: 160).

Linguistic adaption however has accelerated enormously in the intervening thirty years. Traditional cockney areas for example, Hackney, largely as the result of immigration from the wider Developing World, is now home to speakers of at least eighty-nine different languages.²¹⁵ In areas like this where there is a large linguistic pool to draw from language changes and mutates constantly.

Sali Tagliamonte and Alexandra D’Arcy (in Cheshire, 2011) suggest that it is the late adolescent age group that selects and edits language in a largely informal way according to their friendship groups often “using forms resulting from their imperfect learning of the target language.” Certainly, the resulting linguistic patchwork owes much to black youth culture evidenced through commercially successful genres of rap and hip-hop and is referred to by sociolinguists as Multicultural London English (MLE).²¹⁶ As Jenny Cheshire *et al* (2011: 164) have it, “the vernacular baseline has changed from one which was largely cockney in the 1980s to a variant of MLE today.” Indeed, Paul Kerswill (2013: 133) suggests that London children do not

²¹⁴ Jean Sanchez. Interview by author, 17 May 2022.

²¹⁵ <https://hackney.gov.uk/knowning-our-communities>

²¹⁶ See - Fox, 2015.

“straightforwardly acquire the localised ‘cockney’ vernacular, even if their parents might be speakers.”

Recent research (Cole, 2021) into phonetic variation in the Essex town of Debden, site of the original relocations from Bethnal Green, has indicated that cockney, as a speech pattern, has become less popular among the children of the Thatcher generation. According to her study, older Debden residents still largely ‘speak’ and identify as cockney whereas younger people see the identity as geographically rooted in *East London*. Crucially, they consider their accent to be ‘Essex’. The author suggests that this is potentially because of cockney’s association with “low social status” and that ‘improper’ speech has been seen as an impediment to “social evaluation[s] and... greater social mobility” (Cole, 2020: 259-260). This would indeed be congruent to an increased valorisation of a specific modern Essex character that takes its cue largely from celebrity and consumerism. My own interviews, specific to eel and pie shops across both London and wider parts of Essex would seem to indicate a more mixed picture yet undoubtedly, there is a conflict around the notion of what cockney, both as a linguistic form and an identity, currently signifies; what it was and what it will become.

The axis of that is certainly age and amongst younger people, a partial turn from whiteness and a partial re-identification, after the 2008 financial crash and widespread gentrification, with the idea of class.²¹⁷ Indeed, in a recent video for his latest single, *Blessings*, the cockney rapper Tommy B, 25, is seen performing in the newly opened F. Cooke’s pie and mash shop in Chelmsford, Essex. In it, he woos a mixed-race girl with a cockney peppered by (largely) Caribbean patois inflections common to contemporary, *Grime* music. He is also seen (ironically) at the wheel of the iconic three-wheeled van from *Only Fools and Horses* accompanied by a stereotypical ‘Essex girl’. For him, as a young, modern cockney, age, class and race are linked.

²¹⁷ For a discussion of the re-evaluation of class in contemporary politics amongst the young see - Milburn, 2019.

I think that our generation is totally different. If one of my pals is being racist, I'm like, that's just backwards... it's outdated, it's expired... for me I realise that I have much more in common with a black boy that's come from fuck all than with fucking 'Sebastian' who is white and has grown up with a great life. Same thing with the Eastern Europeans or the Asians... and they're all working class people.²¹⁸

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to show how the personal, sensory memorialisations of the cockney have become synchronous with larger cultural and political ones. Always meaningful as *de facto* working class spaces of pride and community, their role in the past few decades has changed concomitant with the cockney's problematic procession into modernity.

Through its historic demonisation by New Labour and growing rage at its long, slow cultural disintegration the traditional cockney, for so long the loyal hostage-servant of the elites, has come to represent what Gilroy (2005: 132) noted at the tail-end of Empire were the "widening fissures in British society".

The eel, pie and mash shops have become both a sanctuary and anchorage for their culture and a key signifier for memories deeply entrenched in the East End subconscious. These spaces for the ritual invocation of working classness are uniquely powerful because they rely on personal sensory memorialisation of a food based on comfort which holds within it the cockney's origin story.

The shops have become a palimpsestic enticement for multiple and myriad memories of London working class life whose contestations into a living, performed script change and settle according to the needs of the contemporary memory epoch.

Currently, this landscape is largely dominated by the memorialisations of a post-war generation whose cultural compass is fixed to a nostalgic embellishment of wartime

²¹⁸ Tommy B. Interview by author, 25 March 2022.

austerity concomitant with a hegemonic signalling of a particular kind of monocultural conservatism. Some of these memorialisation are fabled within the mythscape of a multi-era cockney from the registers of a 'jellied eel London' (Sinclair, 2004). They are rosy depictions of poverty from unreliable autobiography and the confluence of "glimmers" of working class authenticity (Beswick, 2020) found in kitchen-sink dramas and gangster films.

These problematic recollections have been re-created throughout the cockney diaspora in pie shop simulacra's that are, in effect, *lieux de memoire* (Nora, 1989). Here a new cockney is being birthed, fed from memories from simultaneous temporalities with contestations around multiculturalism and age within the neoliberal city.

6. Conclusion

“Nothing becomes romanticised so much as memories, both individual and collective, about food and drink” (Mathias, 1967: 17)

6.1 Overview

This thesis has for the first time explored and examined the unwritten history of London’s iconic but fast-disappearing eel, pie and mash shops and additionally interrogated their cultural conduit, the changing and concomitant notion of the cockney identity. In doing so I have addressed an absence in research around these spaces and the communities that use them who, in turn, have been largely forgotten or ignored but whose contested memories and identity I argue have great contemporary political and cultural resonance in an age of populism and Brexit.

My work has excavated a tracing around these absences in historical literature, synthesising existing scholarship and applying new research to extend their relevancy. I have utilised memory theory, sensory ethnography and semi-structured interviews to explore the shops and those who use them as temporal anchorages within the neoliberal city and the Essex hinterlands. This thesis has contextualised the shops’ development, not within any contemporary family dynasty as is commonly held, but as part of a much earlier historical process centred around the greater mobility of labour during early modernity, concurrent with the ideological and cultural accession of a bourgeoisie whose rise was a synchronous dance with an emergent London proletariat.

6.2 Summary by chapter

My first chapter proves that these enterprises were part of an earlier, established trade than previously recorded. I link for the first time within them a simultaneity to suggest that they were synchronous to both the dying breath of an older, popular

street culture, of which the roving pieman was part, and to the withdrawal of the middle classes from areas that came to be dominated by the urban poor.

The exact fare and presentation of these early shops remains somewhat unclear, and I argue that they became increasingly defined by the class-demotion of their clientele that mirrored the changing cartography of the city. By the mid-nineteenth century the pie shops were no longer places that gentlemen might frequent. Rather, depending on their hyper locality, the shops were feeding tradesmen, the petit bourgeois and some of London's market-adjacent poor. By the turn of the twentieth century the now pie and mash shops have become a cultural cornerstone of those who almost exclusively identify themselves as working class.

In describing this process, I have employed the biological notion of a taxon to illustrate their evolution in tandem with other lower class eating places as increasing responses to hunger, precarity and the changing work-discipline of industrial capitalism (Thompson, 1967).

I argue a new London working class culture, defended within dual notions of freedom and respectability and centred largely around unofficial markets and desperate resistances to poverty, came into conflict with bourgeois attempts to physically and ideologically control the capital's streets. It was these populations, contributing to the emergence of a distinct and unique London character that became integral to the customer base of the emergent eel and pie shops. By the early twentieth century the (now) eel, pie and mash shops had become numerous but, I suggest, were confined within largely matrilineal, hyper-local social solidarities based around micro-class divisions of work and codes of propriety that remained largely impenetrable to outsiders.

My second chapter defines the eel and pie shops through the contested evolution of the character that became known as cockney. I trace its pre-modern roots to suggest that it became a metaphor for the interplay between the powerful and the powerless.

During early Victorian modernity, I argue the performativity of the cockney was both an escapist pantomime that simultaneously aped, celebrated and satirised the

appearance of the elites and a dramatic identity informed by street commerce (Jankiewicz, 2014). This identity I suggest was a consolidation of an older, carnivalesque street culture and a new London-specific working class personality, re-inscribed as both comic and criminal within the moral framework of bourgeois morality. I relate the fascination and fear of this character within the twin nodes of Victorian liberalism that sought to meld the potentially revolutionary cockney of the 'abyss' into a figure of imperial incorporation and suggest additionally that the eel and pie shops became central to a hyper-local and largely shielded culture of working class consolation (Steadman Jones, 1974). I utilise Hall's (1973) work on hegemonic messaging to clarify the creation of a particular type of 'ordinariness' through a bourgeois theatrical ventriloquising of the coster community and this I argue continues to be periodically valorised according to its usefulness to capital at times of political stress.

My third chapter continues to chart the trajectory of the cockney and the culture of eel and pie shops beyond the rubble of the Blitz but returns to the era of New Imperialism to contextualise the cockney identity within the notion of whiteness and empire. I argue that the reframing of the nation as a racial singularity (and the eventual franchise extension) marked a fundamental shift by the elites from overt repression to a more consensual vision of hegemony. Further, I suggest this signalled to subsequent 'entitlements' of East London's white population (especially) around the gains of the Welfare State and a national economy. I argue that these entitlements are memorialised in the contemporary imagination of a largely mono-racial, hyperlocalism to which the eel, pie and mash shops are, to a large extent a spiritual refuge.

I link the destruction of traditional cockney territoriality by zonal redevelopment, gentrification and exodus to the allied decline of social structures simultaneous to the identity's contested relationship with modernity. I further argue that housing and its allocation was central to the *ressentiment* towards mass immigration and the hastening of the transmission (and simulacra) of the cockney identity outward towards (especially) Essex and its 'dual class trajectories' (Watt, Millington and Huq, 2014). The delineations of these I suggest are central to cockney's internal, inner-

world contradictions and negotiations between its working class and petty bourgeois nodes.

Rather than the suggestion that the cockney disappeared in the post war period (Stedman Jones, 1989), I argue that the identity simultaneously continued its role as a nostalgic conduit to capital but evolved multiple valences that spoke to an increasing emphasis on popular culture, age, choice and individuality (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2018) further complicating its continued existence as a palimpsestic construction.

My fourth chapter examines the sights, sounds and smells of a contemporary eel, pie and mash shop utilising a sensory ethnography.

I clarify the shops as a unique site of hyperlocal, working class territoriality that utilises ritual as a zone of resistance to the modern neo-liberal city. These rituals I suggest have, through the senses, become mythologised and coded and part of the 'true archives' (De Certeau, 1998) of the remnants of a working class city. They link hospitality, conviviality and memory which have been inscribed within and upon and the bodies of the customers (Connerton, 1989).

I argue that the formulation of the food served in the shops is unique and antithetical to the 'rules' (Douglas, 1975) of a British working class meal and that the eel is now largely the object of demographic, age and class-based notions of disgust relevant to the changing notions of cockney which sees its limited consumption as a 'food of ordeal'.

My thesis suggests that the shops are arenas of a specific and historic working class respectability and a temporary refuge from dominant forms of cultural production. I argue that the shops contain and generate their own notions of taste and are a negotiation with the hegemonic culture. I offer that the shops are a unique insight into the changing notions of taste, class and inter-class contestation within the convivialities of a closed, almost secretive heritage of proletarian culture.

My final chapter interrogates the complex memories that populate the shops and the communities that use them.

I suggest that these memorialisations are myriad inscriptions that partly derive from the historic specificity of London and potentially include early capitalist notions of conviviality as well as the faint cultural mnemonics of nineteenth century working class privation, defeat and accommodation which led to them as zones of consolation. I argue that the shops and their memorialisations are additionally complicated within the simultaneous remembrances of a separate owner and customer class which meld around a notion of an entrepreneurial proletarianism. This includes a largely white precariat who valorise their historic social solidarities within a hyper-local cartography against a backdrop of immigration, globalisation and the forces of gentrification. In addition, these accompany the re-imagined, performative and simulacra-like memorialisations of the so-called cockney diaspora (largely) within Essex. I refer to these multiple, simultaneous and competing memories as polyphonic. The memory scripts that are performed within the eel, pie and mash shops, allied to the palimpsestic cockney identity and its cultural and geographic dislocation, are overwhelmingly nostalgic and melancholic. I argue that these narratives and reconstructions of the past are and remain concomitant to the needs of capital.

Currently, I suggest, these scripts fall between a cultural and communicative memory (Assmann, 2010) of a post-war generation that dimly recall as children the legacy of wartime privation and mass colonial immigration. It is, I argue, this generation's sketchy memorialisations and political framings of the Second World War, that now sit with a melancholia around the loss of the fantasy of a British omnipotence crystallised as a post-colonial nostalgia. Here, I offer, a bitter confusion at the ending of the *Trente Glorieuses* (and the part enabling of a neoliberal embrace via Thatcherism) and a monocultural conservatism reified as a 'common sense', hold the key to deciphering much of the structure of contemporary 'populist' politics, the contestations of Brexit and the so-called 'culture wars'.

6.3 The unseen

“There are certain areas of London that I suspect retain their integrity and beauty only by becoming invisible” (Moorcock, 2000: 180).

Underlying this thesis has been the question of why these spaces and the culture contained within them been rendered near historically invisible. I have in the introduction, suggested that part of that unseeness is the result of both the class positioning of those who have tried to tell the story of London’s working class but also a defensive habitus which surround the shops, the result of historic cultural repression. Elsewhere, I have also pointed to what I suggest is a lack of exchange value in the shops and their fare for a gentrifying bourgeois audience which contrasts to the treatment of spaces like public houses (so-called gastro-pubs), the upmarket selling of dishes like fish and chips and also the ‘traditional’ comfort food and décor of re-imagined ‘working man’s’ cafés. All of these have been concomitant with either renewed historical interest or re-mapping of these enterprises to suit more middle class tastes. The eel, pie and mash shops, often linked with insular communities associated with unfashionable attitudes to cultural change and historically demonised in mainstream culture have, however, remained unassailable and untranslatable outside of their class habitat.

This unseeness may also have its partial roots in the evolution of the cockney communities themselves. The shops and their food, long associated with proletarianism, parents and pastness, increasingly sat uncomfortably with an upwardly mobile, aspirational generation ironically birthed within the working class modernity of the ‘fifties, ‘sixties and ‘seventies who became (partly) valorised by the neoliberal retrenchment from the Thatcher project onwards. In that sense, the shops retain something of the comic, performative origins of the Victorian cockney often reproduced in mainstream culture as an object of anachronistic derision. I argue that for many to whom the shops were an inevitable class heritage, these factors combined to form a kind of complex embarrassment.

More, the shops and the food were historically contained within a distinct collective habitus formed through historical work forms and associated patterns of community

life that have been largely destroyed. The melancholic valorising of this is a central contradiction at the heart of the cockney identity.

In recent years, largely synchronous with the privations of austerity, the notion of class has strongly reasserted itself within Britain. This has been additionally concomitant to a 'populist' political reaction against both a breakdown of a two-party class-aligned political system and a managerial-professional class largely associated with 'progressive' values centred around the EU and 'centrist' politics.

For many, the pie and mash shops that held traditional class allegiances have become somewhat of a symbol for opposition to this hegemony and have been increasingly celebrated, via selective memorialisation, especially on social media, as arenas of reasserted, traditional 'working classness'. Whilst the ascriptions, subtleties and confusions around those who claim to be (historically) working class are beyond the scope of this work, it is incontestable that as the handful of London's traditional pie and mash shops fade and close, the numbers relocating or indeed appearing for the first time in Essex and other places of London diaspora as simulacra, are multiplying.

6.4 The palaces of comfort and consolation

This thesis has argued that the eel, pie and mash shops are a crucial but historically unexamined arena of London working class life.

These spaces I have argued, remain an unmitigated, unpretentious, authentic loci of a culture born of the need for sustenance and conviviality; the food served within, a code for a complex but contested ordinariness.

Central to these spaces is the allied but equally contested identity of the cockney recollected through what I have referred to as polyphonic memorialisations. These I suggest are not merely palimpsestic in a linear sense but rather the result of multiple junctures of memory and identity traces that may be usefully illustrated by Michel Serres' (1995: 60) concept of the handkerchief. This speaks analogously to an image of 'pleated time' - a multi-temporality of history where an ironed handkerchief, once

flat (representing definite and stable historical co-ordinates) is crumpled rendering historically distant points "... close, or even superimposed". In this way cockney, by the mid-twentieth century, consisted of (amongst many others) mediaeval notions of urbanity, eighteenth century assumptions around developing petit-bourgeois ascendancy, nineteenth century Irish immigrant entrepreneurial anti-authoritarianism and late Victorian propaganda around race and empire.

The contemporary cockney, no longer defined by a traditional territoriality, race or even necessarily dialect is, I offer, a reservoir of identities. These might be mixed and matched according to personal need, historic cultural obligation or contemporary political requirements.

The polestar of this identity, especially for the diasporic cockney, remains a recently reinvigorated cultural symbol: the final taxon of a nineteenth century feeding station, frozen in time, hidden in plain sight and largely forgotten. A space inscribed by responses to hunger, conviviality and early working class notions of respectability forged in a culture of consolation.

In this way, cockney is now I propose more akin to a structure of feeling, an affective but contested landscape of emotion and evolving cultural signifiers caught between past certainties of a largely monoracial, national identity and the challenges of a globalised world.

This is a complex identity, perilously mapped. It is culturally working class but increasingly held in tension with an aspirational, interstitial and precarious petty bourgeoisie respondent to the nostalgic populism of a reimagined post-war landscape.

Cockney is an identity haunted by a melancholy and phantasms of a time which has passed, its eel, pie and mash shops are as Cynthia Cruz (2021: 58) suggests, "filled with the aura of what previously defined them".

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Appendix



Fig.1. Shepherd, Frederick Napoleon. "View of building in Fleet Street, with Blanchard's premises and figures on pavement".



Fig.2. Olive Malvery serving in a cheap coffee house, early 1900s.



Fig. 3. Kennington, Eric. "The coster mongers" 1914.

Interviews

Name	Location	Position	Date of Interview	Location of Interview
Arment, Rita	London	Pie shop owner	20/11/2019	virtual
Arment, Roy	London	Pie shop owner	16/11/2019	virtual
B, Tommy	London	Customer	25/03/2022	virtual
Boutall, Adam	London	Customer	19/10/2021	virtual
Bradley, John	Essex	Customer	25/06/2022	virtual
Burrows, Tim	Essex	Author/Customer	15/06/2022	in person
Brian (alias)	Essex	Customer	22/06/2022	virtual
Camp, Greg	Essex	Pie shop owner	10/05/2021	virtual
Clunn, Chris	Wales	Customer	17/02/2022	in person
Cole, Amanda	Essex	Academic	05/04/2022	virtual
Cooke, Chris	Warks.	Pie shop owner	17/11/2020	in person
Cooke, Joe	London	Pie shop owner	01/03/2020	in person
Cooke, Kim	London	Pie shop owner	07/03/2020	in person
Cooke, Robert	Essex	Pie shop owner	10/09/2021	virtual
Errol, Eileen	Essex	Customer	22/10/2021	in person
Ford, Nicola	Essex	Pie shop worker	12/06/2022	virtual
Furnham, David	Sussex	Director	21/02/2022	virtual
H, David (alias)	Essex	Customer	14/04/2022	virtual
Kelly, Paul	Essex	Pie shop owner	15/12/2020	in person
Ken (alias)	Essex	Customer	22/06/2022	virtual
Malone, Johnny	Essex	Pie shop owner	15/06/2022	In person
O'Carroll, Steven	Essex	Customer	22/06/2022	virtual
Poole, Graham	London	Pie shop owner	16/09/2021	In person
Sanchez, Jean	London	Customer	25/10/2022	virtual
Sanchez, Johnny	Kent	Customer	01/11/2022	virtual
Wincott, Mark	London	Pie shop owner	05/11/2022	virtual

The Palaces of Comfort and Consolation -

The Pie and Mash shop as a performative space of a contested
London working class memory.

Stuart Freedman

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of
Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

April 2023

Abstract

This thesis seeks to interrogate and clarify the history and culture of London's traditional but fading and largely forgotten eel, pie and mash shops. In doing so the work examines their cultural conduit, the adjacent and evolving identity of the cockney whose contested memoryscapes have, I suggest, great contemporary political and cultural relevance in an age of populism and Brexit.

The work excavates a tracing around the shops' absences in historical literature. It situates their establishment within the dying breath of an older, popular street culture and the birth of a new London working class, centred around unofficial street markets and in a synchronous dance with the ideological accession of the bourgeoisie.

The thesis employs the biological notion of a *taxon* to illustrate the shops' evolution largely defined by the class-demotion of their clientele that mirrored the changing cartography of the city. By the late nineteenth century, this work argues, the eel and pie shops had become a pillar of a respectable London working class culture whose hyper-local solidarities revolved around micro-class divisions of work and negotiated bourgeois codes of propriety as part of a 'culture of consolation' that has remained largely impenetrable to outsiders.

The study explores this concomitant cockney identity which became, partly through bourgeois theatrical ventriloquising, a figure of imperial incorporation. This eventually came to represent a particular type of 'ordinariness', subsequently reconfigured around the gains of a Welfare State and a national economy that continues to be periodically valorised according its usefulness to capital at times of political stress.

Utilising sensory ethnography and memory studies the work explores the landscape and territoriality of the contemporary eel, pie and mash shop. It interrogates the rituals and complex, often competing and polyphonic memory inscriptions which memorialise a largely post-colonial nostalgic melancholia around the loss of fantasy

of a British omnipotence. The thesis argues that the shops and their simulacra-like reincarnations amongst the cockney diaspora in the Essex new towns offer an insight into the changing notions of taste and class within the convivialities of a unique but broadly closed heritage of proletarian culture as a zone of resistance in the neoliberal city.

Contents

Contents	iii
Acknowledgements	vi
Author Declaration	vii
Definitions	viii
Methodology	x
Introduction	1
Overview	1
1.1 A walk down the Broadway	2
1.2 (uncharted) History from below	4
1.3 Co-ordinates	8
1.3.1 History	8
1.3.2 Identity	10
1.3.3 Food Culture	13
1.3.4 Memory	15
1.4 Chapters	17
Chapter 1. Origins	22
Introduction	22
1.1 Monstrous Wen	24
1.2 “What has become of the pieman?”	26
1.3 Through a plate glass window of respectability	33
1.4 Food as cipher	41
1.5 Hunger and the ‘Great Unwashed’	44
1.6 Eating out and translatable spaces	49

1.7 Defeat and the culture of consolation	54
1.8 Cat's meat and glue for the gravy	56
1.9 Modernity, space and identity	59
Conclusion	62
Chapter 2. The Theatre of the Cockney	65
Introduction	65
2.1 The cockney in history	67
2.2 Dickens and the descent of the cockney	73
2.3 The Music Hall as distorting mirror	76
2.4 The coster confusion	79
2.5 The character refined	82
2.6 The character reflected back	84
2.7 The Pearlies	87
2.8 Modernity, ordinariness and the first decline of the cockney	90
2.9 The cockney keeps calm and carries on	97
2.10 Disillusionment and the spoils of war	100
Conclusion	105
Chapter 3 The Defensive Trench of Empire	108
Introduction	108
3.1 The 'whitening' of the London working classes	110
3.2 From the terrace to the tower block	119
3.3 The kids are alright	129
3.4 The unmodern	138
Conclusion	146
Chapter 4 Tastes and Space of Resistance	149
Introduction	149
4.1 Resistances from a stubborn past	150
4.2 No mate, this is a pie shop...	156
4.3 Too heavy to steal	162
4.4 The lower classes smell	164
4.5 The eel and the East Ender	169

4.6 A Regime of Disgust	174
4.7 A Working Class Taste and Space	178
Conclusion	184
Chapter 5 The Cockney Saudade	187
Introduction	187
5.1 “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are”	189
5.2 “Nothing tastes as good as the past”	202
5.3 Don’t mention the War...	210
5.4 We’ve had our jellied eels and our glass of beer	217
5.5 The pie shop archipelago	224
Conclusion	235
Conclusion	237
6.1 Overview	237
6.2 Summary by chapter	237
6.3 The unseen	242
6.4 The palaces of comfort and consolation	243
Bibliography	246
Appendix	309

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To my three parents, I hope I've done you proud.

Thanks to Joe and Kim Cooke and all the shop owners and customers who generously allowed me to interview them and record their thoughts and memories here.

I hereby declare that all of the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Stuart Freedman, 11 April, 2023

Definitions

This thesis contains some problematic terms which I will briefly define.

White Working Class

I use this particular descriptor because I can find no suitable alternative. This simple designation in physical terms on the one hand refers to the historical constituency of the eel and pie shops that I write about. On the other however, I realise that it has become a very loaded term. It is increasingly a code for a 'forgotten white tribe' (Collins, 2014) that concentrates on race rather than class position and plays to the latest narrative that multiculturalism has 'failed'. More it seeks to erase those members of the British working class that are non-white, falsely pitting them against those who are. This ignores the overwhelming evidence that inequality is a complex matrix of simultaneous social, economic and structural disadvantages and that ultimately, as my thesis recounts, the British working class were 'made' white to reframe the nation as a racial singularity (Bonnett, 1998, Virdee, 2014). In all of this is the resurgent nostalgia for empire and at its heart the fear of miscegenation and loss of identity.

Bourgeois/Middle Class

I use these terms interchangeably throughout the thesis and follow Raymond Williams' (1983: 45-49) difficulty in employing the notion of 'bourgeois' in a British context of 'upper', 'middle' and 'working class'. However, my usage coincides with his in pointing to the idea that bourgeois is a cultural distillation of an ideological hegemonic ruling class that came to dominate Britain in the nineteenth century.

Popular Modernity

This derives from Mark Fisher's (2014: 23) work on culture. It refers to a dialectic that sits between the current and the experimental. Although Fisher usually employed

this critically in terms of popular music, I use it more widely to capture the cultural moment from the 1960s until its defeat by the forces of neoliberalism in the 1980s, that saw elements of the British working class emboldened by post-war educational gains to make culture and to valorise that culture as 'ordinary'.

Saudade

This Portuguese word signals to a nostalgic longing for something that is lost. I use it to partly describe the contemporary memory script of the cockney, always I suggest a nostalgic creature in its late nineteenth century music hall iteration. There seems to be no English word that captures this kind of longing, but many other cultures have this concept, notably the Welsh with their notion of *hiraeth*.

Methodology

Given the almost complete absence of historical and sociological work concerned with London's fading eel, pie and mash shops, I decided early on to employ what might be called a panoptical approach. This was an attempt to address the subject matter from several simultaneous disciplinary angles in order to identify and clarify the significance of the shops, both in terms of their origins but also their contemporary meanings. My compass points were largely but not exclusively historical, sociological and (sensorially) ethnographic utilising extensive field work and a core of semi-structured interviews from different shops and customer communities that reflected the geographic spread of the enterprises.

The first objective in my research plan was to excavate the historical processes that led to the emergence of the shops and placing them in wider cultural and social contexts. I used existing scholarship (Thompson, 2013 *et al*) to trace the process of change in class structure, emanating from transitions in clientage, to delineate an interstitial class of London traders revealed in the role of pastry cooks that catered to a changing city.

I used numerous contemporary accounts of the city from this period (Heine in Stigand, 1875; Pückler-Muskau, 1832; Smith, 1857; Sala, 1859 *et al*) and contemporary scholarship (Bailey, 1997; Spang, 2001; Mennell, 2003; Tames, 2003; Winter, 2013; Assael, 2018) to contextualise and chart the evolving culture of the city.

However, at the same time I wanted to address the accepted and conventional narrative of the beginnings of the shops in the popular imagination. All of the meagre, contemporary, 'populist' writings on the shops (Clunn, 1995; Smith, 1995; Hawkins, 2002) seemed to (incorrectly) suggest that a venture owned by Henry Blanchard at 101 Union Street in Southwark and opened in 1844 was the primogenitor of all the current enterprises in an unbroken gustatory tradition.

My primary source work utilised *Kelly's Post Office Directories* and *Pigot's Trades Directories* at the London Metropolitan Archives which merely ascertained that this was indeed the first shop 'recorded' as an eel and pie house. The vagaries of the listings of eating places in the directories have been well documented (Assael, 2018) and indeed an image in the London Metropolitan Archives main print collection (see Fig.1 in appendix) clearly showed a Blanchard's pie house in the more salubrious location of Fleet Street in a watercolour that dated from 1835.

I made extensive use of the British Newspaper Archive at the British Library to examine newspaper texts and crucially, advertisements that predated the Kelly's entry by several years. I used these figures to suggest the rents referred to, suggested a capital investment achievable only by a strata of the lower middle classes. I utilised this resource to exhaustively chart mentions of pie shops and their concomitant identity within emergent cockney culture until the early twenty-first century.

I further used census material (both via London Metropolitan Archives and Ancestry online) to excavate Henry Blanchard's family records and additionally retrieved similar records for the Cooke, Antinks and Manzi families via resources from British History Online, part of the Institute of Historical Research at the University of London. Booth's Poverty maps were accessed via the LSE digital library.

In terms of food history and adulteration I researched, via the British Library, contemporary journals (amongst many others, *The Caterer and Hotel Proprietor's Gazette*, *The Hotel Review and Catering & Food Trades Gazette*, *The Coffee Tavern Gazette*, *The Journal of Food Thrift* and *The Anti-Adulteration Review, Food and Sanitation*). I utilised several modern PhDs (via the LSE, the University of East London and Essex Libraries) to chart the city's gustatory and linguistic histories and interrogated the Bishopsgate Institute and The Hackney Archives for fragmentary references to the shops.

I utilised period literature (especially Dickens) and modern scholarship (Stedman Jones, 1971, 1974 and 1989) to chart the city's changing identities, interrogating the historical cockney as well as its relationship to the music hall.

I focussed especially on two periods of literature: that of the Cockney Novelists and the post-war London novel to chart a cockney modernity as well as the more recent writing of Sinclair and Moorcock. I drew on a wide variety of filmic cultural products (from cockney 'kitchen sink' dramas to documentary) for which I extensively utilised the British Film Institute Library. For artworks, I utilised London Picture Archive, the London Metropolitan Archives and the Réunion des Musées Nationaux (Paris).

My experiences during the course of this research were crystallised within a sensory ethnography contained within the F. Cooke shop on Hoxton Street over numerous and extended visits. The work has been additionally informed by my own personal memorialisations around the culture from which I come and my own past memorialisations of several (now largely closed) shops. Additionally, I drew on one my own previous books about the shops (*The Englishman and the Eel*, 2017).

I have extensively used social media, especially Facebook (especially groups that centre around London memory communities including Bethnal Green and pie and mash), Twitter and Instagram to interrogate contemporary memorialisations of the culture that surrounds the shops and the evolving identity of cockney.

Finally, the cornerstone of this thesis has been interrogations of personal history and memoryscapes that capture real, working class voices for the first time in relation to the shops and their culture. I conducted field visits and semi-structured interviews with more than thirty contemporary eel, pie and mash shops and their owners who generously shared genealogies, reminiscences and historical artefacts from their pasts. I interviewed dozens of customers from a diverse age range and from both London and Essex. From this I drew from a core of twenty six comprehensive interviews.

I additionally interviewed the photographer Chris Clunn and the film maker David Furnham.

Because of Covid-19 many of these interviews were conducted using internet telephony.

Introduction

Overview

Militant nostalgia is on the rise across Britain.

For London's traditional working class communities this trend is synchronous with the closing of the city's once populous eel, pie and mash shops.

These spaces, largely forgotten and often seen by outsiders as anachronous, are however vital repositories of largely undocumented but increasingly contested communal memories whose physical buildings, food and rituals speak of identity and authenticity.

In this thesis, I examine and attempt to clarify the largely unwritten history of these, London's first working class restaurants. I attempt to situate the shops as temporary private spaces within the neoliberal city and examine them as sensory repositories of historical and contemporary significance, contextualising them within ideas of food culture, gastro-nationalism and a post-colonial melancholic haunting.

In doing so I examine the communities that use the shops (and eel eating) as theatres, temporal anchorages and totems of authenticity in a constructed, performative but increasingly retrograde ritual culture, largely closed to outsiders.

In this way I interrogate an evolving working class London identity and examine the changing notion of the idea of 'Cockney'.

1.1 A walk down the Broadway

In January 2020 the Cooke's eel, pie and mash shop in Broadway Market closed its doors for the last time.

Opened in 1900 by Robert Cooke, it had been one of East London's most iconic pie shops. Double-fronted in glass and marble (renewed after the Second World War due to the Luftwaffe's close attentions) its interior tiling was a delicate yellow picked out with sky blue detailing. Up until its closure its floors had always been freshly covered in sawdust, its large distinctive mirrors regularly polished and behind the long marble serving counter on the right, a poster still advertised the John H. Stracey fight at the Royal Albert Hall in 1972. The shop retained a gas mantle on its wall. Now shuttered and empty, it looked sad and desolate surrounded by fashionable coffee shops, artisanal bakeries and an organic supermarket. Cooke's was a place out of time.

Standing outside the shop on that freezing morning brought me back to my own Hackney past of the 1970s, where the streets were still navigated by corrugated iron hoardings, rough pubs and the fading technicolours of greasy spoon 'caffs'. In those days, I'd sometimes walk past the shop after school. I remember it as always busy. Steamed windows. Warmth. My family weren't customers but over the years with friends, I'd visited this and the Cooke's family's other shop in Dalston - a grand, cavernous cathedral of a working class eatery opened in 1910. The spaces of these shops felt Victorian. Safe but staid and strict; a place where everybody knew the rules and each other.

The Broadway and London Fields, the area that it served, was at this time an almost forgotten part of the capital. Once a thriving working class street market it was now a shadow of its former self. Most of the shops were closed and boarded and only a handful of stalls sold fresh vegetables or tinned food at reduced prices. Vandalised cars littered the streets. Its desolation seemed to represent a wider landscape of urban working class London at the time. Cockney London. Jelled eel London (Sinclair, 2004: 95).

Squeezed between the enduring semi-criminal poverty of Bethnal Green and the unreachable wealth of the City, Hackney had been the site first of steady Jewish migration out of the Whitechapel *shtetl* and then wholesale Caribbean settling from the 1960s onwards. During the 1970s Hackney was a culturally contested zone full of vandalised Brutalist tower blocks but also decaying Victorian terraces. A space caught between the National Front and the Angry Brigade.

David Furnham's neglected documentary film, *Noted Eel and Pie Houses* (1975), captures the devastation of the market during this period. The Broadway, desolate, broken, but clinging to life. Yet inside the Cooke's shop, it's lively and full of people chatting and eating: the space a portal to a previous generation, its memories and its rituals and customs.

The large light industrial base of the city and its concomitant working class population of the inner city areas had, by the early 1970s, been mostly lost and along with it the certainties of the post-war paradigm of job security and the promise of decent housing for all. In 1972 The Housing Finance Act introduced by Heath's Conservative government replaced the requirement for councils to charge tenants 'fair rents' with those of 'reasonable' rents linked to the private sector (McCulloch, 1982). Pandering to the "myth of the over-subsidised council tenant" (Sklair, 1975) this legislation required local authorities to make a profit from their properties and reduced government subsidies. In practice it meant that poor inner-London boroughs like Hackney could no longer afford the considerable upkeep of its (largely ancient and substandard) housing stock and this fell into further disrepair. Hackney, like much of inner London, was a post-industrial zone divided between blue collar workers, a precarious self-employed workforce with a "relaxed attitude to convention and legality" (Medhurst, 2023: 181) and an increasing proportion of its labour force "working in financial and business services" (Hammett, 2004: 2).

In this interstitial period between the end of what became known as the *trente glorieuses* and the neoliberal ascendancy, Hackney had become an arena for earnest, middle class gentrifiers (Raban, 1974) and the squatting movement (Proll, 2010). The Broadway and its surrounding streets became home to some of these newcomers, legal or otherwise. Locals looked on aghast at some members of this

strange tribe walking around barefoot through the market. Beads. Tie-dye. Odd-shaped French cars. Co-ops and vegetarian food. These squatters, these 'do-gooders', wanted to live amongst the working classes as an act of solidarity rejecting "consumerism... the suburb or luxury flat" (White, 2008: 65).

As part of a 'long march through the institutions' (Dutschke) some of these newcomers became teachers, some social workers, others, artists. They brought with them notions of a different kind of community and one not solely built around the iconography and memories of Empire and the last war that still loomed large in popular culture.

The presence of these newcomers and their new convivialities (Gilroy, 2004) as part of an emergent culture were simultaneous (Koselleck, 2004) to the temporalities of a residual, older proletarian culture and were a portent of the changes and challenges that Hackney and indeed much of working class London would evidence in the coming years. Their residence coincided with a longer-term process that came to be known (colloquially but problematically) as 'white flight' and between the censuses of 1971 and 1981 nearly 10% of the total population of Greater London had decamped to the Essex new towns or the Kent coast (Champion and Congdon, 1987, Medhurst, 2023: 160). Those that hadn't or couldn't move away made the dwindling number of pie and mash shops like Cooke's increasingly defensive spaces that would eventually become code for a certain type of working class Londoner: white, generally poor, and increasingly out of time with the coming neoliberal order and its modernity.

1.2 (uncharted) History from below

I came to this thesis because London's eel, pie and mash shops are seemingly invisible. Until very recently the shops seemed to have disappeared almost entirely from London's cultural texture and its high streets. Forgotten, ignored or avoided. Mentioned only when one of their dwindling number permanently closed; a local newspaper would invariably write an article bemoaning the loss of another part of London's great 'heritage' and repeat the same half-truths and hearsay about the shops' opaque origins and fare.

Yet this *unseenness* is not new. These working class spaces once ubiquitous at the *fin de siècle* and the start of the twentieth century, like the culture they contained, were, my research evidences, hardly ever cited, explored or critically examined. Virtually unknown outside of the capital, they were part of a *common* knowledge of working class Londoners, but they were only ever fleetingly seen or referred to tangentially in cultural texts. Although there have been several notable documentary pieces like Norman Cohen's psychedelic *The London That Nobody Knows* (1967), and Furnham's already mentioned *Noted Eel and Pie Houses* (1975) that feature them, all centre on the shops' *pastness*, always asynchronous with the present.

During my research, I have been unable to locate more than a handful of references to the shops in post-war literature or on film. Only Franc Rodham's *Quadrophenia* (1979) lingers at any length in the (inevitably now closed) A. Cooke's shop in Shepherd's Bush. The scene regards the pie shop where Jimmy meets his 'greaser' friend Kevin as an ordinary, unremarkable space within a contemporary working class temporality as part of a 1960s popular modernity. This treatment contrasts to myriad proletarian spaces reclaimed as 'cross-class' like cafés, fish and chip shops, public houses or bingo halls. These are sites of 'pleasure and leisure' (Langhamer, 2007) retrieved and celebrated by bourgeois interest and academia in the name of 'resurrectionism', 'retro-chic' (Samuel, [1996] 2012) or simply 'heritage' (Wright [1985] 2009). Even football, that most working class of London's sporting life, became the site of widespread bourgeois cultural colonisation in the 1990s.

A central question that this work addresses, then, is why have London's eel pie and mash shops remained largely unexplored? The thesis suggests several intersecting conclusions that stem directly from issues of hegemony and Bourdieusian class 'distinction'. However, one enveloping explanation lies at least partly within historiography: the way that the lives of those that are owners and customers of the shops have been recounted (or ignored). And crucially, by whom.

Until perhaps the second half of the twentieth century in Britain, history and its telling was charged with the description of great men, monarchs and governments oblivious to the encounters of Marx, Durkheim or Weber. Although Lucien Febvre, the founder of the French *Annales* School along with Marc Bloch, used the notion of 'history from

below' in the 1930s it wasn't until the Communist Party Historians Group of amongst others, Eric Hobsbawm, Edward Thompson, Christopher Hill and Raphael Samuel sought to uncover the revolutionary tradition of a 'people's history' in post-war London that British historiography turned to examine in detail the lives of the ordinary and the everyday. Enjoined by the Society for the Study of Labour History (1960) and then The History Workshop later in that decade, the British working class entered contemporary historiography through what became known as 'social history' at roughly the same time that its post-war victories and popular modernity began to be undone by the forces of late capital.

From the 1970s onwards, in line with wider questions about the changing social landscape, postmodern and post-structural concerns, and the identity of oppressed groups especially in terms of race and ethnicity, historians increasingly wrote about the British working class not as 'revolutionary agents' but as objects of study on their own terms. Many were seemingly disappointed that the British proletariat had not fulfilled its radical role. Class, as Ellen Meiksins-Wood (1986) suggested, became 'de-centred'.

Although the 'cultural turn' in history opened the door to some working class historians, the pie shops appear to have remained liminal spaces. Seemingly untranslatable, they have I suggest been guarded by a "dense, inward-looking" (Stedman Jones, 1974: 499) defensive habitus born of an historical cultural repression. However, these are zones that through their insularity and partly perhaps because of London's specific artisanal working class heritage, have in some measure, resisted the delegitimising attempts of bourgeois culture.

Neither Gareth Stedman Jones nor Raphael Samuel, whose historical investigations into East End life are central to my work, include any systematic interrogation of these spaces that were a *loci* for the communities that used them.¹

¹ There are several brief but inconsequential mentions of eel stalls in Samuel [1981] 2016.

The pie and mash shops were, and in some senses remain, markers of an historically significant but closed territoriality and culture that at one time thrived in hyper-local street markets and loyal, tight-knit (but now largely romantically mythologised) communities. The shops, encased in neighbourhood ritual and lore, made more mysterious I suggest through the process of wholesale demographic change, have become additionally concealed in plain sight. They are however I propose, a partial gateway, somewhat obscured by contested memorialisation, that allow us to view a largely lost and marginalised culture and, in that way, pose significant questions around class and identity.

This work is the first rigorous academic research into the history, culture and significance of London's eel, pie and mash shops and seeks to explain and contextualise the popular conjecture, assumptions and myths that surround them. The thesis seeks to provide a comprehensive history of the spaces, the food served, and the etiquette and rituals held within. It additionally attempts to sketch the contours of that music hall caricature of the London working classes, the cockney that is so central to the story of the shops.

The thesis further seeks to examine both the contemporary and historical eel, pie and mash shops at the turn of the twenty-first century and in doing so to discover not only their uncertain origins but also their recently renewed political, social and cultural significance. It does so through the interrogation of dozens of shops between London and Essex and by way of their spaces, their sights and their smells. It does so by archival research and numerous semi-structured interviews with patrons and customers that interrogate memory as well as a sensory ethnography informed by my own past.

The approach of this thesis is then an intersection of the personal and the political. My own upbringing and now interstitial class position offers, I believe, a unique insight into the textures of the pie and mash shops and the changing culture that envelops them.

1.3 Co-ordinates

This thesis charts the eel, pie and mash shops around four compass points. I utilise the locations of history, identity, food culture and memory in a panoptical approach to excavate the subject.

1.3.1 History

Because of the paucity of historical literature around the eel, pie and mash shops and the working class culture which they contain, it was necessary to find co-ordinates that would lead me into their absence. In this way I have synthesised existing scholarship, with my original research to extend our understanding of the circumstances of their origins.

My work is bounded by a largely Marxian analysis and delimited by the broad contours of the Nairn Anderson thesis (1962). This argument, honed throughout the 1960s and 1970s offers that British capitalism's development was rendered incomplete by its precocity and the continuing presence at its core of elements of the *ancien regime*.

Rather than initially link the emergence of the shops to the efforts of one particular nineteenth century family in isolation as custom has it, I place their evolution concomitant with a much earlier contestation within England's proto-industrial landscape. In this I largely use E.P. Thompson's scaffolding which charts the contestations of cultures between those of the elites and the poor that emerged during the eighteenth century. Here, economic rationalisations engendered by a rising mercantile middle order challenged the paternalist bonds of the 'old corruption'. Wage labour became freer, more mobile and "concentric rings of clientship" (Thompson [1980] 1991: 39) began to break away from the orbit of the great houses. Significant amongst these for this thesis were pastry cooks many of whom in time would themselves become small masters in London's pie trade. This in itself, although beyond the immediate bounds of this study, is a noteworthy and

under researched arena of the capital's food history that was simultaneous with the growth of the city and increasing urbanity.

I link this development to the new and self-conscious urban identity (Olsen, 1976) that was beginning to emerge in the dying days of Georgian London. This identity was concomitant with the accession, ideologically and culturally, of a middle class whose rise I chart as a synchronous dance with an emergent London proletariat. It is the latter's demonisation that I suggest is a significant factor in the defensive culture of the contemporary eel and pie shops. In this I use Pierce Egan's writings to explore the ending an older popular culture that was a dwindling asymmetry (Burke, 1978) between the elites and the poor.

Henry Mayhew's mid-century navigation of the capital's fluid, poverty-stricken street communities records the final traces of this culture amongst the penniless roving street pie man whose livelihood had by now been decimated against a backdrop of unemployment and continuing (mostly Irish) immigration. I link the pie man's changing customer base with an emergent bourgeois culture of *laissez faire* that equated poverty and morality but also with rigid attitudes to outdoor eating.

In that vein, the thesis links for the first time, work on the contestations around the early Victorian street that I contend encouraged the emergence of settled pie shops. This complicated process connects Stedman Jones' (1971) work on casual labour, James Winter's (2013) work on street culture with recent scholarship (Kelley, 2019) on London's traditional markets around the idea of modernity and nascent consumerism. I suggest that the process of the 'clearing' of London's streets and the subsequent attempts to force the city's myriad trades to 'move inside' was a simultaneous moral crusade against the 'old, popular culture' (Golby and Purdue, 1984) and a negotiation around a new rational planning directive that had its roots in a Lockean ideology based on cementing property rights for rentiers. I offer that this 'internal' urban enclosure was linked to, and was the culmination of, a process started much earlier in the English countryside. Further, my thesis proposes via Stedman Jones ([1971] 2014) that these attempts to control the crowd (Rudé, 1964) evidenced a developing working class culture influenced by those forced to leave the street trades (Jankiewicz, 2012) and exhibited, emergent class solidarities (Brodie,

2001). These populations would I conclude, form the customer base of the new eel and pie shops that were suffering a problematic class descent as the bourgeoisie retreated from the city's centre.

My thesis reconfigures the history of the eel and pie shops and proves that the accepted notion of the first recorded pie shop is erroneous. My research, by interrogation of sources, establishes a much earlier date to these enterprises and refutes the earliest formulation of the shops' fare held within the traditional lore of one the oldest pie shop families. Further, this work casts doubt upon the accepted notion that the shops exhibited an unbroken gustatory tradition and suggests that this is an echo of the invented conventions (Hobsbawn and Ranger, [1983] 2017) of the *fin de siècle*.

My thesis further significantly utilises the biological notion of a *taxon* to describe the myriad of London eating places, that would eventually contribute to the final, classic late nineteenth century eel, pie and mash shop. I employ Rebecca Spang's (2001) work on the restaurant and utilise Brenda Assael's (2018) writing on London's culinary specificity to examine eating for the city's working classes based initially around the new temporalities of capitalism. Eventually I advance that this emergent proletarian culture became based around street market hyper-locality, and synchronous with entertainment and the opportunity to demonstrate and perform respectability. This aligns with David Harvey's (2004) notion of "pacification by spectacle" and Stedman Jones' (1974, 1982) notion of consolation within the 're-making' of the working classes.

1.3.2 Identity

Underpinning much of this thesis was a realisation that an excavation of the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops would be incomplete without examination of the historical identity of the cockney. This figure was simultaneous to the development of the shops and ultimately formative in their 'classic' late Victorian incarnation. It is a version of this cockney that is valorised within the contemporary spaces of the shops.

Because it became increasingly clear that the cockney of the pie shop was a constructed creature born of a palimpsestic identity coterminous with London's urbanity, I sought firstly to historically contextualise its origins within early emergent tensions between forces of capital in towns and older feudal forms of rural power. In this way I again use Thompson's ([1980] 1991) wider framework of eighteenth century class negotiations between the 'patrician and the plebian' and, along with the cockney's particular and direct spatiality traced the evolution of its specific 'cant'. Stedman Jones' (1989) delineation of this emergent identity of modernity as an interstitial (specifically London) class of trade and commerce was central. Cockney at this point I argue was a lived and geographic pivot that evidenced the coexistent struggle between the bourgeoisie and those beneath them: between those with authority and those without. I use Gregory Dart's (2012) work to audit the literary cockney of the late Georgian period and Charles Dickens' reportage (and fiction) to clarify the cockney's subsequent class demotion. This was parallel to the simultaneous rise of the lower middle class consumerist dandy of the 1867 franchise extension and the youthful 'counter-jumper' - at this time some of the likely eel and pie shops customers.

My thesis examines the demonisation of the informal street economy in this period as part of a complex cultural shift in which the landscape of the costermonger, who would inherit the sinking cockney moniker, became subversive and largely tarred with the notion of the residuum.

In doing so I explore the dual bourgeois fascination and revulsion for a London proletariat more and more defined by a cartography that circumscribed a zone of exclusion - the 'abyss' of the East End. This was increasingly delineated by a moral formulation surrounding the subversive (cultural and political) potential of dirt and disease.

My narrative argues the cockney was ingested into a national project during the New Imperialism to constrain potentially explosive domestic social forces and this was done largely through coding transmitted by behavioural forms of popular song in the music hall (Scott, 2002), public houses and the eel and pie shops that draws upon Stedman Jones' 'culture of consolation' (1974). To examine the process, I utilise

Hall's (1973) work on the dissemination of hegemonic messaging as a guide to the 'encoding' of patriotism in the creation of a sanitised, sentimental cockney plastered on top of previous layered incarnations.

This thesis argues that the cockney henceforth became periodically useful to its hegemonic creators as a motif and a warning siren that a certain type of Englishness was under threat. Crucially I suggest that the co-option of the cockney's alleged stoicism in the face of the Blitz is the basis for a contemporary memoryscape and the haunting of the present day austerity nostalgia.

Once I have established the historical co-ordinates of the cockney identity, my thesis returns to the late nineteenth century to contextualise the 'whitening' of the Victorian working class (Bonnett, 1998) as a defensive trench of empire (Cohen, Qureshi and Toon, 1994, Schwarz, 1996) which underscores the character from this point forward. I locate the contemporary identity within the contentious frame of a new ethnic group (Jones, 2011).

I argue that the cockney did not die during the immediate post-war period with the Mrs Mop character as Stedman Jones (1986) suggests but was responsive to and simultaneous with an ongoing popular modernity and national economy birthed within the Welfare State. In this I suggest that the cockney, rather than simply fade away, continued its role as a nostalgic conduit to capital but evolved multiple valences that spoke to an increasing emphasis on popular culture, age, choice and especially individuality consistent with an historical 'proletarian entrepreneurialism' (Hobbs, 1998). In this, and synchronous with multiculturalism and an 'ordinary cosmopolitanism' (Gilroy, 2000), a new parallel multi-racial cockney has emerged around a 'structure of feeling' (Williams, 1961) that is a looser group identification of numerous cultural signifiers.

Finally, I argue that the contemporary reimagining of the cockney via a decamped East End in Essex has narrated the 'slow cancelation of the future' (Beradi, 2011) that is the neoliberal ascendancy through forces of the popular Right by appealing to race and their alleged cultural abandonment. The contemporary reimagining of the

eel and pie shops as a totem of a lost, white working class London is, I argue, anchored within this nostalgic haunting.

1.3.3 Food Culture

Although this thesis has food at its core it is not about food *per se*. Rather it quantifies food both as a signpost to a historically specific working class culture and cuisine and as an element that is “central to a sense of identity” (Fischler, 1988).

That said, historical surveys of London’s food within the period of study have been invaluable. Heal (1990) contextualises food and the rituals that surrounded it in early modern England and I have drawn heavily on Henry Mayhew (1851), George Dodd (1856) and George Sala’s (1859) work from the mid nineteenth century. In addition to primary magazine and newspaper sources, George Sim’s reportage (1889, 1902) was excellent background.

The unpublished work of D.J. Oddy (1970) and Katy Pettit’s (2009) thesis was crucial in mapping the working class diet and food landscape in the late nineteenth century as was Maud Pember Reeves’ (1913) early feminist work amongst the Lambeth poor. Olive Malvery’s *fin de siècle* journalism (1906, 1908) that contains her memoirs of working in an (unnamed) eel and pie shop were priceless finds that incidentally interrogated the cuisine and interior spaces of working class eateries. John Burnett’s work (1979, 2004) has been essential in delineating the hierarchies and type of eating places that Londoners used as have Stephen Mennell (1995) and Richard Tames (2003). James Vernon’s (2007) work on hunger was significant as was Lesa Scholl (2017) on Gaskell’s writing.

Scholarship around the specific constituent parts of the fare of the pie shop was less common but Peter Gurney’s (2009) work on potato consumption during the Famine of the 1840s was particularly useful. Additionally, Janet Clarkson’s (2009) very general history of the pie was helpful but Tom Fort’s (2002) work on the eel was essential in general, especially on its historic links to the diet of Londoners.

There is a certain amount of scholarship on what might be called the foods of multiculturalism and in this Panikos Panayi (2008) on foods of origins was useful as was Tony Kushner (2003) on the food of Jew and gentile in the East End. These however, like much from the academy, barely mention eels, pie and mash and so, this thesis is an attempt to address to that absence.

I chose to examine the lived textures of the contemporary pie shops for the uninitiated through a series of semi-structured interviews and a sensory ethnography. This methodology allowed me to relate intimate aural, olfactory and visual sensory experiences and correlate them to historical and cultural coordinates. My starting point was the anthropological vocabulary of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955) and Mary Douglas (1975) that described the classifications of food, much of whose 'rules' the pie shop meal ironically 'breaks'.

I used the sociology of Erving Goffman (1949), Ray Oldenburg (1999) and Anna Marie Steigemann (2017) to define these largely unexplored spaces within the performative register of retail and the restaurant but my main co-ordinate was the work of Michel DeCerteau (1988) in relating the obscure rhythms, rituals and rules of the shops.

In terms of sensory ethnography, a major coordinate was Sarah Pink's (2015) anthology of the discipline as was the work of Alex Rhys-Taylor (2017, 2020) that utilised Teichmüller's notion of the 'democracy of the senses'. I used the sense of smell to map a working class aroma and in doing so excavated several early to mid-twentieth century novels that described *taxons* of proletarian eating places and their dubious perfume. I use the sense of taste to examine the notion of disgust and the gustatory de-centering of the eel via Douglas (1966) and Deborah Lupton, (1996)

I use Daniel Miller's (2008) formulation that food is an object-bridge between ourselves and the people we love. In that way I use food as a link between personal and political identities (Radstone, 2010).

Pierre Bourdieu (1986, 2011) and his notion of classed taste and *distinction* was a crucial signpost in determining a working class taste and space. This I explored

largely through the work of Beverley Skeggs (2004, 2016) to loosely outline a working class arena that is the pie and mash shop. Here, class is defined through fluid and symbolic matrices that negotiate the limits of bourgeois meaning and accountability in the form of microresistances in manners and humour, limited in its field of exchange value.

Finally, I use the field of memory to interrogate the food of the pie shops utilising it chronologically in conjunction with New Labour's hysteria around working class eating and corporality during the early Blair years. This I cite as a trigger for political and cultural anger. In this I utilise the food-memory coordinates of Sutton (2001, 2005) but especially the work of Nadia C. Serematakis (1996) on sensory interiority and the dialogical and reciprocal processes of the socio-material field outside of the body. I interrogate childhood food memories in conjunction with matrilineity to show why a simple dish like pie and mash has such a profound sensual pleasure and link this with Paul Connerton's (1989) work on the bodily inscription of memory. Lastly, I utilise ideas of gastronationalism (DeSoucey, 2010) to link the *terroir* of pie and mash to what Yi-Fu Tuan (1974) refers to as 'local patriotism'.

1.3.4 Memory

Central to this thesis, in the relative absence of historical and cultural texts, is how the eel pie and mash shops have been memorialised, for what purpose and by whom.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, at the foundation of this theorising is Peter Bromley's (1998) notion that memory is an historical construction, subject to constant revision. This is echoed by Aleida Assmann's (2010: 97) conception that each generation stands on the shoulders of its predecessors whose "... knowledge they can reuse and reinterpret".

I categorise the myriad memoryscapes that coalesce within both the remaining few traditional eel and pie shops in London and their newer counterparts in Essex as polyphonic. I suggest that the shops in divergent locations hold simultaneous

memories that are distinct but synchronous and carry memories of several groups which use them as temporal anchorages (Huysen, 1995) within late capital.

I utilise Jan Assmann's idea of a 'cultural' memory of rites and rituals enshrined in performance within the eel and pie shops along with the idea of a 'communicative' memory, one that is based on the temporal dimensions of lived experience. I suggest that for the shops, the contestations around what they are and subsequently will be, are held between these two points in a 'floating gap' (Vansina, 1985) that moves with the passage of time and additionally between generations. Change within memorialisations is likely evidenced by the outlines of fissures within this gap (Olick, 2003). Appropriate to the contemporary contestations around the identities held within the shops, Duncan Bell's (2003) theorising around hegemonic memory groups invading and capturing the memory landscape by re-narrativizing the past has been particularly useful.

The shops act to stabilise a 'geography of belonging' (Hodgkin and Radstone, 2003) to a largely white, monocultural and inevitably 'better' past and combine with this a notable sense of loss. It is this deficit that was apparent to Pierre Nora (1989) in his notion of *lieux de mémoire*. In the absence of *milieux de mémoire* within modernity these are symbolic sites that are apposite simultaneously to the fading pie shops of cockney London and their simulacra created in the New Towns of Essex and beyond. They capture in shorthand places where "memory crystallises and secretes itself". Crucially as Astrid Erll (2011) offers, these sites can reach forward and backwards to the past and present in memorialisations which are the result of collective reconstructions in the here-and-now (Rigney, 2008). These reconstructions I contend are further evidenced in the spate of problematic and romantic 'recollections' from a post-war generation in autobiography and memoir that signal to palimpsestic, personal memory epochs largely valorising a lost landscape of Empire, post-war gain and national sovereignty. These are partly I believe as Andreas Huysen (1995) suggests, an attempt to "claim some space" within a confusing and increasingly accelerated temporality of modernity.

The shops and the territories that they once represented are in this way arenas of cultural defensive against globalisation, gentrification and historically, multicultural.

They act as sites of memory “as practice - as opposed to memory as fact or essence - history” (Malcolm, 2014). They become self-perpetuating vortices of “symbolic investment” (Rigney, 2008) inscribing and re-inscribing memories that pertain to a political reconstruction of ‘ordinariness’ revealing the contestations between working class memory groups divided between a precariat and those who partially benefitted from the Thatcherite project. However, the shops as sites of memory are unable to heal a rupture between the past and the present and into this void rushes the spirit of nostalgia. This, as Stuart Tannock (1995) suggests, acts as a search for continuity.

I use Svetlana Boym’s (2001) notions of both a restorative nostalgia that seeks recreation of the past within the present and a reflective nostalgia which whimsically lingers over the patina of the time to reflect on the cockney identity within the shops. Here I focus on the cockney diaspora which valorises hyper locality and the “magical recovery of community” (Clarke, 1976) evidenced through pilgrimage to the shops (Fawbert, 2011) linked to the other great working class consolation, football. These sporting allegiances largely mirror the hyper locality of the historical pie and mash shops delineating food-culture boundaries in opposition to the dominant hegemony (Palmer, 1988).

I suggest that these have become arenas of a gastronationalism (DeSoucey, 2010) allied to the reinvigoration of a populist, political ‘common sense’ Right which in some cases uses pie and mash as a symbol of a ‘forgotten white tribe’ (Collins, 2004). I link these memory concretions to a growing public distrust of a political class recruited increasingly from a professional, managerial background, an ‘austerity nostalgia’ (Hatherley, 2016), a partial re-racialisation (Schwarz, 1996) of British politics, the so-called ‘culture wars’ and Brexit.

1.4 Chapters

My first chapter addresses the absence of a satisfactory history of the enterprises that would become the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops.

I contextualise the shops' distant origins within the class exodus of small masters, especially bakers and pastry cooks who served the great houses, to the expanding and new urbanity of Georgian London. Here, some as roving pie men and others as settled shopkeepers participated in the last throes of an 'old' popular culture - the asymmetry of the 'great' and 'little' traditions of the elites and the common people.

I trace the shops' development adjacent to the ideological and political ascent of the urban bourgeoisie and the concomitant contestations over the capital's physical streets and markets. Here, London's working classes acceded to some elements of the new hegemony whilst creating a nascent culture based partly on earlier proto-industrial customs and responses to the new temporal discipline of capital.

I argue that the new pie shops adapted to the middle classes withdrawal from the city's centre by negotiating with modernity and consumerism and eventually becoming eating places for the city's 'respectable' poor within a penumbra of informal markets. These areas were dominated by the costermonger communities whose identity would become intertwined with and essential to the cockney culture that the shops would represent by the start of the twentieth century.

My second chapter recognises the centrality of this identity, eventually adjacent to the eel and pie shops, tracing its historical progression from early modernity to the Blitz. In this I argue that cockney became integral in not only defining the spatiality of a new kind of Londoner but one that exemplified an interstitial class tension largely as a label delineating those without authority. I argue that this was initially between older rural power and emergent urban capitalist forces but eventually delineated a grouping of the petit bourgeoisie in relation to the elites.

Largely through the works of Dickens, I trace the class demotion of the term cockney that came to define a section of the urban poor and in doing so chart its reproduction as a ventriloquised reflection of proletarian culture within the music hall by bourgeois performers. Here, the working class cockney was reified simultaneously as a figure both of good humour, honesty and criminality: between the respectable poor and the worthless 'other'.

The music hall I assert, as an effective hegemonic device (in tandem with popular fiction in late Victoriana) inculcated within London's working classes, bourgeois notions of racial and national superiority. The increasingly palimpsestic cockney identity was further conscripted into the imperial state through franchise extension and, along with popular song, public houses and the eel and pie shops formed a culture of 'consolation' that would become part of the English 'ordinary culture'.

My third chapter contextualises the cockney identity within the notions of whiteness and empire. I excavate how the middle classes classified the 'dark and dirt' of the London poor as part of a moral coding and extended the designation of whiteness to inhibit potentially explosive social forces so as to reframe the nation as a racial singularity. In this way, I argue that henceforth the cockney was periodically used by capital as a largely reactionary and patriotic force and that the eel and pie shops became a loci for this culture. I suggest that the Blitz cockney as a motif became central to the subsequent memoryscape and further into the twentieth century I trace how this was channelled, initially as opposition to American consumerism and an expanding EEC and then, in defence of its post-war welfarist gains, how the cockney was used to bolster the internal colonial frontier.

In the second half of the chapter, I explore the destruction of traditional cockney territoriality and trace, largely through a changing age demographic how the cockney, rather than dying out, developed multiple internal valances around the expanding horizons of choice and individuality via an expanding popular modernity. In this way I argue that by the 1970s the cockney began to simultaneously embody a vigorous low-cultured populism and an upwardly mobile conservative element receptive to and used by an emergent neoliberal right. An increasing internal instability within the identity allied to spatial and demographic uncertainties led to an exodus to the Essex and Kent hinterlands. Here, a simulacra culture had been incubating and it is within this culture that the pie and mash shops would evidence a new political and cultural significance.

My fourth chapter investigates a significant London pie shop primarily using a 'sensory ethnography' to chart the sights, smells, sounds and rituals found within. In this way I interrogate the coded sedimentation of gestures and largely unspoken

rules that link hospitality, conviviality and memory within and upon the bodies of the owners and customers. I explore the cuisine in reference to other British working class foods using archival reportage and contemporary theory. I place the ingredients of the meal within historical and cultural contexts and examine them especially within the parameters of distinction and contemporary notions of disgust.

In the second part of the chapter, I situate the shops and their fare within a nostalgically memorialised habitus of a changed London working class identity. I examine the culture of a performative working class respectability and the particular 'classness' of the shops. I argue that this reflects both a subtle deviation from the refinements of bourgeois dining as microresistances to neoliberal modernity but also inter-class contestations. I suggest that the pie shops might uniquely evidence inter-class differences and how a contemporary London working class might view itself. In this way I challenge the argument that class tastes have wholly declined with modernity.

My final chapter addresses the central role of memory within the shops and the cockney culture they contain. I argue that the memories inscribed upon the contemporary, palimpsestic cockney identity are largely tangled and hybridised, linked to historical hyper-locality and past class solidarities. I refer to these, the results of social dislocation and inter-class competition, as polyphonic. I argue that although cockney memories were largely mediated by each generation apposite to the contemporary hegemony, this process began to break down during the 1990s under a New Labour government that embraced globalisation and accelerated concomitant neoliberal reforms. I argue that the contemporary memory scripts of cockney, performed and reinscribed by a post-war generation, are a melancholia for the gains of the post-war period, an empire nostalgia and the loss of the fantasy of a British omnipotence. These nostalgias I argue are performed through a 'local' patriotism of which the pie and mash shops are a key symbol. I trace the course of this political/personal memorialisation to the under-theorised arena of food and the demonisation of working class corporeality assailed by a culture of distinction within an aspirational managerialism in the context of 'cartel' parties and concomitant to a Third Way and the End of History. Finally, I explore these largely constructed nostalgias adjacent to a 'geography of belonging', the reinvigorated politics of

whiteness and the 'new' cultural minority, the white working class in context of 'class non-voting', 'post-factual' politics, populism and the campaign for Brexit.

1. Origins

Introduction

In this chapter, I will chart and analyse the birth of London's iconic eel, pie and mash shops (as they would become) by placing their development firmly within London's emergent identity during its extraordinary nineteenth century expansion and in relation to its nascent, distinct but compromised working class culture.

Because of the relative paucity of primary material surrounding the evolution of the shops, I attempt to trace the contours of this absence so as to define the cultural, and political space into which they appeared.

The maturation of the shops was entirely concomitant with larger societal changes and was simultaneous to the negotiations with, and then attacks upon, remnants of what has been called the 'old' popular culture (Golby and Purdue, 1984) by an urban bourgeois hegemony. I use Mayhew's roving pieman to illustrate this initial contestation. The pieman's livelihood was just about contemporaneous with the dying breath of what Peter Burke (1978: 28) has called the asymmetry of the 'great' and 'little' traditions of the elites and the common people. Here the former often partook in the performity of the latter but not vice-versa. The pieman's decline mirrored a gradual withdrawal of the urban middle classes from areas delineated by the lives of the new industrial poor.

A major site of this contestation was the physical and ideological control of the capital's streets (Bailey, 1978). The 'clearing' of these streets and the subsequent (physical and metaphorical) 'coming inside' of London's working classes were framed by the elites in terms of modernity, morality and political necessity. They were I suggest, simultaneous to the demonisation (and simultaneous) valorisation of an increasingly impoverished coster class by the twin nodes of Victorian liberalism, itself part of a longer effort to 'civilise the crowd' (Golby and Purdue, 1984).

These efforts I argue were partly successful negotiations with an emergent proletariat that acceded to some elements of hegemonic control whilst creating their own culture on the remnants of a largely pre- and early- industrial way of life. This was based on notions of access to natural rights, conviviality, hospitality and communality, that had been broken by 'time, work-discipline and Industrial Capitalism' (Thompson, 1967). This new culture, held within dual notions of freedom and respectability, centred largely around unofficial markets (Kelley, 2019) and desperate resistances to economic hardship. These populations became integral to the customer base of the emergent eel pie shops.

My thesis suggest that the original owners of the early nineteenth century pie shops were largely the product of the breaking of the concentric rings of "economic clientship" (Thompson, [1980] 1991) that had radiated out from the great houses during the previous century. The evolving genius of the early pie shops was I argue by mid-century, a recognition and response to a new class of customer that synthesised an entrepreneurial reimagining of the capital's changing consumer culture against a backdrop of shortage and deprivation. This was coterminous during the next decades with the growth of places to eat outside the home for all Londoners, both out of necessity and choice.

I chart the shops' development throughout the nineteenth century as a taxonic evolution that encompassed different food choices, décor and service, part of a systematic commercialisation of the catering business (Tames, 2003) within an eventual accommodation of a partially successful *embourgeoisement* of nascent working class cultures. The evolution of the culture of the eel pie shops this thesis argues was synchronous with the class descent of its client base finally coming to rest in the notion of the 'respectable' working classes. In doing so, the shops eventually created a unique but defensive counter-public constructed around the evolution of a conservative working class community, taste and consciousness.

The evolution of the pie shops into the twentieth century mark an emergent definition and cartography of the social fabric of the capital informed by the forces of modernity and divergent class cultures.

1.1 Monstrous Wen²

In 1827 Heinrich Heine, the German writer and critic, wrote of his sojourn in London. “Everywhere wealth and quality stare at you... [but] ...poverty, pushed away in remote alleys and dark, damp passages, dwells there with its rags and tears” (Stigand, 1875, 1: 290).

Visitors remarked on London’s seemingly limitless docks, the bustle of its people, but also its dinginess, its fogs and its gloom. The German nobleman Hermann Ludwig Heinrich von Pückler-Muskau (in Fox, 1992: 13) found in 1826 that the “...whole City, ha(s) a repulsive sinister aspect, which almost reminds one of the restless and comfortless throng of the spirits of the damned.” He wrote to his wife the following year complaining that fog covered everything, and it was necessary to breakfast with lit candles.

London, now the world’s largest city, was a hard-edged place of commerce. It contrasted in stark terms with the culture of ‘Pantomime and Pageantry’ of the Regency then coronation of George IV (Cumming, 1992). Here was the very caricature of a profligate peacock of the *ancien regime* increasingly out of time with an emergent industrial, entrepreneurial capitalist age. In the first decades of the century, the city was still a mosaic of what had been and what was yet to come; a mixture of Tudor, Stuart and Georgian buildings, rambling dark alleyways and terrible slums competing with speculators’ haphazard attempts at a patchwork of solutions to overcrowding and squalor. It was noisy, with a “universal hubbub; a sort of uniform grinding and shaking, like that experienced in a great mill with fifty pairs of stones...” (Gray, 2015: 322). It was dark, without proper sewerage and its streets were dangerous.

London was an intriguing jumble of the refined and the inelegant, perfectly illustrated in the aging Gillray’s imaging of the bawdiness of the street and Pückler-Muskau’s disdain for the “coarseness and brutality” of the English theatre audience (Pückler-Muskau, 1832, 3: 126).

² Thomas Carlyle to Alexander Carlyle; 14 December 1824; DOI 10.1215/lt-18241214-TC-AC-01.

The 1820s in particular had seen the birth of a new and distinctive London character partly centred around George IV's 'picturesque' reordering of streets but also a literary landscape that "promoted a self-conscious urban identity" (Olsen, 1976: 38). These were the years of patriotic 'euphoria' between Waterloo and the Reform Bill (Olson, 1976). These were also the years when the West End was transformed: the Regent's and St James' Parks were created and monuments such as Trafalgar Square and the Hyde Park arch *et al* were established. The poor were removed but they were not yet objects of hysterical Victorian fear or sickly pity. In this fluid, transitional period, London was still a place where the wealthy might conspicuously attend working class dives in the East End. In Pierce Egan's monthly *Life in London*, Jerry the country gent is accompanied by his sophisticated cousin Tom around the poorer districts of London 'to see a bit of life'. They go to the working class *All-Max* in the East End and report that:

Every cove that put in an appearance was quite welcome, colour or country considered no obstacle ... The group was motley indeed - Lascars, blacks, jack-tars, coal-heavers, dustmen, women of colour, old and young, and a sprinkling of the remnants of once fine girls, and all jiggling together (Egan [1821] 2019: 263).³

They see ageing prostitutes and poor children in gin shops; they enter bawdy coffee houses before retiring to the more class-suitable Almacks. Crucially, they move freely between both worlds before the carefully delineated moral and cultural margins of a later Victoriana.

This kind of urban chronicle, still largely within an eighteenth century literary tradition, finds home in the burgeoning number of satirical magazines and scandal journals that begin to appear, whose readership were an audience of "... apprentices, shop assistants, clerks and other young men who were coming of age in the first Victorian

³ This appears to be one of the earliest uses of 'East End' - contrary to both Peter Ackroyd and W.J. Fishman, who place the place the term much later in the 1880s. See - Newland, 2008: 47.

decade of manifest political and social changes to ride them to new social identities” (Gray, 1982 in Nord, 1995: 30).

It is men like these, of similar class and background that will discover themselves in the mirror of the new publications. They identified with a London life that was alive to the modern and full of opportunity: a formulation of a new strata of the self-made who were both participants in, and beneficiaries of, a reconfigured coal and steam driven metropolis. This class, spectators to the privilege of the wealthy *by proxy*, was beginning to develop its own consciousness and gaining at least a partially invested possession of London’s streets. It is these men, part of the lower-middle classes and the upper working classes with access to employment and at least some meagre capital, who will be the customers and indeed owners of the eel and pie shops as the century progresses.

1.2 “What has become of the pieman?” (Smith, 1857: 201)

The Victorian painter and author J.D. Harding (1851,1:129) had suggested that “The Only true Republic / Is a crowded city street.” This space had always been a sphere for working class life, an open-air theatre of necessity for sustenance, romance and trade, but increasingly by the early Victorian period the street was becoming a contested arena of class privilege and preferential access. The emergent hegemony of the ‘industrious’ middle classes saddled work and productivity to an increasingly Christian probity and the street became a moral battleground. Prefigured by Wordsworth in his *Prelude* and Blake’s *London*, the city’s streets had started to be linked to a defiled physical and moral pollution: a loss of innocence, the horror of female sexuality, prostitution and venereal disease. This linked bourgeois men and proletarian women in an unspoken, secretive, hypocritical and decidedly unequal dance, the very word modified by the contamination of ‘street-walker’ and the notion of ‘woman of the street’ (Nord, 1995).

The Regency thoroughfare had been none too carefully calibrated between pedestrians and traffic, but by the 1830s convention seems to have it that the less salubrious pedestrians like beggars, prostitutes and touts would be literally ‘in the gutter’ whilst on the threshold of that murky realm - between the gutter and the

pavement - would be the 'almost respectable'. These would be the travelling self-employed, the so-called 'penny capitalists', the men selling from carts: the costermongers.

The 1832 Reform Bill had led to increased middle class influence over local government spending. By the 1840s a more utilitarian polity born of a dislike of the chaos and ostentation of the Regency city, a bourgeois fear of disease, the threat of Chartism and eventually Evangelicalism (Green, 1982: 143), sought to implement bylaws which guaranteed pavements as spaces for 'respectable' pedestrians. Symptomatic of divergent class cultures, those in the 'in-between world' were viewed simultaneously as dangerous yet useful; enviably free yet chained to their poverty.

Henry Mayhew's documentation of the emergent, fluid culture of the "urban nomads" who inhabited this realm foreshadows Booth's cartography by decades and his concentration on morality through fascination and fear in pseudo-racial terms is instructive. He carefully characterises the differences between "... the vagabond and the citizen... the nomadic and the civilised..." (Mayhew, 1851: 1). For him, the streets are populated by "wandering tribes" who prey on England's "settled tribes" and are far from the light of civilisation. The worst are distinguished by group physiognomy evidenced by "high cheekbones and protruding jaws", "a slang language" and "lax ideas of property" with an eagerness to "rebel at authority". For Mayhew and his class, despite some evident sympathy for their conditions, these working people are uncivilised and carry no "positive cultural connotations" (Stedman Jones, 1974: 463). The 'street folk', those who roam to sell their wares in this inter-zone and who have these traits in an exaggerated form are almost a "distinct race" in themselves that Mayhew suggests are potentially of "Irish extraction" (Mayhew, 1851: 2). The street is a dangerous arena and is a site ripe for control.

Among these tribes are the wandering piemen. Mayhew does us an enormous service by describing their number, trade and equipment. He calls them "one of the most ancient of street callings of London" (Mayhew, 1851: 195). We learn that they usually make the pies themselves in various guises of meat, eel and fruit and that they work the streets and public houses from mid-afternoon until late at night. Significantly, they are mostly unemployed bakers and they "number about forty in

summer and twice that number in winter” (Mayhew, 1851: 195). They are in steep decline, emblematic of the wider cultural and physical distances between the city’s middle classes and those they employ. After the Great Reform Bill and the New Poor Law (1834), the bourgeoisie increasingly started to abandon the city, its industrial areas and with it their street eating habits. The new Metropolitan Police now patrolled London and a recent class of aspirational, professional clerks increasingly availed themselves of more settled, interior eating places.

By the 1850s the piemen are little more than adjuncts of street gambling: they allow punters to toss a coin to see if they can win a pie or pay a penny forfeit and this seems almost their sole route to income.⁴ Mayhew reports a poor pieman relaying to him that, “Gentlemen ‘out on the spree’ at the late public houses will frequently toss when they don’t want the pies, and when they win, they will amuse themselves by throwing the pies at one another, or at me” (Mayhew, 1851: 196).

One of Mayhew’s interviewees reports an eight-and-a-half-hour day tramping the streets for “1s. 6d., ... and out of that I have to pay 1d for charcoal” (Mayhew, 1851: 196). It’s a far cry from the character portrayed in Hogarth’s 1750 print “March to Finchley” as recounted by *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* (3,15 August, 1851) almost exactly a century later. The writer of the piece describes how the historical pieman was:

... a prominent character in the highways and byways of London. He was generally a merry dog... (who) stands in the very centre of the crowd, grinning with delight at the adroitness of one robbery, while he is himself the victim of another.”

By now, he is a figure of scorn, taunted wherever he goes by animal noises repeating an old but entirely significant trope that his pie-fillings are likely to include old, rotten food - or cat (Mayhew, 1851: 196).

London, now a world city, was a magnet for immigration from Irish famine and from European revolutions. Street hawking was the only option for many of these new

⁴ Dickens regularly uses the tossing for a pie as part of street language - “‘Heads’ as the pieman says” - see Dickens [1836] 2020: 351 and again, Montague Tigg spins a coin “in the air after the manner of a pieman” - see Dickens [1842] 2014: 447.

arrivals, who swelled the ranks of the native urban poor even further during the periods of cyclical unemployment that dominated the British economy from 1843-1911. In this economic climate many piemen had fallen further down the social scale having “merged [with] a dealer in foreign nuts, fruits, and other edibles which barred the suspicion of sophistication” (*Harper’s New Magazine*, 3, 15 August, 1851).

By the mid-century, the itinerant pie-man’s days were largely done. As Meiksins Wood (2017: 67) has it, “... capitalist imperatives were imposed on traditional forms of work ... on artisans still engaged in pre-industrial production no less than on factory hands.” Those processes, that synchronously changed the nature of the street itself, meant that their business had been almost completely usurped by settled pie-shops. “These shops have now got mostly all the custom, as they make their pies much larger for the money than those sold on the streets” (Mayhew, 1851: 214).

The wandering pieman however was a dying subset of a much larger constituency of costermongers who, in turn, were part of a vast army of ‘casual’ labour. Their identity, location and trade would eventually become central to the establishment of the eel and pie shops.

The context of the costers was integral to understanding a London in transition and theirs, at this stage, was a “dwindling subsistence economy trapped within the expanding capitalist system” (Richards, 1990 in Jankiewicz, 2012: 394). Their precarity was structural (an advantage for capital as a residual, ever-present reserve army) and an “alien presence in the midst of mid-Victorian plenty” (Stedman Jones [1971] 2013: 14). Significantly for this thesis, bakers were also part of this precarious pool of labour and “surplus bakers could count on Friday night employment to meet the extra demand for bread” (Stedman Jones, [1971] 2013: 60).

During the first half of the Victorian century, the number of London’s street sellers rose faster than the general population of the city due to immigrants finding nothing other than casual work (Lummel, 2016: 33). Indeed, “[F]or most of the population flooding London streets, selling was a euphemism for begging” (Thomas, 1990: 41). Stephen Inwood (1998: 504 in Jankiewicz, 2012: 395) suggests that during this period perhaps a tenth of London’s labour was ‘casual’.

Some coster occupations were hereditary however, what Mayhew (1851: 3) calls “costermongers proper” and were further distinguished from both itinerant street sellers and the regular tradesmen by the fact that while the shopkeeper served even the humble bourgeois, the street seller almost exclusively provided regular services to the poor.

George Dodd (1856) reports that by the 1850s, largely the result of appalling hygiene and the disorder of busy streets, both the flower, fruit and vegetable market at Covent Garden and the fish market at Billingsgate were redeveloped (Smithfield’s cattle holding and abattoirs were transferred to Islington between the 1860s and 1880s). As the city expanded the poor found themselves located further from these markets which additionally had turned increasingly to the more profitable and efficient wholesale. The coster families had always bought their wares in bulk at these markets and had historically sold them on the move from barrows. Increasingly, they now came together in convenient locations to create local, unofficial markets. The London County Council (LCC) lists perhaps thirty such unofficial markets in the 1840s and Mayhew suggests thirty-seven in 1851 (Kelley, 2019: 1). By the later 1850s the LCC area has more than forty-two and sixty or more by the 1860s (Kelley, 2019: 24). These informal street markets were penumbras of expanding working class districts and the lists of street markets given by Mayhew would inevitably match the later “roll call of slum clearances” (Yelling, 2007: 120).

Vital to the poor, and in turn to the wealthy they served, they were further impediments to municipal attempts to modernise London’s food supplies with new market halls disrupting the “Liberal master-narrative of urban development” (Jones, 2016: 64). They remained a perceived threat to civic authority embodying a stubborn fragment of medieval carnival and performativity; their legal and spatial marginality entwined. As such they were the target of often brutal police enforcement actions (Jones, 2016). The Commissioner of Police, Richard Mayne (1796-1868) was accused of “waging a war on the costermongers” which possessed “all the malignancy of personal dislike” (*The Era*, 1 November 1863: 9). However, the necessity of some class interdependency and the belief in evangelism as a civilising influence likely meant that unlike the brutal, military demolitions of Hausmann’s

Paris, London's modernity was progressed largely "equivocal and piecemeal... based on a conjunction of the old and the new" (Nead, 2000: 6).

Even so, as the physical distance between the bourgeois and the poor increased concomitantly with fear and suspicion, so did the influence of arms-length benevolence with funding of missionary societies. This linked the enforced 'moving inside' (both physical and metaphorical) of the trades and life on London's streets with a simultaneous moral crusade against popular pastimes and amusements. By mid-century, gone were the tea gardens, cock fighting, apprentice rituals and street gambling of a previous age. The sanctions by the Common Council in the City, "under the prompting of its Methodist contingent" (Bailey, 2014: 32) against the famous Bartholomew Fair, dating from 1183, meant that it, along with other fairs closed by private bills, was dead by 1854.

This attempt to 'clear the streets' also constituted a culmination of a kind of internal, urban enclosure cementing property rights for rentiers on the basis of a Lockean ideological project started much earlier in the English countryside.⁵ The failure to 'improve' so-called 'wasted' land (or its commercial value) in this sense meant forfeiting the right to age-old liberties to live, graze, or as here, trade. Especially true of those that sold the watercress, chickweed, flowers or indeed sometimes eels that they sourced from age-old common land in London's greener extremities, these "challenges to their livelihood... [was also] a disruption of their social networks and a challenge to their dignity" (Jankiewicz, 2012: 404). Interestingly, the costermongers whose livelihoods were threatened were in many cases Irish immigrants, the victims of a related 'internal colonialism' practised by English landlords in Ireland.

The conventional view that street trading declined through this process is, however, untrue. The walking (or carrying) street traders like Mayhew's pea-soup seller and the hot-eel man, both of whose fare would, in one way or another be absorbed into the offerings of the nascent eel-pie shops, did eventually, by the later century largely

⁵ Locke follows the writings of Thomas More in his *Utopia* (1516) in expounding his theory of 'improvement' as the basis of property rights against communal, customary rights that interfered with capitalist accumulation. Locke's contention that if property (or land) was being used by 'indigenous' peoples, it could be legitimately colonially expropriated to 'improve' it is entirely concomitant with the reappropriation of market spaces by capital.

go the way of the roving pie seller.⁶ Street markets however, inevitably home to many eel and pie shops as their customer base became entirely working class, continued to grow into the twentieth century. Along with permanent shops these markets absorbed some of this former ambulatory retail business. In 1932, The London School of Economics' *New Survey of London Life and Labour* (an attempted 'update' to Mayhew) reported that stall numbers had grown by fifty percent since the turn of the century and Victoria Kelley (2019: 1, 6) suggests that markets had "reinvented themselves within a consumer modernity."

What appears to have occurred was a negotiation around what Kelley (2019) suggests was the notion of 'informality'. Although street selling remained a thorn in the side of the authorities and large sections of an outraged bourgeoisie, their utility was beyond doubt, and they were largely tolerated. I suggest that these negotiations were in no small part advanced by the costermongers themselves, initially aided (sometimes) by Mayhew's ventriloquising of their struggles (Herdman, 2021). Indeed, although beyond the scope of this study, costermongers, despite their later *fin de siècle* conservative associations appear in this period to have been active around wider issues of suffrage and Irish nationalism (Jankiewicz, 2012: 402). Certainly Marc Brodie (2001: 49) cites coster unions with governing committees that may have been absorbed within the New Unionism of the 1880s and suggests that they "quite consciously identified themselves and their causes with the working class... that was clearly recognised by politicians of the period, but which has been largely ignored since."

By sheer strength of numbers costermongers, as part of a developing working class culture, forced an accommodation with the forces of modernity and capitalism. This accommodation was not linear nor was it simply about how and where trade occurred but was more profound. Distinctive not only through their unique (and London-centric) economic formation but additionally subversive through what both Gertrude Himmelfarb (1995) and Stedman Jones ([1971] 2013) have suggested was a cultural and moral separateness, the costers, as part of a wider London working

⁶ John Thompson's camera captures much of the fading of these street trades in the late 1870s. See - Thomson and Smith [1877] 1994.

class, constituted a radical alternative to the strictures of bourgeois society “which probably owed something to the tradition of workers entering and leaving the street trades” (Jankiewicz, 2012: 405).

This culture perhaps additionally contained something of the solidarities and charity that Mayhew had noticed amongst the ‘Street Irish’ (Mayhew, 1851: 104) and also encapsulated the essence of the independence and individuality of what would become the late Victorian cockney. This complicated identity, a culture partly defined by precarity, nascent entrepreneurialism, early Victorian moral zoning and the largely failed hegemonic effort to create a working class in the image of the bourgeois, would be reconstituted as the customer base of the eel, pie and mash shops later in the century.

1.3 Through plate glass windows of respectability

Although *The Post Office Directory* appears to list the first Eel Pie House as a *shop* that belongs to Henry Blanchard at 101 Union Street in Southwark in 1844, it’s clear that there existed much older, taxonic institutions.⁷ In the mid-eighteenth century, eel pies were served in a public house (The Eel Pie House) on a small island south-west of Twickenham Ayt(e). Mentioned by Dickens, it became notorious for dog fights and duels.⁸ So popular did this become that the area subsequently became known as Eel-Pie Island. In addition, another public house, also known as The Eel Pie House, by the New River in Highbury (then) north of London, was cited by John Nelson in an 1811 book where:

So great is the resort of the lower order of people from the metropolis to the Eel Pie House, on Palm Sunday... that the host and servants are obliged to be on the alert at two o’clock in the morning to receive their numerous guests, who are none of the most gentle sort... (Nelson, 1811: 153).

In 1830, *The Morning Advertiser* (24 August 1830: 1) mentions another public house with the name Eel Pie House in an advertisement for coal barges. A pie shop in

⁷ Blanchard, Henry, *eel pie house*, 101 Union St. Boro’ High st. *Post Office London Directory for 1844*, Commercial Directory, *Post Office London Directory for 1844*: 574.

⁸ In the third Dickens novel, *Nicholas Nickleby*, (1838-9) Miss Morleena Kenwiggs goes to Eel Pie Island for a picnic.

Wardour Street that certainly sells eel pies is referred to in an article in *The Champion* in 1837 (16 April 1837: 24) whilst describing, with rather obvious glee, a fight between the shop owner and “four young shopmen” who are passing customers. The dialogue of the subsequent trial, reproduced as a patronising colloquialism, is instructive. One of the young defendants is quoted as saying “Heel-pies are only fit for snobs, give me a mince 'un.” The presiding magistrate gives an opportunity for the unnamed pie-shop owner to speak.

Heel pies, yer Lorship, as is chalked up a penny, is made of fish with their heads, and tails, and hinsides, and all in it, chopped up together. But sitch' pies as I sells aint only made with the werry best sand or silver eels, cleaned in three vorters...

The speech is cut short by the judge, but clearly the tradesman is making a distinction between cheap penny pies sold on the streets and his better fare. Also interesting is the idea of the pie as a food for the common man, whose voice is ventriloquised for comic effect. We might also note that the eel as an ingredient is held in traditionally higher esteem than simple fish and that is partly due to its heritage as a staple of Londoners diet for more than a thousand years (Fort, 2002).

In terms of these early taxonic pie shops, a painting by Frederick Napoleon Shepherd however conclusively proves that the listed Blanchard shop was not even the owner's first. Painted in 1835, the image clearly shows a Blanchard's eel-pie shop on the more central Fleet Street.⁹

We might conclude then that the pie *shop* was more common than the largely unreliable and erratic recordings of *The Post Office Directory*. We have, unfortunately, no documentary evidence of exactly how Blanchard sold his wares and whether for instance, he sold live eels as later pie shops would, or whether there were potatoes, soup or anything else on the menu. Blanchard's is not then, despite commonly held views the progenitor of the contemporary eel, pie and mash shop, merely a distant ancestor.

⁹ Shepherd, Frederick Napoleon. “View of building in Fleet Street, with Blanchard's premises and figures on pavement”, Watercolour, 1835, London Metropolitan Archives, Main Print Collection, Cat., No., q4029905. See Fig. 1 in appendix.

The listing of a business by its trading name is, up until this point, usually (although not exclusively) reserved for public houses. Assuming that the directory relies on the owner to define their own business, it seems likely that Henry Blanchard, who makes a great and expanding success of his venture through the coming century, may be the entrepreneurial author of his own commercial debut.

The waters are further muddied by two advertisements in the *Morning Advertiser* in 1846:

To be let - an Eel Pie House - low rent made by lodgers. For cards of address apply to Mr Clayton, Hairdresser, 2, Borough Road, near St George's Circus (*Morning Advertiser*, 11 April 1846)

And:

To be Let an Eel Pie House, *established six years* [my italics], in a crowded thoroughfare, doing a snug business - rent 30/. - let off for 24/. For further particulars enquire Mr Wellard's, 8 St George's-place, Walworth road (*Morning Advertiser*, 24 October 1846)

My research indicates that these are the first mentions of eel pie houses in the press not specifically referring to ventures in public houses, and the ordinariness and casual mention of the description certainly indicates a type of shop that was reasonably common.

In the 1841 Census, a Henry Blanchard in Union Street (although the street number is illegible or missing) is listed as pastry cook.¹⁰ He is also listed in tandem with his new shop in the same way in *The Post Office Directory* of 1844.¹¹ The following year, a second Eel Pie House is recorded this time in Lisson Grove in west London. The owner is John Fletcher. There is a listing for a baker called John Fletcher in the

¹⁰ Blanchard, Henry, *1841 Census for England*, Surrey, St Saviour, District 16: 13.

¹¹ Blanchard, Henry, *Post Office London Directory for 1844*; Confectioners and Pastry Cooks: 1003.

1844 directory who is also working as a pastry cook in Soho.¹² We can't be entirely sure that, as it would seem, these are one and the same man but given perhaps the success of Blanchard's venture, Fletcher might have taken his future and his trade skills into his own hands.

That both of these men were pastry cooks is entirely significant. During the progress of the eighteenth century, the ideology of rationalism, individualism and the free market came into direct conflict with the profiteering, patrician state (the 'Old Corruption'). With the increasingly vital role of manufacturing, the unequal relationships between the elites and the commercial and professional sections of society who served them, started to break apart. In tandem, the scale of manufacture began to erode paternal control over the life of workers, challenging class relations and evidenced "the growth of a newly won psychology of the free labourer" (Thompson, [1980] 1991: 37-38).

The bonds between the gentry, small masters and labourers (emboldened by an advancing radical ideology) weakened significantly. Among the casualties of this breakage was a "further concentric ring of economic clientship" radiating out from the great houses" (Thompson, [1980] 1991: 39). These were workers like dressmakers, coach makers, innkeepers, vintners and pastry cooks. It was this class, profiting from "the sweat of their own brow" (Thompson, [1963] 2013: 710) that took their skills to London, to serve the needs of a growing metropolis commercially dominated by the bourgeoisie. They were joined by those that the gentry had come to see as both idle and disorderly and who had withdrawn from social control: clothing workers, urban artisans and labourers (Williams, 1969). Both groups brought with them at least some vestiges of customs and rituals of a proto-industrial culture.

It is my contention that both of these groups would form a commercial relationship in the city as respectively owner and customer of the emergent Eel Pie Houses. With this synthesis of groups, late eighteenth and early nineteenth century London begins to facilitate a cultural negotiation around its own earlier, urban culture. This was one

¹² Fletcher, John, *Baker*, 12 Nassau St, Soho. *Post Office London Directory for 1844*; Confectioners and Pastry Cooks: 682.

in which “people took their pleasures in great gulps and were addicted to excitement and spectacle” like riots and cruel animal sports (Golby, 1984, 65). It was a culture that the Victorian bourgeoisie, unlike their Regency cousins Tom and Jerry, increasingly feared and associated with a danger to the new embryonically hegemonic social order. The association of work with respectability and its converse, idleness and leisure with chaos, was linked “in a self-conscious cultivation of respectability on the part of those of all classes who wished to emphasise their social superiority” (Golby, 1984, 65).

The control of the London street and the subsequent rise of the eel pie shop must be seen in this light. According to Winter (2013: 4), “neither common law or statute bestowed the right to set up a stall or put down a basket on the public way... [and] vestries received explicit powers to remove barrows and stalls from street markets in the Regency period”. Subsequently, the 1839 Police Act gave the new Metropolitan force powers, open to the discretion of the officer, to confiscate goods, barrows or stalls if they impeded traffic on the pavement or road. What this meant in practice was that the sellers had to keep moving and not, apart from within the act of making a sale, put their baskets down. This process of ‘improving’ the city was not linear however and was conditional on compromises between local government, private interests and tradition (Nead, 2000:5). Indeed, further legislation in 1869, (formally, *The Metropolitan Streets Act, Amendment Act, 1867*) provoked an enormous backlash from the coster community who had by now formed what amounted to a union around their evolving identity and culture (Ellis, 1923: 284).¹³ At a time of an essential appeal to a ‘one nation Toryism’, Disraeli’s government subsequently manoeuvred to amend the act by exempting all costermongers (defining them as traditionally those that traded in foods including fish and fruit and goods manufactured at home that had been exempted from previous licensing), itinerants and hawkers (licensed traders who, crucially, had their own street cries).

The commercial opportunity of the ‘coming inside’ for those able to avail themselves of it would be considerable. It did however require capital and business acumen. If

¹³ For the *Metropolitan Streets Act, Amendment Act, 1867* - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/31-32/5/contents>.

we take Blanchard's as a starting point for what we know will be a successful empire and contrast it with Fletcher's (which will not) we can see immediately that their physical locations are different. We might conjecture whether at this stage his shop in a prime location like Fleet Street is his only premises, but he opens a new concern in a Union Street that already has five Coffee Rooms.¹⁴ In Lisson Grove near Fletcher's shop, we find only one Coffee Room but two Dining Rooms in close proximity.¹⁵ Modern retail parlance would call this 'clustering' - a geographic concentration of interconnected businesses whose aggregation is said to increase productivity.

Yet Blanchard's new shop is in a solidly working class district whilst Fletcher's location is more mixed. Southwark, historically outside the jurisdiction of the City of London, had been seen as an area of license, entertainment and criminality for hundreds of years. By the time Blanchard opens, it is a mix of artisans, warehouse workers servicing the river and the very poor with one of the worst slums in the capital, known as 'The Mint' (Yelling, 2007: 21). Blanchard's is also very close to a street market and this juncture of shopping, work and refreshment would become crucial in the shops' mid-century iteration, enticing as it did a clientele increasingly defined by speed, necessity and an emergent consumer culture.

We might deduce that eels and pie and the businesses that sell them are now more commonly associated with the working classes as a food of convenience housed in a shop that has all the hallmarks of bourgeois respectability.

Because of the inconsistencies of City Directories and their categorisation of eating establishments it's difficult to accurately pinpoint the number of these new ventures but it seems that from Blanchard's opening in 1844, there are almost twenty similar establishments by 1865 and they clearly mirror the decline in street sales.¹⁶ If

¹⁴ Census and listings in the Post Office journal reveal that the Blanchard family subsequently owned a string of eel and pie houses in South and central London.

See listings for Coffee Rooms in *Post Office London Directory for 1844: 1099-1100*.

¹⁵ Burcham, Robert, 5 Lisson grove north. *Post Office London Directory for 1844; Coffee Rooms; 1099*, Rutland, Chas, 4 Up. Lisson st. Lisson gro. *Post Office London Directory for 1844; Coffee Rooms: 1117 & Matthers, William, 41 Lisson gro. Post Office London Directory for 1844; Coffee Rooms: 1117*.

¹⁶ Confusingly, Kelly's Post Office Directories initially only carried the categories of 'Dining Rooms' to refer to places that people ate away from home, but by 1850 the category of 'Coffee Rooms' changes to include a subcategory 'and also Dining Rooms'. During this period, *Eel Pie Houses* remain unlisted

Blanchard and Fletcher were outliers, however, this change in eating patterns was exacerbated by increasing industrialisation. With the Great Exhibition of 1851, London especially would witness the birth of an age of commercial entertainment and consequentially “a significant trend towards the systematic commercialisation of the catering business” (Tames, 2003: 31).

Again, a lack of exact historical record means that it’s difficult to conclude what these enterprises might have looked like or how they operated but an account in Charles Manby Smith’s *Curiosities of London Life* (1857) describes one of these mid-century pie shops. They are found “...especially in the immediate neighbourhood of omnibus and cab stations, and very much in the thoroughfares and shortcuts most frequented by the middle and lower classes” (Smith, 1857: 203).

The appearance of propriety is essential:

...but though the window may be of plate-glass, behind which piles of the finest fruit, joints, and quarters of the best meat, a large dish of silver heels, and a portly china bowl charged with a liberal heap of minced-meat, with here and there are a few pies, lie temptingly arranged upon napkins of snowy whiteness, yet there is not a chair, stool, or seat of any kind to be found within. No dallying is looked for, nor would it probably be allowed.

Yet the shops are certainly gendered spaces and working women a likely draw:

The customer of the pie shop is a man (if he is not a boy) with whom the penny is a penny, and a pie is a pie...Look at him as he stands in the centre of the floor, Direct as grenadier, turning his busy mouthful upon the living tide that rushes along Holborn... The assistants are women ... three or four good looking lasses, the very incarnations of good temper and cleanly tidiness, who

as a category in their own right. The ‘restaurant’ is a class-loaded term in this period, and it is for this reason I believe that they deserve a taxonomic qualification of their own. My statistical research is based on counting individual entries, keyword listed by ‘eel and pie house’ in the business title although it is clear from cross referencing mentions in newspaper and magazine articles of the period, this is not necessarily accurate.

For similar establishments, see - London Metropolitan Archives; London, England; *London, England, City Directories, 1736-1943* [database on-line] Commercial Directory.

from morn to night was busy as bees in extricating the pies from their metallic moulds, as they are demanded by the customers... they are without exception plain and healthy looking ... (Smith, 1857: 204-205).

Indeed, these descriptions echo in some ways the modish role of barmaids in the city's new public houses and gin palaces that were taking over from traditional taverns. The pie shops of this era were, it appears, analogously gas-lit and mirrored. Peter Bailey (1997) suggests that these kind of illuminated spaces provided a theatrical atmosphere which eventually accommodated a flirtatious 'knowingness' especially with a counter that heightened the allure of the unobtainable. This emergent 'managed' early Victorian sexuality, whilst beyond the scope of this work, signals to a customer base that understood the illicit potency of the "maid-manservant relationship" (Bailey, 1997: 168).

The shops are however not yet recognisable as the contemporary or even later nineteenth century Eel and Pie shop. They have no seating; they are not spaces to linger, and food seems served not on a plate but by hand. They appear a synthesis of an eighteenth century enterprise with a location-specific modern customer base, where artisans and clerks might rub shoulders with cab drivers. The elites are nowhere to be seen nor perhaps at this stage are the amorphous London poor. These are likely petty bourgeois enterprises largely catering for their own interstitial class and the more prosperous of the working classes. George Dodd in his *Food of London* (1856: 520) concurs that "... pie shops are now numerous in London - not only in the humbler streets, but in the leading thoroughfares where a high rental must be paid." He continues that "the modern commercial system has been adopted to its fullest extent; yielding an almost infinitely small profit on each, and, therefore, a large scale and efficient management are requisite." It appears that at this stage the shops are still likely an echo of the earlier, more traditional pie shop but are increasingly bifurcated along lines of location and client base.

Burnett's (2004: 42) comment that at this point there were "also specialist hot eel, pie *and mash* [my italics] cookshops which were beginning to take over from the street traders" without primary evidence seems hopeful at best but the taxon of eating places to which I will subsequently turn is likely significant.

1.4 Food as cipher

Food, its type and, crucially, the *manner* of its consumption, would become increasingly relevant as a code for understanding how British (and specifically London) society was developing in this period. With an ascendant politically powerful middle class, the early century would see “an increasing convergence of outlook between the middle classes and the aristocracy” (Stedman Jones, 1974: 462). It was to France that these upper classes had historically looked to enhance their gastronomic culture. This was a departure from the traditional roast meats that had come to define the English upper class diet largely unchanged since the mediaeval period. The class adaption of such food was crucial to the emergent prototypes of the eel and pie shop and their genius would be to serve such basic food in familiar pairings (eels, pies and eventually potatoes) and in contemporary surroundings.

The historical pie was likely a way to cook meat without burning and some suggest that the pastry was only eaten by the poor after the master had consumed the innards.¹⁷ By the early Victorian period, however, it was clearly ubiquitous as a form of mobile meal, as was the potato, usually served baked from a street seller (useful to warm the hands on but, as Mayhew records, also in decline). The potato itself in this period accounted for a huge 212.7 kg per capita per annum and was an enormously cheap item on which to base a new commercial venture (Lummel, 2016). The eel, a historical staple, was still immensely popular. At this point they were brought to the Thames by Dutch merchants and in 1851 “an astonishing 9,797,760 eels were sold in Billingsgate market”. Mayhew (1851: 63) records them being sold hot in liquor, hawked on the streets by costers. This is likely the culinary pedigree of the contemporary dish of eels and liquor.

Spang (2001) claims that Paris was the birthplace of what we now know as the restaurant and the term, from the sixteenth century, initially referred to a restorative consommé. In 1765, a man named Boulanger was sued by the caterers’ guild after they claimed his shop, selling such ‘restaurants’, compromised their monopoly (the English guilds had lost their own control over the catering trade almost a century

¹⁷ This commonly held culinary belief is however disputed by - Clarkson, 2009.

earlier). This brought him notoriety and other enterprising Parisians soon opened their own similar establishments.

Spang (2001: 11) cites Roze de Chantoiseau, proprietor of the *Champ d'Oiseau*, as the first recognisably modern restaurateur in the 1770s. Conveniently he also published a business directory allowing him to promote his cooking in a way that appealed to the elites' preoccupation with health and the growing fashion for *cuisine*. Crucially Mennell (2003: 250) suggests that this process of elite dining out was also developing, by exchange in London. Indeed, inns and coffee houses had prefigured the role of the restaurant by at least a century or more and there had likely been free mixing in inns between intellectuals, merchants and landed gentry especially when winter sittings in parliament had necessitated 'eating out' away from country estates. When the Revolution began, "Paris already had a hundred restaurants" and in a bloodier echo of the breaking of the bonds between the English elites and the small masters, Paris had a surfeit of cooks previously employed by the now depleted aristocracy (Mariani, 1991: 25).

After 1789 the new Jacobin class echoed their earlier English cousins by using dining spaces as political and cultural arenas that eventually contributed to an aesthetic of wider public gastronomy. According to Jürgen Habermas ([1962] 1989), restaurants became, like music and art before them, part of a bourgeois discursive and linguistic sphere, a public arena open to all 'private', rational individuals to debate and discuss. Participation was based on literacy, opinion, subjectivity and experience, not by dint of social rank or hereditary status.

Mennell (2003: 247) echoes Habermas' ([1962] 1989) notion of the dissemination of elite culture to the 'reasoning' public by the figure of the gastronome, a cipher who by his writing, eventually democratized this notion of elite taste. Mennell further suggests that the gastronome's role as an arbiter of taste and fashion might be analogous to that of the flamboyant Regency dandy whose challenge to convention signifies a moment of social flux in which it may be possible to cross "social grades" (Mennell 2003: 251-252).

By 1825, Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin in his *Physiologie Du Goût* recorded that all of Europe has imitated Paris and "...you may see here and there, some foreigners, especially the English, who stuff themselves with double portions of meat... (1970: 231). Crucially, for the French bourgeoisie and their English class-cousins, the emergent institution of the restaurant represented a distinctive and unique Parisian cultural landmark in similar ways that their earlier incarnations had for the elites on their Grand Tour. As the century progressed Spang (2001: 86) suggests, that the restaurant began to represent "... the translation of an eighteenth century cult of sensibility into a nineteenth-century sense of taste: the mutation of one era's social value into another's cultural flourish."

By the mid-century, London's population expansion is mirrored by a large increase in places outside of the home that they can eat. Assael (2018: 17-18) quotes the problematic listings in *Kelly's Directory* to show that in 1840 there were 106 restaurants in London. This rises to 570 in 1870 and then to 1147 in 1890. A good deal of this growth is contiguous to areas of commerce, transport and community activity.

Whilst middle class dining remained a leisure performance translated from elite circles and contained the opportunity to redefine societal manners in their own image, much expands into the daily arena of work. Now, "the heterogeneities in nature of London's public eating" was synchronous with the demands of the working day (Assael, 2018: 15). London cooks no longer represent the prestige of their previous aristocratic masters but serve food to a wider, although class-segregated, eating *public*. Towards the 1870s as trade grew in both rapidity and volume, food became cheaper and there was a rise in both disposable income and immigrant labour to service the sector. The London restaurant eventually becomes a foci for notions of the modern: for advances in technology, hygiene, manners and the creation of an identity of certain types of Londoners defined through their class and thus gustatory cultures.

For the urban poor, much food is still taken outside but some cook shops, analogous perhaps in some limited ways to later working class *caffs* started to provide limited seating for their customers to eat adjacent to the shop (Assael, 2018: 41). By the

latter half of the century, the expansion of cheap working class restaurants signify a democratisation of eating in the public sphere and the extension of urban social interactions. Eating as theatre was now not solely confined to the bourgeoisie and Assael (2018: 97) cites James McKenzie who relates of his childhood in the 1870s a local eel shop with “‘lady servers, standing behind a counter [who] wore cleanwhite [sic] aprons’ serving stewed eels from steaming containers. whose outside stall attracted crowds watching the eels being killed.” Later in the century, with the rise of the consumer society, the customer could increasingly choose to identify with types of food that expressed their own tastes and those of their contemporaries. The eel and pie shops would become hyperlocal emblems of a distinctive and emergent working class culture no longer based solely around work but synchronous with entertainment and the opportunity not only to demonstrate but also to *perform* respectability.

1.5 Hunger and the ‘Great Unwashed’¹⁸

During the first half of the century the diet of the poor people in the towns was bad. The greater part of their nourishment came from bread, potatoes and strong tea (Drummond and Wilbraham, 1991: 329).

If the period between Waterloo and the First Reform Bill had been exultant for the wealthy, it was much less so for the poorer residents of London. As Himmelfarb (1985: 356) remarks, the shock of their discovery by Mayhew and his urban explorers “was actually a shock of recognition.” They could be ignored for long periods, demonised even (as they certainly were), but as Tom Nairn (1964) suggests, the issue and problem of the working classes was inextricably linked to that of the English bourgeoisie because they developed in a synchronous dance.

Industrialisation and the machine age had meant a different development of the labouring classes in London. Unlike the mill towns of the north, many workers in the capital retained a limited stake in how production occurred and were not just the

¹⁸ Usually attributed to Edmund Burke, the first published use was by Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1830. See - Bulwer-Lytton, 1833: 49.

unthinking automatons conjured by the word 'proletarian'. Although these men likely supported the "ideology of economic independence and sturdy individualism" (Thompson [1963] 2013: 710), delineations in earnings were large between a labour elite like compositors and tailors, relatively unaffected by recent industrialisation, and the those like the silk-workers of Spitalfields, part of the urban casualty-mass of the same process. These divisions were to some limited extent closed within the early decades of the century by the erosion of artisanal independence in the workplace yet, market precarity meant that even skilled workers might be subject to periods of "prosperity and poverty" Burnett (1979: 52). However, it was sharp and unexpected food-price spikes that were most disastrous.

In the early part of the century, especially after 1815 and the introduction of the Corn Laws, bread prices especially were subject to regular and acute price fluctuations. These 'laws' or, more accurately, tariff restrictions, were initially introduced in 1804 to impose a duty on imported grain to protect the interests of British agriculture, a sector dominated by the landed aristocracy. Solidified in the Importation Act of 1815, the Liverpool government sought to exclude foreign-grown corn until the domestic price of home-grown corn exceeded 80 shillings per quarter. This led to rioting almost immediately and the following year climatic change (likely prompted by the eruption of Mount Tombora) exacerbated shortages causing famine across Europe. Disturbances around food prices and (the lack of) democratic change ushered in an era of draconian state repression. As Perry Anderson (1964: 31) suggests, the new English manufacturing class "

rallied to the aristocracy... [The whole era of] wars against the French abroad and repression against the working class at home marked the years of its maturation. Two decades after the fall of Bastille, it celebrated its entry into history by cutting down working class demonstrators at Peterloo.

Although there is debate about exactly how the economic situation affected working class nutrition patterns, what seems clear is that workers' wages (and thus purchasing power in relation to food) stagnated simultaneously with a rapid expansion of per-capita gross domestic product during a period of technological upheaval (Allen, 2009).

The ability to purchase food to consume was one (very significant) thing but where to consume it was quite another. In a Britain where one-fifth of the population was now living in urban areas there was a unique necessity for the provision of food and drink to be available close to work and home. This fragmentation of the social fabric in terms of location and activity, in addition to the cost and ability to acquire fuel, required working people to seek sustenance in new ways. The lack of storage, refrigeration or indeed general space at home was exacerbated by temporal changes to work, especially shift patterns and early starts. This meant that most working class men relied on transient coffee and food stalls in the street for sustenance. In parallel, traditionally gendered rural skills such as around cooking, baking and brewing declined. This had much to do with women that had entered the workforce either in factories or domestic service having less time to practice them and the changing (and smaller) urban living spaces (Burnett, 1979: 4).

In urban areas, eating outside had largely been the prerogative of those who begged. Workers had to shop outside too and did so largely from tiny stalls that sold small amounts of staples very cheaply and often on credit. Working patterns also meant that much of the shopping was done on a Saturday night and especially at the very late close of business when perishable items would be discounted for a quick sale. The markets would be,

Hives of activity, noise and bedlam. The stalls would be lit with naphtha flame lamps... It was... midnight before the noise ceased and then the Council workmen stepped in to clear away the debris" (Southgate and Philpot, 1982: 83-84)

Food that was bought had to be cheap, tasty and easy to cook. In tea and white bread, there was an ironic inversion and likely social imitation of the food of the previous century's elites. In comparison to seasonal, rural eating scarcely a generation previously, the urban poor's diet was monotonous, relatively expensive and contained much less nutritional value. Urban bread was now almost entirely cosmetically white, the result of 'high milling' that removed nearly all of the bran. It was taken with tea that gave crucial warmth, converting a meagre meal into the

appearance of a hot dinner. Thomas Wright was a worker who 'tramped' (one of many thousands who had no option but to seek seasonal employment) and he records the necessity of purchasing breakfast at street stalls usually on the edges of town centres:

The gleam from the hot coffee stall comes like a guiding star ... here you get warmth to your hands on the outside of the cup, and for the inner man from the liquid, which you get piping hot... (Wright, 1868 in Burnett, 2016: 33)

George Sala (1859: 13) describes one such common rickety stall in Covent Garden Market as "something between a gypsy's tent and a watchman's box."

Urban food was about cost, speed and palatability. Mayhew (1851: 174) likely has it correct when he states that "men whose lives are alternations of starvation and surfeit love some easily swallowed and comfortable food better than most approved substantiality of the dinner table." At regular intervals throughout the century and coinciding with price fluctuations or bad harvests, soup kitchens became a feature of London life and well-to-do women ventured like explorers into the jungle of slums to dispense lectures on the benefits of cheap and nutritious food - failing of course to answer issues around fuel-poverty or sheer exhaustion.¹⁹ Burnett (2014: 29) suggests that soup became for the working class a symbol of pauperism, reawakening terrible memories of the workhouse.

Food price instability and ultimately famine meant that the 1840s were characterised by great hunger. It is in this period that the street pie men would see their livelihoods diminished where an opportunity arose to provide indoor meals based on cheap palatable and common ingredients. Concomitantly, it was also a period where the legend of Sweeney Todd (the 'demon barber' of Fleet Street whose customers ended their days as pie fillings) would be established.

¹⁹ See for example - 'Soup Kitchen in Leicester Square', *The Poor Man's Guardian*, 6, 11 December 1847.

By the late 1830s, because of falling incomes, potatoes were increasingly replacing wheat in working class diets and there are reports in the *Times* of farmers shooting people caught stealing them (Gurney, 2009). As well as becoming a key ingredient for what would later become the eel, pie and mash shops, the potato had its own symbolism in the debate around hunger and its articulation in the so-called 'Hungry Forties.'²⁰ Thompson (2013: 348) notes that around this time potatoes were seen as the food of the 'primitive' Irish peasantry ("Erin's root-fed hordes") contrasted with the food (wheat for bread) of the free-born Englishman contributing to a gastro-nationalistic moral panic.

In Victorian literature, hunger is portrayed both as a pervasive threat to order but also has a moral dimension. In the cultural texts of the period there was a "nervous interest in what, and how much, paupers ate" (Berry 1999: 48) but simultaneously a trope of self-control. In Christina Rossetti's *The Goblin Market*, Lizzie's refusal to eat the goblin's fruit is a spiritual act of denial concomitant with the period's valorisation of idealised womanhood. In contrast, John, a representative of the male working class in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* ([1848] 2018: 125) is dehumanised by starvation, reduced to a pre-civilized state, with "hunger in his shrunk, fierce, animal look". The breakdown of the family unit is shown through the impoverished, typhus-stricken Davenport's 'selfishness [which] he has never shown in health" when he "snatche[s]... with animal instinct" the jug of tea intended for his wife (Scholl, 2017: footnote 26). Dickens' Magwitch in *Great Expectations* will be forever grateful to Pip for feeding him at the opening of the tale and will become his invisible benefactor.

However, food representation changes in Victorian narrative by the 1860s when "taste begins to supersede hunger" (Scholl, 2016: 5). The eel pie shops, likely serving the petit bourgeois and respectable working classes in a simulacra of the emergent bourgeois restaurant, sit between these two poles.

²⁰ 'The Hungry Forties'. This term, it is now acknowledged, was a retrospective invention coined in the 1920s by free trade supporters as criticised in Chaloner, 1967.

1.6 Eating out and translatable spaces

As least as far back as the fifteenth century, England had a network of inns that meant travellers no longer had to rely on the hospitality of monasteries. “However, it would seem that availing oneself of a meal provided commercially was restricted to people journeying until sometime at the end of the eighteenth century (Warde and Martens, 2000: 22).” Prefiguring the bourgeois developments of the restaurant, cuisine and an associated societal change in Paris, Felicity Heal (1990) concludes, rather depressingly, that the early modern Englishman never appeared terribly hospitable to strangers. According to her, hospitality by the elites became performative and a way of estimating the recipient’s moral worth against a backdrop of an emergent market economy and the beginnings of state charity for the needy. Importantly for emergent patterns of dining, especially amongst the growing working classes, the growth of urban London changed prevailing notions of hospitality by foregrounding personal preferences and individualism against a more traditional rurality of social duties. Hospitality was increasingly frustrated and delineated by social rank and became focussed on rites of passage and communal festivities. Both of these would decline in nineteenth century London as part of the ‘civilising’ of the street and the allied pacifying of the mob (Golby and Purdue, 1984).

By the turn of the nineteenth century, the necessity of providing food services for those away from home resulted in “what might be called professional as opposed to amateur building. Prior to that... most buildings were ... adaptable for a variety of purposes” (Olsen, 1974: 269). We can see this in the building of new public houses that reflected the need for privacy and segregated drinking areas for different patrons. As so many of the contemporary eating places were inadequate to their new, expanded role (and fashions that dictated that middle class meals at home became increasingly ritualised) the public landscape within which the eel and pie shops would emerge started to change (Drummond and Wilbraham, 1991: 335). Coffee houses of this period had altered little from their heyday in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when their associated function was of facilitating debate amongst customers. Their wooden compartments were open to the centre of the room but, with the increasing concerns of Victorian propriety, many added upstairs spaces for women and families.

Astonishingly, by 1820 there were some 3,000 restaurants in Paris (Zeldin, 1977, 2: 739). Transplanted to London for the upper classes, these spaces were translated and revelatory. The Grand Divan Restaurant on the Strand in 1848 still nodded to the coffee house in booths on either side of the room but also utilised long mirrors set in gilt frames. In place of pewter, there were electro-plated tankards, clean linen and napkins (King, 1980: 237). From a dark London of the early century, “the new restaurant did good in other directions. It let in the daylight into London life generally (Scott, 1900: 12).” It is this cheerful and bright aspect the eel pie shops would inevitably copy.

Such spaces were well publicised in the press as *a la mode* and aspirational. We may certainly conjecture that an early taxon of the eel and pie shop would have been aware of these developments. However, for most of London’s population, public eating spaces in this period left a great deal to be desired:

On working days the artisans and lower middle classes often ate their midday meal at a Tavern or a cheap eating house where an ordinary of hot meat, vegetables, bread, cheese and beer costs from 6d to 1s. Some of these places were none too attractive (Drummond and Wilbraham, 1991: 333).

‘Himself’, the anonymous author of *Memoirs of a Stomach* (1853) records that:

I have dined at eating-houses, the effluvia of which, steaming up through the iron gratings made me qualmish before eating, and ill all the day after ... I have groped my way down hypocausts in Fleet Street, and dined in cavern-like taverns, wishing myself a thousand miles away the moment the eternal joint was uncovered (Drummond and Wilbraham, 1991: 333).

These are also highly gendered spaces. In Dickens’s *Dombey and Son*, women like Miss Tox have to seek refuge ‘in a musty little back room usually devoted to the consumption of soups and pervaded by an ox-tail atmosphere’ (Dickens, 1848 in King, 1980: 235).

In early Victorian London, certainly by 1830, we see a “hierarchy of eating-places, catering for a range of needs and incomes - from humble cook-shops and ‘ordinaries’ to better class inns, chop-houses and dining rooms up to a few renown taverns and hotels” (Lummel, 2016: 9). The emergence and fading of these numerous types of eating places are synchronous with the early eel and pie houses and in nearly all, some later element is partially visible.

The conduit between the working class food of the street, the beginnings of mass catering, the restaurant and crucially the owners of the embryonic eel pie shops is most clearly seen with the pastry cooks and their cookshops. These cookshops supplied a variety of cooked dishes to the lower middle classes and, according to Dickens, were often grim:

Mr Grazinglands looked in at a pastry cooks window, hesitating as to the expediency of lunching at that establishment. He beheld nothing to eat but butter in various forms, slightly charged with jam, and languidly frizzling over tepid water. Two ancient turtle shells on which were inscribed with the legend ‘soups’ decorated a glass partition within, enclosing a stuffy alcove from which a ghastly mockery of a marriage breakfast spread on a rickety table, warned the terrified traveller (Dickens, 1877: 27).

The poor frequented their own versions of cookshops or bakeshops which sold more or less similar fare but also had communal ovens where people without facilities could take food to be cooked. These date back to the seventeenth century and as well as housewives bringing meat in a pot to be cooked, street vendors would also have their food cooked here.²¹ Dickens, in *Little Dorritt* mentions such a place:

... a dirty shop window in a dirty street, which was made almost opaque by the steam of hot meats, vegetables, and puddings... within, were a few wooden partitions, behind which set such customers as found it more convenient to take away their dinners in stomachs than in their hands (Dickens [1857] 1967: 283).

²¹ For working class cookshops, see - Flanders, 2014: 291 (footnote).

Cookhouses, notorious for skimming slices of customers' meat for themselves, inevitably declined later in the century as more homes were built with rudimentary kitchens of their own.

When visited by Egan's Tom and Jerry, coffee-shops for the lower orders, seemed to be places of "drunkenness, beggary, lewdness and carelessness" but a few offered newspapers and a pause in the city *en-route* to work (Egan, [1821] 2019: 165).

Judith Flanders (2014: 294) relates how:

The coffeehouses clearly filled need: from only a few dozen catering to artisans in 1815, they had increased in number by 1840 to nearly 2000; There a full breakfast could be purchased for 3d. A coffee house in one working class district served up to 900 customers a day, who had a choice of three rooms: the cheapest was open from 4:00 am to 10:00 pm, where customers could enjoy breakfast of coffee, bread and butter for 1 1/2d day; the second grade room offered coffee, a penny loaf and a penny worth of butter for 3d; or, in the most expensive room, customers could order a dinner where the coffee shop supplied the bread and the coffee, but the diner brought his own cooked meat.

Soup houses were even less charming offering basic soup, bread and the inevitable potato for 2d or 3d. Chop houses were a cut above all of these, although they varied considerably in quality of food and surroundings chiefly because the waiters were not paid but expected to live off tips and paid for the tablecloths to be laundered themselves. So-called 'slap-bangs', named for the onomatopoeic slamming down at speed of the dishes, were a cheap and not-so-cheerful cousin of the more salubrious chop houses that fed better-off clerks and City gents alike.²²

Further taxons of the eel and pie houses could be found in less likely places. By the 1830s, traditional public houses were also under threat from modernity by the rise of the new Gin Palaces. From the mid-eighteenth century, gin had become

²² For a description of Guppy's meal in a slap-bang see - Dickens, [1853] 2008: 276.

progressively more expensive due in no small part to the 1751 Gin Act and pubs had developed from taverns that were essentially a front room of a house onto a more professional footing. Now, however, plate glass windows and gas-lighting meant that customers flocked to these fashionable, bright and decorous new wonders that served only gin. As Dickens ([1836] 1995: 217-218) significantly remarks, “the more splendid do these places become, the poorer the area.” Indeed, gas light could be such a modern and dizzying spectacle that *The Times* reported in January 1837 on a confused drunken man demanding gin from a baker’s shop (Jackson, 2019: 7).

By 1861, *The Sporting Life* gives us a rare and brief glimpse of what we may expect to find in a mid-century eel and pie shop when it mentions “splendid shops, dazzling with gas, and glass, and Women’s charms”.²³ The shops appear as a modern ‘spectacle’ synchronous with a nascent consumer commodity culture framed by the earlier Great Exhibition of 1851 (Richards, 1990).

One may conjecture that location, price and not a little business acumen was required to make these new prototype spaces profitable. The number of advertisements *selling* these new businesses are clearly noteworthy. One such, from 1848 is typical and from its mention of a coffee house may indicate a joint venture.

To be let, near Finsbury square, a HOUSE and SHOP, well adapted to any business - now in the pie trade - low rent, and partly made by lodgers - coming-in moderate. For particulars, apply at the Globe Coffee house, Caroline-place, City road (*Morning Advertiser*, 15 June 1848).

Further variants of the trade can be seen here:

Worthy of Notice - To be let - an old established eel pie house with immense Ginger beer trade, with fountain, cylinder, and receipts complete, in a crowded thoroughfare, near the Borough rent low; coming-in moderate. Apply at the eel-pie house, 49 White-street near St George’s Church, Borough (*Morning Advertiser*, 23 May, 1848).

²³ The Betting Interest, Its origin, *The Sporting Life*, 30 May, 1861: 1.

From the mention of ginger beer, we may assume a further (and unexpected) menu item from very limited source material.

In 1849 a mini *cause-célèbre* was reported in several newspapers of a romantic, failed suicide attempt by a young man who was (allegedly) prevented from jumping to his death from Blackfriars Bridge. He carried a letter to his new bride apologising for their poverty after he had “set up an eel-pie house, which had proved a disastrous speculation, for he had lost upwards of 40/-...” (*Daily News*, 16 January, 1849) An article a week later clarifies the situation that the man in question:

... prevailed upon a female servant to lend him 20/-. With which he took an eel-pie house in Barbican, and instead of being turned out by the landlord as he had stated, he absconded after selling some of the materials, and with the remaining portion of money got married, and lastly excited the sympathy of the public in his behalf by what the writer considered a sham attempt at suicide” (*Daily News*, 30 January, 1849).

1.7 Defeat and the culture of consolation

The potato blight of the ‘Hungry ‘Forties’ brought untold suffering but “[t]he fungus (*Phytophthora infestans*), however, did what 20 years of bitter agitation had failed to do; it brought about the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846” (Drummond and Wilbraham, 1991: 283). With this legislation dead, mid-century London expanded to an extraordinary 2.4 million people (Green, 1982: 129).

The following decade saw the start of a period where food generally became cheaper and, after years of economic and political turmoil, dining for the middle classes increasingly became to be seen as culturally significant within an arena of pleasure and amusement in an expanding ‘leisure’ economy (Rich, 2011: 2). For the London poor, a term that now included a vast army of casual labour and those whose occupations left them at the mercy of economic and seasonal fluctuations, charitable feeding and soup kitchens remained a constant presence. These parallels however were mirrored by an increasing ‘hollowing out’ of the capital as the middle

classes, increasingly drawn to an 'improving' Evangelicalism (Holladay, 1982), settled in the suburbs away from the 'corrupt' commercial centre.

Historically, the artisans, small masters, their workers and apprentices had lived in close proximity to their workshops. This community, full of rituals, drinking, gambling and sport was lost by the middle class flight and cut adrift from the proletarian poor that had moved into the city centres. The artisans, who could trace their lineage to the remnants of the guilds, had been generally hostile to mass industrialisation. Steeped in an eighteenth-century Radicalism, their language spoke to encroachments on the Civil War settlement of the 'free born Englishman' and they looked to the writings of Thomas Paine and republicanism. The traders and small masters were more influenced by the classic liberalism of John Stuart Mill who championed their own beliefs of self-reliance, free trade and individualism.

Nonetheless, the legacy of the 1832 Reform Bill marked a consolidation within the middle classes who strove increasingly to emulate the aristocratic elites. By the time of the final defeat of the 1848 Charter, London had become intensely stratified, and by the 1870s the middle classes were "generally voting Conservative" (Stedman Jones, 1974: 465). The working class, having no ideological vehicle of its own on which to carry its emancipation forward, fell into political despondency, largely abandoned and increasingly demonised by the bourgeoisie.²⁴ In turn, the class would divide as Engels, writing to Marx in the late 1850s explained. He saw a growing conservatism in some sectors of the working class and referred to it as a 'Labour Aristocracy'.²⁵ This notion, although contestable, regards these mostly skilled workers as becoming 'bourgeoisified' (Gray, 1981).

This working class introspection would not end until an upsurge in trade union activity in the 1880s, but by then the cultural framework into which proletarian culture developed had been largely set. The partial granting of suffrage by the Conservatives in 1867 served only to prove how limited the earlier radical threat had become and how unassailable the architecture of capitalism. In this context the

²⁴ Marx would not write the Communist Manifesto until 1848.

²⁵ See Marx's response to Engels on 9 April 1863 where he reflects on an "apparent Bourgeois infection of English workers" - Marx and Engels, 1965: 140.

working classes, through trades unions and co-operatives societies, increasingly sought an accommodation within class structures that would guarantee at least some stability and dignity.

During the last thirty years of the century the London working classes, as Stedman Jones (1974) suggests, appear to have turned more and more towards the consolations of pleasure and distraction found within family, sport, seaside outings and the music hall. In this it appears that they were at least outwardly receptive to an overwhelming new cultural hegemonic message from the middle classes. This was of thrift, hard work and a delineation between the 'good' and the 'idle' poor: one that equated cleanliness as a code for moral probity. This concomitant obsession with aspiration, materiality and consumption, drove an expansion of dining culture with its associated manners around public and private spaces. Here was a coetaneous "culture of governance and pacification by spectacle" (Harvey, 2004: 223) that now included both cheap cafes and expensive restaurants that signal directly to the growth of the eel and pie shops.

Although we might profitably conjecture that sections of the London working class were guided by some form of memory of *pre*-industrial solidarities and convivialities, much of the emergent proletarian culture from the 1880s onwards was formed within the interstices of now entirely working class neighbourhoods that had known little but urban living. As McLeod's (1974 in Savage and Miles, 1994: 64) work evidences, working class married couples came overwhelmingly from the same geographic areas and this hyper-locality of micro-class formation became crucial to the types of culture that proliferated. Despite the fact that the London working classes were constantly surveilled by the bourgeoisie, the culture that grew within these communities was largely opaque and defensive in nature signalling to its own uniqueness.

1.8 Cat's meat and glue for the gravy

From the thirteenth century onwards the Guilds and the Assize system oversaw much of bread and ale production and their prices. By the end of the eighteenth century however, regulations became more lax and rapid urbanisation, poor

sanitation and extended food chains meant that food quality and the incidence of deliberate adulteration became endemic. The level of contamination was made public as early as 1820 when Frederick Accum published a *Treatise on Adulterations of Food and Culinary Poisons*. By 1830 an anonymous publication called *Deadly Adulteration and Slow Poisoning Unmasked* made it clear that almost all commercially available food was corrupted in some form. A rising hegemonic belief in the free hand of the market, competition as well as periodic inflation, food shortages and remote, “highly capitalised and mechanised producers” meant that not only was the country’s food not safe, it was also not trusted (Burnett, 1979: 110, 113). Victorian literature is full of social horror at suspected (and sometimes real) poisoning at the hands of servants (Horn, 1990). It was this as well as potentially substantial losses to the treasury on heavily taxed comestibles (often the most adulterated) that led in the 1850s to Dr Thomas Wakely, the editor of the *Lancet*, commissioning Dr Arthur Hassal to write a report of his investigations into the scandal of contaminated food. These became known as the *Lancet’s* ‘Sanitary Commission’. There followed a Parliamentary enquiry itself followed by a Select Committee which led to the Adulteration of Foods Act in 1860 with much media interest. Successive legislation continued throughout the century (although the issue wasn’t resolved until comprehensive inspection regimes in the 1930s). Just as the early pie-man was slandered by notions of adulteration, the stigma was still referred to by Manby Smith about the new eel pie houses:²⁶ He retells a humorous story of a widowed pie-maker who refuses the matrimonial advances of a new upstart who has taken all her trade and who is saved by a friend arriving at the competitor with a “huge brace of dead cats” and announces that he’s arrived with the regular order...” (Manby, 1857: 208-209).

The 1850s to the mid 1870s, commonly referred to as the *Golden Age* of Victorian society saw the economy grow and ‘generally’ wages increased ahead of prices. There is a marked increase in consumption across all classes and this period prefigures a point where “... there was a dramatic growth in the number of public eating establishments in the second-half of the century” (Assael, 2018: 17-18). More “... the records of inspection and regulation illustrate the specific ways in which the

²⁶ See - Dickens, [1836] 2020: 292. The pie-man relates that in Summer, “fruits is in, cats is out.”

restaurant related to the issue of public health and testify to the increasing significance of public eating within the shaping and ordering of the later Victorian and Edwardian urban environment” (Assael, 2018: 130).

Restaurants had started to advertise themselves as ‘well ventilated’ and ‘hygienic’ literally building themselves into the narrative of the city, along with physical roads and pavements that were increasingly inspected and regulated. By 1874 *Kelly’s* lists thirty-three eel and pie houses and, although contemporary reportage is patchy, we can assume that they were at some level a deliberate replication of successful and fashionable bourgeois restaurants (Hawkins and Garlick, 2002). By this period then we might conjecture that the mid-century pie shop has likely morphed into a largely working class space that probably served pies of eel, and (probably) meat, stewed eels (likely in a liquor) and soup. The fare is almost certainly an aggregate of the offerings of an earlier pie shop with proletarian street food served in a space that resembles a cookshop or coffee house with bench and (possibly) booth seating. The pie-shop or house (not the bourgeois, restaurant) appeals largely to the employed, skilled or semi-skilled working class and possibly (largely depending on location), self-employed petty-bourgeois tradesman. It is situated within, or in close proximity to, a street market and is common in these areas with some operating until very late at night.²⁷ They were certainly popular, affordable and prolific as an article in 1869 explains, “There is a wonderful outbreak of pie shops... we know of a locality that boasts three such emporiums in succession” (“How we dine”. *London City Press*, 13 November, 1869: 13). The pie shops are, or try to be, respectable as several newspaper advertisements of the period record vacancies for: “*Respectable* [my italics] able boy... to make himself generally useful in Eel and Pie House” (*Kentish Mercury*, 2 August, 1895).

One of the best reportage that we have of shops of that era, however, does explicitly confirm that disreputable adulteration was continuing. As Olive Malvery, an extraordinary Anglo-Indian reporter recalls when undercover in an eel pie house, she is instructed to go to “...the oil shop to get sixpen’orth o’ glue” which will go in the

²⁷ “Report of two drunk and disorderly men”. *Lloyds Weekly Newspaper* 25 September 1898: 1. The article relates how “*Shortly after midnight*, the prisoners went into an eel and pie shop in East Street, Walworth.

gravy as the customers, “like it thick” (Malvery, 1908: 83). Malvery doesn’t reveal the identity of this shop but in this period, analogous to the emergent chains like J. Lyons and Spiers and Pond’s, we see the establishment of what might be called the triumvirate of the eel pie business that would dominate until the late twentieth century, each speaking of consistency and reliability.

In 1889 Robert Cooke, an East Ender with Irish roots and a background as a butcher, fishmonger and a publican, opened an eel and pie shop in Watney Street Market and, shortly after, his wife, opened another in Hoxton Street (adjacent to the market).²⁸ On his death, his widow, Martha would also own a coffee house at 169 Hoxton Street, illustrating well the complimentary and commutable relationship between different early taxonic working class eating establishments.²⁹ A decade before, a penniless Italian peasant, Michaele Mansi, had arrived from Ravello and married Cooke’s daughter Ada. The Cooke family gifted an eel and pie shop to them in Tower Bridge Road (that remains open to this day). From this Mansi built an empire of such establishments, in his own name, making himself and his family fabulously wealthy.³⁰ In 1915 another Irish immigrant Samuel Kelly opened an eel pie shop in Bethnal Green and by the outbreak of the Second World War had four of his own shops and a live eel business.

1.9 Modernity, space and identity

Adulteration had been so widespread that it’s little surprise that eel and pie houses, now splendidly dressed in their ‘gas and glass’, would appeal to a working class clientele by producing what was essentially honest, homely food. By the late

²⁸ The Cooke’s claim that it was their family that paired pies, mashed potato and parsley liquor in a shop in Sclater Street in 1862 although no record of this shop exists in either tax records or the Land Registry. There is evidence however from the 1871 census that Robert Cooke was resident at 104 Sclater Street with his wife and two daughters and was a fishmonger.

²⁹ Martha Cooke is listed in the 1901 Census at 169 Hoxton Street in the Borough of Shoreditch as an employer, working from home originally as a ‘Refreshment Housekeeper’. This is crossed out and written over with “Coffee Ho.” See - TNA PRO 1901 RG 13/274: 26. However by 1905 she is listed in the Post Office Directory as the owner of an Eel Pie House at the same address. See - *Post Office London Directory for 1905*, Commercial Directory, *Post Office London Directory for 1905*: 1051. An image of Olive Christian Malvery working in a ‘cheap coffee house’ shows an interior that would be instantly recognisable to a contemporary eel pie and mash shop. See - Malvery, 1908.

See - Appendix, fig. 2.

³⁰ The family would change their name to a less sounding foreign *Manze* during the First World War.

nineteenth century, the shops have about them an air of respectability and a cleanliness. Perhaps the best description of a late Victorian eel pie shop is this by the writer and *bon vivant* George Sims:

The dressing of an eel-pie shop window is conservative. It is a tradition handed down through many generations to the present day. The eels are shown artistically on a bed of parsley which is spread over a dish... To see the eel pie business at its best, to appreciate its poetry, you must watch the process of serving to its customers. Behind the counter on a busy night stands the proprietor in his shirt sleeves, a clean white apron preserving his waistcoat and nether garments from damage. Observe with what nimble deftness he lifts the lid of the metal receptacle in front of him, whips out a hot pie runs a knife round it inside the dish, and turns it out onto a piece of paper for the customer - possibly into the eager outstretched hand. He is generally assisted by his wife and daughter, who are almost, but not yet equally, dextrous. There are metal receptacles in front of them also, and the pies are whipped out in such rapid succession that your eyes become dazzled by the quick continuous movement. If you watch long enough it will almost appear that a shower of hot pies is being flung up from below by an invisible agency. (Sims, 1903, 3: 51)

Although Sims' description is likely from the 1890s and still speaks of pies as being eaten by hand, it also speaks of cleanliness and speed. Ultimately, it also speaks of a working class modernity, an arena engaged in commerce and debate. More, as Harvey (2003: 232) has outlined, such enterprises enabled spatial dialectics around which specifically community values and identities could be built. The London working classes, zoned into clearly defined areas, have used (and continue to use) the historic eel pie houses as gathering points in which to performatively celebrate their identity, partly unique and partly a distillation of bourgeois notions by osmosis.

Historically for many working class people we might imagine, the novelty of the eel and pie shop was seen as offering the possibility of experiencing in reality some of the idealised pleasure already consumed in imagination from the restaurants of the wealthy. Consumption of the food was by the late century not only the solution to

hunger but also about the excitement and crucially the *anticipation* of that purchase. It expressed the consumers' uniqueness - ('autonomous imaginative hedonism' (Campbell, 1987: 77) but also identified a relationship to 'acceptable' class tropes (Johnson, 1988: 27-42).

Indeed, as George Dodd reported of the mid-century pie shops, "At some of these commercial dining rooms... [that are] in themselves a characteristic of the middle class respectability of our times..." (Dodd, 1856: 507). Although this 'respectability' is crucial as it gave a moral and cultural framework to consumption and an indication of how to act 'appropriately', it requires some clarification within the context of a late nineteenth century London working class.

Delineations within that class were significant. The capital's artisanal elite had always divided itself from other workers and this appeared to mirror the hierarchy of micro-class divisions that "extended down to the very lowest stratum of the London poor" (Stedman Jones, [1971] 2014: 338). In that sense, the notion of Victorian working class respectability likely had a distinct, class-located sense. This was probably a contingent, situation-specific compromise and often performative rather than one "'emulative' of bourgeois patterns" (Bailey, 1979: 347). In that way, there could be a 'duality' of respectability as evidenced by performers within the music hall whose satire could undermine bourgeois pretensions (Walkowitz, 1992) or by negotiations around the strictures of Victorian temperance (Harrison in Bailey, 1979: 336).

Although the last two decades of the nineteenth century saw an economic decline, there was a rise in working class spending especially in the arena of entertainment and leisure (Bakker, 2011). The eel and pie shops would become, as I expand in a subsequent chapter, arenas of these class and site-specific 'respectabilities' and, like the music hall and Association Football, sub-cultural touchstones of a new working class life. Indeed, the shops would become as much a part of cultural production as any Marie Lloyd song or coster slang. In essence, although they held within them a refusal to completely acquiesce to bourgeois values and (overt) control, they were as much about conciliatory comfort and offered "...an assertion of personal dignity in the face of adverse circumstances" (Goby and Purdue 1984: 185).

By the turn of the twentieth century the shops had turned culturally inwards creating around themselves a protective cocoon of performative self-mythology and a political conservatism wrapped in a gastro-nationalism. They were, in the strictest sense, subaltern counter-publics (Fraser, 1990) without any of the implicit radicalism. Frozen in development from perhaps the 1920s, they have survived in a semi-fossilised state, spatialised to (often former) market-adjacent sites, hyper-local, unnoticed and untroubled within plain sight, becoming only visible to a twenty-first century London when their customer demographic and racial constituency was challenged by globalisation and gentrification.

Conclusion

Following Norbert Elias' warning that "nothing is more fruitless, when dealing with long-term social processes, than to attempt to locate an absolute beginning" (Elias, 1983: 232), I have sought to demonstrate that the origins of the eel and pie shops lie not in the entrepreneurial figure of any one family dynasty but much earlier in the changing class relationships between a largely corrupt state of Thompson's ([1980] 1991: 27) patrician 'banditti' and the artisans that served them.

Economic rationalisation along with the elements of an embryonic bourgeois state (aided by amongst other factors, an emergent press with its adjuvant literate readership) meant that the humble pastry cook now served a different clientele and in doing so would propagate a taxon of working class eateries respondent to the temporal disruptions of capitalism, one of which through class descent, would eventually birth the contemporary eel, pie and mash shop.

The shops themselves, clearly an earlier inception than previously recorded as my research evidences, would be partial responses to the 'coming inside' of the working class. This was a process of bourgeois control (physical, cultural and moral) of the street and the necessity of mass catering, initially as a reaction to hunger but also congruent with the middle classes growing consumerism, morality and fears of pollution. The genius of the new eel and pie shops was to combine elements of advancing modernity in a replication of the 'gas and glass' of, amongst others, the

gin palaces with the warmth and respectability of a home that spoke of a proto-industrial conviviality.

The food served utilised the historic food of the London poor (the eel) with easily available ingredients in a setting that was geared to speed and necessity rather than the reflexivity of the (Habermasian) public sphere. Contrary to contemporary memorialisation (the political and cultural signification of which I shall discuss in my final chapter), the fare was more mixed with some shops like Evans' (the forerunner of today's Arments) still serving soup until at least 1914.³¹ Indeed, in a revealing interview in David Furnham's forgotten film, *Noted Eel and Pie Shops* (1975), Joe Cooke's grandmother, Lily, 91 at the time significantly recalled that "Robert Cooke [the founder of the Cooke dynasty] was-my-father in law... in Watney Street, Stepney "He never sold pies, he sold hot eels and mash."

By the mid-nineteenth century, this intensely localised and market-adjacent communality, itself derived of a synthesis and 'remaking' (Stedman Jones, 1974) of the culture of different types of manual workers, saw the emergence of a unique coster identity, simultaneous with and intrinsic to, a wider London working class culture. This, by the 1870s, without political navigation, had turned inward, defensively orientated towards the family and home set against a pacified lifestyle of consolation and distraction that saw them congruent with music halls, association football and seaside excursions (Stedman Jones, 1974: 485). This was the community that would largely become the customer base for the late nineteenth century pie shop. Although we cannot be entirely sure, it is to this period that straddles both centuries and likely no earlier, that we can trace the contemporary shop, its rituals and its traditions. By the early twentieth century the shops had become numerous but shielded within an urban working class culture of hyper-local social solidarities based around micro-class divisions of work, respectability and propriety.

³¹ In an image from a family photograph held by the Arments dated c.1914, a window display clearly offers soup.

The handful of eel, pie and mash shops that now remain within London, memorialised in contested recollection, are the product of a unique synthesis and are nothing less than a fossilised *extant taxon* of an early feeding-station/canteen/restaurant hybrid closely associated with, and synchronous to, the development of the identity of the costermonger who in turn contributed in no small measure to the emergence of a distinct and unique London character. It is to that character, long in creation, that I now turn.

2. The Theatre of the cockney

Perhaps we can remember and adapt Marx's insight: we make our identities, but with inherited resources and not under circumstances of our own choosing. (Gilroy in Gilroy, Grossberg and McRobbie, 2000: 127)

Introduction

Except perhaps in a generalised, geographic sense, the cockney identity, fundamental to, and the main signifier of the contemporary eel and pie shop, is seen as more or less redundant in a global, neoliberal city. Today, cockney is a nostalgic signal. The image of the good humoured, 'rough diamond' of the Lambeth Walk has been in decline since at least the 1940s and is now largely found in half-remembered and reconstructed simulacra in Essex. However, it remains a referent of an exclusively urban, London identity whose dominant register remains a 'proletarian entrepreneurialism' (Hobbs, 1998) associated with selling and service. From London's historic army of clerks, artisans, shop keepers, costermongers or casual labourers it survives, if only in the recollections of old men as "you got something to sell? I'll buy it off ya."³²

In this chapter I attempt to chart the contested evolution of the idea of cockney that appeared to emerge from its pre-modern roots evidencing an increasing divide between earlier rural power and knowledge and nascent, urban forces synchronous with early capitalism. I trace the notion, increasingly defined by a spatiality that began to articulate the contours of the new, expanding city of London towards a tension between the commoners and the elites; between the educated and the non-educated, between the patrician and the plebian (Thompson 1991). In this sense I argue that cockney began to display a duality: firstly, as an identity defined by speech type and then by barbed comedy but increasingly as a metaphor for the interplay between the powerful and the powerless.

³² Brian. Interview by author 22 June 2022.

Towards Victorian modernity, I use cultural texts to plot the rise of, and brutal satire towards, an interstitial, Romantic class that defined itself in cultural opposition to the elites of the *ancien regime*. Secondly, I describe a new strata, initially outlined and personally represented by Dickens, as grocers, journalists, shop assistants and (eventually) eel and pie shop owners. I then examine the fluidity of the moniker and the circumstances of the term's rapid class slippage, synchronous to the alliance of the bourgeoisie and the old elites, that sees cockney become a symbol for the multitudinous urban poor. In that sense, I argue that the journey of the cockney is about who controls the word and its fluid connotation.

During early Victorian modernity, I trace the performativity of the cockney as both an escapist pantomime that simultaneously aped, celebrated and satirised the appearance of the elites and a dynamic, dramatic identity informed by street commerce (Jankiewicz, 2012). Both forms I suggest may owe much to pre-industrial forms of the crowd and carnival reflected back through early working class musical and entertainment traditions that began to shape a specifically London proletarian identity. This identity I argue was carved from precious moments of enjoyment during periods of extraordinary privation and political impotence after the defeat of the Charter. I attempt to contrast this by delineating the characterisation of the cockney as a representative of bourgeois fears of both the street and degeneration: simultaneously repulsive but erotic.

In this I question the notion of the construction of a Victorian 'underclass' (Davis, 1989) by examining the conflation of the coster class with cockney (Brodie, 2001) to describe the further class descent of the character and its re-inscription by the contrasting outlooks of Victorian Liberalism as both comic and criminal: simultaneously a representative of sympathy and fear. I relate this fear to a burgeoning cultural hegemony that sought to meld the potentially revolutionary cockney from the 'abyss' into a figure of imperial incorporation. Here, I utilise Stuart Hall's (1973) work on the dissemination of hegemonic messaging via television to sketch the increasingly middle class music hall's eventual co-option of the authentic voice of the street ventriloquised by a bourgeois performer across culture and media.

This process, I suggest, further utilised Walter Bagehot's (1867) idea of political theatricality to absorb the cockney into the nation via a popular imperialism within a discourse of 'invented tradition' (Hobsbawn and Ranger, 2012). The cockney is then I indicate, utilised as a vessel to encapsulate a particular type of 'ordinary' Englishness and periodically valorised according to its usefulness to capital.

2.1 The cockney in history

Writing in *The St James' Magazine*, Cadwallader Waddy (1873: 127) suggests that the origin of the cockney was "shrouded in mystery." The contemporary association of the cockney with a specific philosophy and dialect is however, largely a nineteenth century construction (Stedman Jones: 1989).

Indeed, in projections redolent of his own period, William Matthews in his seminal *The Cockney Past and Present* (1938: 4-5), identifies in amongst (many) others, the colloquialisms of Shakespeare's Mistress Quickly as those of a "Cockney char woman" and in Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1613), finds George the grocer and Nell his wife, "Cockney treasures". Yet upon inspection, these appear no more than Elizabethan conventions of guileless, 'lower' language. Matthews again hopefully cites the example of the dramatist Samuel Foote, "one of the first writers to formalise the Cockney" (1938: 4-5) whose *Taste* (1752) relies on the humorous mistakes of the alderman Pentweazel and his wife. These "vulgarisms" are again conflated with a later, 'lower-class' cockney.

Early editions of Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* make no linkage at all between cockney and diction, simply citing it as a London 'native' and secondly as an "effeminate, ignorant, low, mean, despicable citizen (Stedman Jones, 1989: 281). Johnson's subsequent etymological suggestion connects the cockney to the notion of *cockagne*, 'a country of dainties' that may additionally related to the Norman word for sugar cake but also refers to the Elizabethan notion of a dear child, or 'cocker'. Thomas Tusser in his *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry* (c.1557) seems to foreshadow this. He has -

Some cockneies with cocking are
made verie fooles,
fit neither for prentise, for plough, nor
for schooles (Tusser, [1557] 1878: 549).

Here, 'to cocker' was to spoil or pamper and all of these definitions seem to suggest that cockney was in this period identified with urbanity and a subject unused to hard rural labor.

Julian Franklyn (1953: 15) follows Matthews in citing John Walker's *Pronouncing Dictionary* (1791) that congratulates the cockney as "models of pronunciation to the distant provinces [who] ought to be the more scrupulously correct." Walker ([1791] 1830: 17) comments at some length however, on what would become a mid-nineteenth century cockney trope; the use of 'v' for 'w' and the dropped 'h'. This seems to be a grammatical mistake across the board: perhaps a fashion or an affectation and not just amongst the urban poor. His real concern with the mistakes of the 'lower orders' however is the mispronunciation of 'curtsey', that "... has its last syllable changed into the *che* or *tshe*, as if written *curt-she*."

The main problem in his view was the -

difference between the metropolis and the provinces is that the people of education in London are free from all the vices of the vulgar; but the best educated people in the provinces, if constantly resident there, are sure to be strongly tintured with the dialect of the country in which they live. Hence it is, that the vulgar pronunciation of London though not half so erroneous as that of Scotland, Ireland or any of the provinces, is, to a person of correct taste, a thousand times more offensive and disgusting (Walker [1791] 1830: 17).

The distinction of 'educated' and 'vulgar' is not necessarily class (this period certainly predates an industrial proletariat) but between the educated and the non-educated, the elites and everyone else. We might say, in echo of Thompson (1991), between the courtier and citizen, the patrician and the plebian - the genteel and the vulgar.

This tension dominated the late eighteenth century mirroring as it did the rise of a new kind of Londoner.

The first reference of cockney with its direct spatiality, Bow Bells, seems to have come from the English lexicographer John Minsheu in 1617 and he repeats a trope that links William Langland's *Piers Ploughman's* small and misshapen eggs ('cocken-ey') to people brought up in cities and ignorant of real life (Stedman Jones, 1989: 281).³³ The retelling of this story, again linking the townsfolk with ignorance, is repeated over and over in subsequent centuries:

That a cittizen's sonne riding with his father... into the country... asked, when he heard a horse neigh, what the horse did, his father answered, the horse doth neigh; riding farther he heard a cock crow and said, doth the cock neigh too? (Elmes, 2005: 52).

Cockney is then an early signifier of the developing tensions between emergent forces of capital in towns and older, feudal forms of power and knowledge in rural areas. Samuel Pegge's counterblast to Dr Johnson's dictionary echoes this analogy centuries later and his criticism is couched in exactly the same terms. Pegge objects to Johnson's alleged ignorance of "antient dialectical words... [and] ... treats them as outlaws who have lost the protection of the Commonwealth" (Stedman Jones, 1989: 281). For Pegge, cockney is a language "in use among the citizens within the sound of Bow-Bells is that of Antiquity and, for the most part, composed of 'Saxonisms' (Stedman Jones, 1989: 282). This is of course, a tenuous link to an older England: a more authentic and symbolic 'cockney' Englishness that allegedly predated the Norman yoke. The comedic also begins to link with the geographic. In Chaucer's *The Reeve's Prologue*, the cockney is a dull fellow. Oswald worries, "I shall be held a daffe, or a cockney". In the second act of *King Lear*, Shakespeare has the Fool exclaim:

³³ Interestingly, inhabitants of both London and York are described in this way by Robert Whittington in his *Vulgaria*, (1520) - "This cokneys and tytyllynges [*delicati pueri*] may abide no sorrow when they come to age. In this great citees as London, York the children be so nycely and wantonly brought up that comonly they can little good." McArthur, Lam-McArthur and Fontaine, 2018: 142.

Cry to it nuncle, as the cockney did to the eels when she put ‘em i’th paste alive; she knapp’d ‘em o’th’coxcombs with a stick and cried, ‘Down wantons down!

Not only is this useful in locating the eel in the historical English diet but it places the cockney as an early figure of modernity, completely uncomfortable in any other environment than the city. A century later, the *New London Magazine* would write that:

There is no popular subject of satire, on which the modern common-places if wit and ridicule have been exhausted with more success than on that of a mere cockney affecting the pleasure of the country.³⁴

The cockney was invariably a figure of humour, “a living paradox, a metropolitan provincial, the stunted offspring of the big city” (Dart, 2012: 5). Rather than a single tongue however, in Pierce Egan’s *Life in London* (1821), the city is a patchwork of local dialects:

A kind of *cant* phraseology is current from one end of the metropolis to the other... In some females of the highest rank, it is as strongly marked as dingy dragged-tail Sall, who is compelled to dispose of a few sprats to turn an honest penny. (Stedman Jones, 1989: 84-85).

This *cant* is located in the geography and attitudes of the character, but this is not identified by Egan as cockney. Egan’s cockney is to be found in his 1839 novel, *Pilgrims of the Thames*, where conspicuously monikered Peter Makemoney, a City alderman, becomes the Lord Mayor of London. Makemoney is “... a thorough cockney... The sound of Bow Bells... was delightful music... he had seen nothing else, but London and he thought that there was no place like London” (Stedman Jones, 1989: 285). Makemoney is a connective between the eighteenth and nineteenth century representation of the identity. He is a born and bred Londoner, who “... despised anything like ostentation; and self-importance he was equally

³⁴ “The Genius.” *New London Magazine, or Gentleman’s Monthly Intelligences*, August 1761: 424.

disgusted with; but his home and fireside were great objects to his mind..." He liked a drink and "was particularly fond of a good song..." (Egan, 1838: 7-8). Makemoney links the earlier idea of the innocent, London-as-the-world (he is gently mocked in an episode on the waters at Chelsea Reach) with an honesty and solid, burgher values. Similarly, Robert Smith Surtees writes in his 'sporting cockney' *Jorrocks* novels of the (more) comic, corpulent cockney squire who has risen through society. *Jorrocks* is not genteel, but he stands in his honesty and plain speaking contrasted with the greedy (and effeminate) aristocracy.

But 'arter all's said and done there are but two sorts o'folks I' the world,
Peerage folks and Post Hoffice Directory folks, Peerage folks, wot think it's
right and proper to do their tailors, and Post Hoffice Directory folks wot think
it's the greatest sin under the sun not to pay twenty shillings i' the pund
(Stedman Jones, 1989: 286).

Cockney could also technically refer to anyone who wasn't aristocratic. He could be the wealthy grocer, Watty Cockney in *Love in the City* (1767) or the out-of-place Cosey in *Town and Country* (1807) but he must have the city in his blood. That city was *old* London; the mediaeval and the historic. The city of a certain pedigree. According to Thomas Barnes (a future editor of *The Times*) in a review of James Kennedy's farce, *Love, Law and Physic* (1813) it is noted that the cockney shopman from Southwark, a character known as Lubin Log, exhibits "the illiterate vulgarity of manner and of idiom which distinguish the native London shopman... for the lash of comic satire" (Dart, 2012: 7). This seems significant in two senses. Firstly, shopkeepers typify for Barnes, "... the real home of the cockney character, the place where its peculiar mixture of pertness and illiteracy, dullness and vivacity, were most fully expressed" (Dart, 2012: 8). Secondly though, it marks the geographic spread of this new type of cockney to the (then) London suburbs such as Islington, Camden Town, Clerkenwell and Southwark. These are areas that become home to a "new lower middle class of dependent clerks, technicians and professionals" (Mayer, 1975: 417), part of the growing service-sector. It is from these areas and this constituency that the first owners and customers of the burgeoning eel and pie shops had begun to emerge by the 1840s. These were now part of an uneasy class and cockney had become code for the vulgarity of modernity uniting city and the new

suburbs. This is the grammatical (and lived) pivot of the central struggle of the nineteenth century, the rise of the bourgeois and its synchronous dance with the working class. At the turn of the nineteenth century, cockney had become a catch-all term for those who lacked property: a barbed metaphor for those without authority.

This barb is the spite and bile unleashed in *The Satirist* in 1813 and again in 1817 in *Blackwood's Magazine* against the so-called Cockney School of Leigh Hunt and his collaborators, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley and William Hazlitt *et al.* The main thrust of *Blackwood's* venom was Hunt's *commonness* and narrow, classed, crucially suburban vision, that "has never seen any mountain higher than Highgate Hill, nor reclined by a stream more pastoral than the Serpentine River (Cox, 2010: 251). The period from 1813 (when Hunt was imprisoned for libelling the Regent) up to the 1840s has been called 'The Cockney Moment'. As Jennifer Cox (2010) suggests, the Cockney School defined its own cultural legitimacy against the elites as part of an emergent bourgeoisie, a unique 'cockney cosmopolitanism'. The audience that Hunt (the son of a clergyman) and Keats (the son of an ostler) and the other 'cockney' poets were addressing was found "among the skilled workers, small shopkeepers, clerks and the better grade of domestic servants that the mass audience for printed material was recruited during the first half of the nineteenth century" (Altick 1957: 83).

Literature was but one part of a culture of self-definition that was, in some sense, solidified in 1832. The limited Reform Bill allowed the propertied middle class to define itself *against* the aristocracy and *from* the lower-middle class and the poor. According to this definition, cockney was a demarcation between cultural and political legitimacies and, not for the first time was a cipher for power: for those who had it and those who did not.

Now, cockney was in cultural terms, "the misshapen 'foster-child' of Romanticism and Social Realism" (Dart, 2012: 26). In political terms, it outlined the downward trajectory of a class, ascendent during the Regency but largely unaccommodated afterwards.

2.2 Dickens and descent of the cockney

The 1830s was a period of great influx into London. Dickens' sharp eye as *Boz*, collated the changing city through the prism of his own difficult formative years. Forced to work in Gray's Inn as a solicitor's clerk at fifteen he was, essentially, a north London cockney.

In his sketches Dickens outlined a new interstitial class of grocers, journalists, shop assistants and (eventually) eel and pie shop owners. This grouping, made precarious by the 1832 Reform Act, was unable to gain acceptance as true bourgeoisie yet desperate not to fall into the abyss below. As petty bourgeoisie they were as Engels remarked, "great in boasting... [yet] very shy in risking anything" (Marx and Engels, [1851] 1912: 232). This political impotence meant that for the bourgeois proper, the cockney class was no longer suspected of radical intent and "... even by the late 1830s in England, the clerkly and shopkeeping classes were no longer the object of quite the same suspicion as in the 'Cockney School' period" (Dart, 2012: 26).

It was also Dickens who seems to have encapsulated the class slippage of the cockney into more familiar registers by his portrayal of Sam Weller in *The Pickwick Papers*. He does this by transposing his London voice, rather archaic even by this time, with that of the lower-classes. As Benjamin Smart recalls in *Walker's Pronouncing Dictionary* (1846):

The diffusion of literature among even the lowest classes of the metropolis, renders it almost unnecessary to speak now of such extreme vulgarisms as the substitution of v for w, or w for v. Few persons under the age of forty years of age with such a predilection for literary nicety as will lead them to these pages can be in much danger of saying that they like 'weal and winegar wery well'... [this speech pattern belongs to a] ... more distant generation of cocknies...[and that] ... the cockney speaker has to learn at least consistency in his pronunciation (Stedman Jones, 1988: 287).

Certainly, Mayhew (1857: 5) writing of the 1840s in his *London Labour and the London Poor* makes a similar comment that "The characteristic dialect of Bow-Bells

has almost become obsolete: and alderman now-a-days, rarely transpose the vs and ws.”

Indeed, Mayhew (1857: 5) lists several other London dialects such as The London exquisite, The affected Metropolitan Miss, The fast young gentleman, The Cadger's Cant and the coster's backslang. A version of one of these would form the basis of what would be known as cockney rhyming slang but that connective between the coster community and the working class (labouring cockney) would be some decades away.

Dickens' motives for Weller's class demotion are unclear and it was an odd reversal: although Dickens only described the character as a “specimen of London Life”, the true cockney in the book should have been Pickwick himself, the epitome of the long-established vein of 'sporting cockney'. Yet Weller is by speech and manner a reassuring character. He has a rough, urban wisdom that is almost an ironic echo of the rural knowledge that the earliest cockney stood against, and his diction is a contrast to the staccato delivery of Jingle, the cockney confidence trickster. Weller, like his wider cockney compatriots has ambitions to be a gentleman but by the end is again Pickwick's loyal servant. This may be Dickens' way of putting working class ambition in its place, but it may also be seen as a gentle (if slightly patronising) humanising of the labouring classes: a repeat of his earlier attempts in his *London Recreations* (1833-1836). Tellingly, in 1850 Dickens remarked that (it is) “The wish of persons in the humbler classes of life, to ape the manners and customs of those who fortune has placed above them... is often the subject of... complaint. [Yet] some of the some of the finery of these people provokes a smile but they are all clean and happy, and disposed to be good natured and sociable” (Dickens, 1850: 55-57).

Although Turner (2020: 115) suggests his use of speech may have been deployed to “satisfy public expectations” and adhere to theatrical convention, it may also be a signal that the lower orders are no longer willing - or capable - of rising as a threat to the social order. Whatever Dickens intended for the cockney, the term now became a weapon of satire in the culture war by the dress and affectation of the aspirant class embodied in the youthful shop assistant or clerk. That these (men, predominantly) are typical of the new consumer dynamic that sees food (such as the

emergent eel and pie shops) and dress as modernity and progress is no coincidence.³⁵ Clearly, the journey of the cockney is about who controls the word and its fluid connotation.

The mid-century sees two major changes in the representation of the cockney. The first was the 1867 extension of the franchise and the second was the growth of consumerism especially amongst the lower middle classes. This was concomitant with the birth of the character of the 'sham-genteel swell'. Although the 'dandy swell' as a London figure had existed for some time in various incarnations, it is now linked to a performative life-style that crossed classes.³⁶ Cockney dandyism was an escapist pantomime celebrating the aping of the appearance of the elites. Revolutions in the fashion industry meant that decent but cheap imitations of the elites' clothes were, for the first time "generally available... to the better class of plebian worker" (Dart, 2012: 206). Although clerks and apprentices were restricted in what they could wear at work, they were free to dress as dandies in the evenings. This performative, simulacrum 'look' has transmitted itself down to contemporary working class (especially youth) culture - the Teddy Boys' adoption of Edwardian fashion being an obvious example. The appropriation of the elites' style and the ensuing cultural faux-pas (and fear) contingent upon that continues to be a subject of satire. The 'Del-Boy' character created by John Sullivan in the BBC comedy, *Only Fools and Horses* for example, combines the cockney ('flashy') adaptation of 1980s formal wear with the linguistic contortions reminiscent of Dickens' 'Wellerisms'.

Presciently, and somewhat ironically given the bourgeois appetite for social emulation of the aristocracy, William Hazlitt (1821: 41) would, in the early part of the nineteenth century warn on the dangers of "... being taken for what one is not."

³⁵ It may be instructive to look at Dicken's *Shabby Genteel People* - another Sketch by Boz - that reflects on the clothing of the less cheerful and not-so-young characters of the lower middle class, struggling in their patched and threadbare clothes. They wait to rise from their predicament but never do so whilst the young believe they will but find fulfilment in fashion and style.

³⁶ Piece Egan would write for example about the earlier dandy cockney fraudster, Samuel Hayward who affected the life of a man of leisure. See - Egan, 1822. We might see the Regency dandy, George Bryan "Beau" Brummell (1778-1840) here as an archetype of modernity and performativity in this sense against the backdrop of consumerism although his elite status meant that his style was as a leader rather than a follower.

Hackney-born Renton Nicholson's *Cockney Adventures and Tales of London Life* (1838) gives us a city full of aspirant cockney young men, their consorts and their often humorous adventures in dialect. A weekly penny-dreadful concurrent with Dickens' *Sketches by Boz*, Nicholson would describe the characters of the London street of the 1830s in an anticipation of Benjamin's (1999) bourgeois *flâneur* that would chronicle Paris' characters and *physiologies* in his *panoramic literature*.

2.3 The Music Hall as distorting mirror

The embryonic music hall, so crucial for the development of cockney identity, reflected back and refined these styles of the street. It became the mecca of the salaried youth of the new working population, the single young men ('counter-jumpers'), and performers like Alfred Vance (1839-1888) better known as 'The Great Vance' who embodied this symbiotic trend on stage as 'swells' or *Lion Comique*. These characters were parodies of the upper classes, generally dressed in evening wear, and sang songs that were "hymns of praise to the virtues of idleness, womanising and drinking" (Dagmar, 1996: 175).

The fear of the masses entering the polity via the music halls was expressed by *Tinsley's Magazine* in 1869:

We do not hesitate to lay upon the music-halls the parentage of that sham-gentility which has become so abnormally prominent among the striplings of the uneducated classes during the past few years. Nowadays, your attorney's clerk - apparently struck by some 'levelling up' theory of democracy - is dissatisfied unless he can dress as well as the son of a duke" (Stedman Jones, 1988: 290).

The 'swell' is just one of a range of characters that music hall performers could call upon. Others were Irish, blackface, the rustic - and the cockney. They are all by this time however played by professional middle class performers in what Derek B. Scott (2002: 243) calls 'the imagined real', "where the identity of the performance remains separate from that of the character portrayed." The period coincided with a simultaneous duality within liberalism itself that both articulated a

fear of this 'levelling up' and expressed guilt surrounding the extreme poverty that laissez-faire had undoubtedly unleashed. The sympathetic ventriloquising of the poor onstage by bourgeois performers may have partially reflected the cultural ascendancy of a Gladstonian moral tone, or as Himmelfarb (1968: 300) succinctly has it, "a Victorian angst". Increasingly, the cockney is simultaneously both satirised and represented in a more benevolent way in songs like "The Ratcatcher's Daughter" that take a romantic view of poverty (Koppen, 2014).

Discussion of the exact type of precursor to the music hall goes beyond the scope of this study, but my argument is that this largely undocumented culture is simultaneous with the working class culture that would meld into the eel and pie shops. Just as the early shops in the 1840s would adopt the appearances of the gin palaces, publicans in the 1820s and 1830s, "... successfully invested in gaslight and gilding" and looked for other ways to expand their business (Lee, 2019: 32). Public houses formalised so-called 'harmonic evenings' or 'free-and-easys' that would typically be held in rooms above the saloon. It seems that in addition, working class youth had their own clubs, and these were, allegedly, "[places where] boys and girls meet... and get drunk and debauch one another" (Lee, 2019: 36). It seems that a "Georgian permissiveness lingered well into the early Victorian period" (Lee, 2019: 36). What is equally clear is that there was a vibrant and authentic working class entertainment culture, that ran parallel to the bourgeois entertainment halls but waned (Speight, 1977). This decline was two-fold. It was achieved by moral panic in the press and by legislation. It seems likely that the intervention of Sir George Grey, the home secretary, in 1849 was decisive and his interest in opposing unlicensed music and dancing venues may well have had a great deal to do with the fear of Chartism and local unrest. Unlicensed and temporary makeshift theatres, the so-called 'Penny-Gaffs', continued for some time however, perhaps until the later part of the nineteenth century. According to *The Morning Post* (Lee, 2019: 51) their audience was young and very poor:

Farces and pantomime, were mixed with stories of highwaymen and murder, drawn from penny dreadful serials (e.g., *The Mysteries of Paris*) or along similar bloodthirsty lines (e.g., *The Blue Apron and the Cleaver*, or *The Sanguinary Butcher of Cripplegate*).

A newspaper article on a gaff in Poplar gives a good account of the audiences of these early taxons of the more 'respectable' halls. The audience we are told consisted of "Ragged boys, each one with his pipe, potatoe [sic] and (we must add) his prostitute" (Sheridan, 1981: 54). Mayhew ([1851] 208: 49, 50) specifically links them with the costers and their "dancing tunes" and is suitably outraged by what he sees. The disappearance of these theatres was simultaneous with the advancement of mass consumption, the 'control of the streets', the moralising of working class culture and its commodification by the forces of capital and modernity.

In a wider cultural sense, this development crucially enabled the creation of a transgressive low *other*, a synchronal notion of the working classes as different, monstrous yet tantalizing and vitally erotic (Walkowitz, 2012). Simultaneously this defined a cultural cartography that delineated zone of exclusion known as the *Abyss* - the East End itself.

This complicated, vampiric cultural ingestion and regulation of the increasingly prohibited carnivalesque in everyday life was fundamental because it "symbolically heightened the eroticised version of fantasy life" and therefore facilitated the "inner dynamic of the boundary constructions necessary to collective identity" for a nation-building project" (Stallybrass and White: 2008: 20). It would also have an ironic resonance in later notions of working class respectability, structural to the identity of cockney and the eel and pie shops.

This process also helped solidify a new cockney identity formed in the pages of *Punch*. The cockney character of 'Arry was created by E.J. Milliken in sketches that lasted from 1877 to the 1890s. He was a fusion of several earlier cockney stereotypes, notably in his aversion to the countryside, his diction, his caddish behaviour and his vulgarity. He was a 'swell', spending his salary on garish clothes, holidays and cheap cigars.

Politically, he was a product of the Disreali's 'Leap in the Dark', the limited franchise expansion of the 1867 Reform Act. 'Arry was a working class Tory ("the

petticoats want keeping down, like niggers and radicals” - Stedman Jones, 1988: 291) and a fervent Jingoist - the term referencing a bullying, expansionist nationalism around the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78.³⁷ The character was celebrated in the popular song of in 1881 that bears his name. Sung by one of the greatest stars of the day, Jenny Hill, the song is a defence not of ‘Arry’s character *per se* but more tellingly of what he represents:

The ‘Upper ten’ may jeer and say
What ‘cads’ the ‘Arries are,
But the ‘Arries *work, and pay their way* [my italics]
While doing the la-di-da (Stedman Jones, 1988: 291).

‘Arry prefigures by a century the latest incarnation of the cockney, the Thatcherite East End ‘barrow boy’ who, in a similar vein, is both comic and threatening; a grotesque that will make the eel and pie shop a central totem of their identity based on a palimpsest of previous (and invented) cockney characterisations.

2.4 The coster confusion

Mayhew’s cockney was rooted simply in an older “dialect of Bow-Bells”. For him, the costermongers were members of the dangerous classes, and their argot was that of “London thieves” (Mayhew, 1857: 5-6). They were “nearly all Chartists”, a synonym for the mob (Mayhew, 1857: 29). His views were angrily disputed at the time by the costers themselves and, although Mayhew is a valuable source of information, his reputation, even at the time was not entirely trusted (Himmelfarb, 1984: 15).³⁸ In light of this, recent scholarship around the coster community and indeed around the notion of casual labour is worth examination.

The demonisation of the street in this period, was part of a complex cultural shift. The costers, part of an older tradition of an informal economy stood, like all of the

³⁷ The term came from the lyrics of a song by George William Hunt, made popular by the performer G.H. MacDermott. “We don’t want to fight but by Jingo if we do/We’ve got the ships, we’ve got the men, we’ve got the money too...”

³⁸ For a contemporary account of a demonstration by costers against Mayhew’s ‘defamatory’ writings, see *Reynold’s Magazine*, 18 May 1851.

street-sellers, stubbornly in the way of this (Jankiewicz, 2012: 403). Rather than the retrospective label of simple ‘penny-capitalists’ (Benson, 1983) who allegedly pursued a “middle class occupation at the working class level of life”, theirs was more likely a “dwindling subsistence economy trapped within the expanding capitalist system” (Richards in Jankiewicz, 2012: 394). As such, their very presence, let alone their unregulated economic activity, was subversive. To the respectable, they represented a confrontation between the stability of the new bourgeois capitalist order and an older, more human set of interactions between members of all classes that were potential customers. Jankiewicz (2012) makes an excellent point when he says that by their very nature the performative role of costers was crucial. In a society where a person could disappear and reinvent themselves (often by necessity) one could transform one’s identity by changing the products that one sold. Although some coster businesses were clearly hereditary, this identity fluidity mirrored the street spaces that the costers occupied (Stedman Jones, 2014: 61-62). To be heard, it was necessary to stand out and perform, and this clearly prefigures their co-opted role in music hall. The open undermining of authority meant that the costers were seen as enemies of order and new laws. Indeed, *The Morning Post* in 1848, reporting on mass demonstrations in Trafalgar Square claims that the crowds were “chiefly composed of the costermonger class.”³⁹ This radical edge to the politics of the streets seems to have been somewhat forgotten by later historians. Work by Mark Brodie questions many of the later conservative assumptions about the coster’s political allegiances. It appears that in many cases they “quite consciously identified themselves and their causes with the working class... that was clearly recognised by politicians of the period, but ... has been largely ignored since” (Brodie, 2001: 149). Some of Stedman Jones’ work on casual labour in this regard is based on earlier studies by Pelling (1967) whose basis for resolving that the costers were an overwhelmingly conservative force is evidenced from just one specific area of east London. Yet “[W]hen first established in 1894, the Whitechapel costers deliberately chose to call themselves a labour union” and certainly, many coster unions “... like the Whitechapel and City unions, seem to have been generally to the left (Brodie, 2001: 149,152).”⁴⁰

³⁹ *The Morning Post*, 8 March 1848.

⁴⁰ It seems likely that the confusion about certain local political alliances was based on, for example, union membership figures from where costermongers *lived* rather than where they *traded*.

In this way, the costers, at this stage, rather than fitting the narrative of the unitary nature of John Bright's *residuum*, demonstrate a more nuanced existence (Koven, 2006).⁴¹ Indeed, Jennifer Davis' work that centres around the construction of a mid-Victorian underclass makes the point that the so-called 'casual poor' exhibited attitudes and behaved in ways "characteristic ...of the nineteenth century working class in general" (Davis, 1989: 20). More, perception and reality of the residuum,

continuously interacted to shape each other in a number of crucial ways. Thus, the behaviour of the casual poor, conditioned by their economic circumstances, often appeared to substantiate the popular image of them as inherently violent and lawbreaking.

This refinement is crucial and again, whilst beyond the scope of this study, challenges the axiomatic association of cultural divisions of the London working class. It postulates a convincing, more nuanced position that the 'casual poor' was an ideological 'turn' manufactured in the 1870s and 1880s as a successor to earlier notions of the criminal 'other'. In this sense, the residuum "was as much a consequence of its identification as it was a necessary precondition for it" (Davis, 1989: 13).

The implications for the identity of the cockney and especially of the eel and pie shops is that it signals a necessary duality: the very definition of a 'respectable' working class *depends* on the criminal, feckless other. These tropes are still, in so many senses, current in the contemporary cockney identity, evidenced in the eel and pie shops, mixed as they are with notions of cleanliness, hard work and respectability.

⁴¹ Bright, a Liberal MP was the first to use the term in reference to an 'irredeemable' Victorian 'underclass' in a debate against further enfranchisement. See - Alexander, 2013: 99.

2.5 The character refined

If street markets, costers and the residuum threatened to interrupt commercial progress mid-century, they provided contemporary writers and journalists, “good copy about the pulsating organism of living London” (Walkowitz, 2012: 144). The hardships of the costers and the closures of their ‘convenient’ local markets for the middle classes that they inevitably served, were clearly linked. It is in this period, largely perhaps due to the everyday utility to a large part of a cross-class audience in the theatres, that the costermonger makes his appearance as a music hall character. He is simultaneously a figure of sympathy and a crook.

Alfred Vance, who we have already seen typifying the ‘swell’ character, was also one of the first of the music hall performers to utilise this ‘respectable’ coster identity with such songs as *The Chickaleary Cove* and *Costermonger Joe*. In a unique character reversal of his dandy (of either the upper or lower-class variety), Vance transforms from the well-dressed cad to become one of “the brutal denizen of Whitechapel...” (Roberts in Stedman Jones, 1989: 295). Vance and a host of other Victorian performers adopted a stage identity of low-life (semi-) realism that exhibited an almost prurient fascination with poverty, moral choice and casual male violence.⁴² This was a performative flirtation between the character of the ‘respectable’ working class and the dangerous criminal, predicated on the middle classes’ increasing acknowledgement that there actually was such a thing as a working class culture.

It was the appearance of the actor Albert Chevalier in 1891 however that cemented him as “...the Kipling of the music-hall”, the cockney as coster and the cockney as a “new archetype in the early 1890s” (Chevalier in Stedman Jones, 1989: 272). Chevalier was an unlikely star for the masses. A veteran of more sedate middle class supper and recital clubs like *The Savage* and *The Green Room*, his debut was the result of a marriage between his artifice, his astute manager, Newson Smith and the founding of new West End Theatre syndicates.⁴³

⁴² See - Anstey, 1888: 36 - “Bein niver too tight of a Saturday night but what I kin wallop the wife...”.

⁴³ The Music Hall landscape that Chevalier conquered was in part the result of the liberalisation of the theatre sector by the Theatres Act of 1843 (amending the regime of The Licensing Act of 1737)

These posited a new financial model that moved away from the sale of alcohol into creating 'star' performers to carry audience numbers. In many ways, this professionalisation of the theatre mirrored the working class restaurants like the eel and pie shops: no longer an artisanal trade but a bourgeois inspired business enterprise. It should be noted however that Chevalier was preceded and outlived by a real cockney performer, Ernest Augustus ('Gus') Elen (1862-1940) who had a "voice of extreme authority, disillusionment and sardonic irony" (MacInnes, 1967: 51).

In terms of identity, Chevalier makes the cockney self-reflective and a figure of great sympathy. This is especially true in the rendition of his famous "My Old Dutch". The song is a lament featuring an elderly coster and his wife who, after forty years of marriage, are separated before the workhouse gates. Not only is this sentimentality a trope that will endure within the cockney identity, but also Chevalier's dialect turns from the comic Dickensian confusions into what might be recognised as a modern cockney cadence. Interestingly, in an interview with *The Graphic* in 1892, Chevalier makes no pretence of his artifice and admits that,

It's a great mistake to suppose that there is any one cockney dialect. There are half a dozen. The 'coster song', as people will call the things I sing, is a kind of embodiment of several; and it isn't necessarily cockney at all" (Stedman Jones, 1998: 299).

There can be no clearer indication that this formative portrayal of the cockney which in its major form still survives, is a fiction: a concoction of the music hall and a saccharine impersonation of the authentic voice of the street ventriloquised by a bourgeois performer across culture and media.

which had allowed for plays to be performed only in the so-called 'patent theatres' - The Theatre Royal Drury Lane and The Theatre Royal Covent Garden.

2.6 The character reflected back

The new, more acceptable representation of the cockney now became standardised. Marie Lloyd (1870-1922) similarly adopted a cockney identity, and she appears as a “respectable crossing-point in the journey of cockney from low to middle-brow culture” (Matthews, 1938: 99). Her, “A little bit of what you fancy does you good” and “The Coster girl in Paris” are evidence of “the music hall’s feeding upon itself rather than by drawing ideas from, or representing, the world outside... a representational code is learnt, reproduced and bingo, you have a cockney” (Scott, 2002: 256). These ‘cockney’ songs, as Matthews (1938: 98) has it, are now “nostalgic for a golden age that preceded modernity...” and can be a cross-class cipher for pretty much any and all representations that can be hung onto them. What was hung onto them, and onto the cockney identity of course, was nationalism.

It is in this late Victorian period, not completely and not necessarily before that it’s possible to categorise the London working classes as turning towards conservatism (Davis, 1989: 103-128). It is in this era that the cockney was conscripted into the nation. No longer part of a ‘wandering tribe’ or a member of the residuum to be feared, cleared or damned for their own moral failings, the cockney was now an imaginary, and cheerfully colourful character that encapsulated very British virtues. From Elgar’s *Cockaigne Overture* to Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, the poor had to be reimagined and repackaged as upholders of the status quo. More succinctly, they were accepted into the body politic because their difference was held in check within a framework of national unity. It is not coincidental that this shift happens against a backdrop of mass Jewish immigration, a rise in trades union activity and a significant dockers strike in 1889.

Indeed, “... from the 1880s, no aspect of Britain’s privileged position was secure. The history of the British state in this period illustrates the profound difficulties of accommodating the changing economic, industrial and political conditions” (Mica and O’Shea, 1996: 27). The riots in London on the 8th of February 1885 that coincided with the severe winter and mass unemployment were seen as more alarming than the threat of 1848 and increasingly the predominant reaction to the

rediscovery of poverty in this period “was not so much guilt as fear” (Stedman Jones, 2014: 290). A riot involving 20,000 unemployed building and dock workers ensued after a demonstration organised by the Social Democratic Federation in Trafalgar Square in November 1887. This in turn was followed some days later by ‘Bloody Sunday’, again in Trafalgar Square, when the police violently assaulted a crowd protesting coercion in Ireland. Certainly, for many within the bourgeoisie, these confrontations must have seemed like the thin blue line of order holding back the barbarians of the East (End) at the gate. Engels (1968: 370-371) was convinced that this ‘New Unionism’ was a political turning-point and William Fishman (1988) has suggested that for many in bourgeois London, these events signalled the start of the coming revolution.

Violent mass repression against the much-swelled residuum was never a realistic possibility. Rather, hegemony had to be “actively constructed and positively maintained” (Hall, 1996, 424). The response to this crisis was the formation of a culture of a ‘suffocating nationalism’ (Anderson, 1992: 24) that continues and is ‘useful’ to this day, visible within the larger identity of the London working class. As Cecil Rhodes had presciently noted, “If you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialists” (Porter, 1975: 125).

At the start of the nineteenth century, notions of an ancient constitution, nationalism and patriotic allegiance were identified with radicalism. This vocabulary was inherited by Chartism but by the 1840s “... the language of patriotism begins to pass out of the mainstream of English radical movements” (Cunningham, 1981: 18). Disreali’s Conservatives began to harness the power of patriotic feeling to both assure the bourgeoisie of Tory intent and to win working class votes.

Although (again) beyond the scope of this study, I argue that Hall’s (1973) work on the dissemination of hegemonic messages via television is analogous to the music hall’s construction of cockney in the struggle for the continued cultural domination of the late nineteenth century’s ruling elites. The music halls’ role in the racism inculcated in the working class audience is well documented (Hobson, 1901) although the work of Andrew Crowhurst (1997) offers a rare challenge, contending that the halls merely celebrated the emergent consumer culture. Hall’s argument is

that within the *discursive* form itself - in this case the *language* of song - (Hall's 'sign vehicle') the 'product' (in this case cockney identity) is circulated. It requires both a 'means' (performance) and its own set of production relations within a media apparatus (the music hall as a newly productive, professionalised arena). It is the 'encoding' and 'decoding' of the hegemonic message that are the *determinate* 'moments' in its (successful or unsuccessful) reception - and crucially - *reproduction*, from source to receiver. It was essential for the decoded identity to *appear* unconstructed: hence cockney was *required* to be palimpsestic, referencing numerous historical notions of origin (mediaeval artisans, street sellers etc) as for example, Matthews (1938) and Franklyn (1953) were only too keen to do. The notion of identity is, according to Hall, subject to the "continuous play of history... culture and power (Hall, 1990: 225) and I argue that it is the role of *memory* to naturalise and habitualise these codes, further concealing their origins. The eel-pie shops become in that sense, both in their linguistic connotations and what they signify visually for Hall, ideological *codes* or shorthand for the cockney identity.

It is this thesis' contention that the music hall was an effective hegemonic device (in tandem with popular fiction in late Victoriana) that centred the bourgeois capitalist class as the shining example of national and racial ideals that by economic and democratic necessity would have to become 'ordinary' and in turn, form a 'popular' imperialism. In that sense, it fits well into both Anderson and Hobsbawm and Ranger's (2012) paradigm that claimed lived 'custom' morphed, under modernity's pressure, into an inauthentic and invented 'tradition'. As Walter Bagehot (1867: 59) had suggested, the masses "defer to what we may call the *theatrical* show of society."

Significantly, as Alistair Bonnett (1998) points out, the inculcation of this popular imperialism was vital to the transition from the liberal, to the more advanced, socially consensual form of welfare capitalism that would emerge in the next decades. That said, it is likely that this patriotic fervour had at least some prior fertile ground amongst the lower-classes in which to take root. Fear of invasion during the French Wars had, as Perkin asserted, meant that "patriotism reinforced paternalism to hold overt class conflict in check" (Perkin, 1969 in Cunnigham, 1981: 21: 208). Further, there was always a "popular John Bullish Toryism" that foregrounded roast beef,

beer and hearty pleasure which found home in the ‘sporting cockney’ (Joyce in Cunningham, 1981: 21). This would be the English ‘ordinary culture’ that Raymond Williams would later transpose as the inheritance of the industrial proletariat.

The result would be a largely compliant, pacified and patriotic urban working class. In London, a loveable, sentimental coster plastered on top of the underlying vulgar of ‘Arry who loved his Queen and country, was “and-in-glove with the nobs” but who knew better than to challenge his position because of the “few bob in his pocket”.⁴⁴ A Frankenstein cockney; the latest in a line of palimpsestic identities.⁴⁵

It enabled the London (now white) working classes “...to start drawing on a form of social symbolism from which they had been once marginalised...” (Bonnett, 1998: 318). Crucially, going forward, the roots of this identification would be forgotten but would form the defence of the eventual Welfare State to which mass non-white immigration would be seen as antithetical to working class political and social ‘gains’.

2.7 The Pearlies

More than any other, it is the ‘pearly’ king and queen families, adjacent to the cockney and central to the cultural architecture of the contemporary eel and pie shop, that are the loci for, and a direct performative receptor of, the music hall tradition.

The pearlies, and their employment by music hall as faux-costermongers provide a folkloric link to, and a direct aping of, royalty and social stratifications. Overall, they provide the final clue as to why the Chevalier version of cockney would displace both the character of ‘Arry, the swell, the cockney-as-criminal and the wider fears of the residuum in popular culture and win cross-class approval.

⁴⁴ *Punch*, 11 May 1878: 205.

⁴⁵ A notion that references the biological and social imperatives of ‘Degeneration’ theory that would influence the second half of the nineteenth century and to some extent perhaps the first half of the twentieth.

As Samuel and Stedman Jones (1989: 64) have shown, the appearance of Henry Croft, the first pearly king, was as a fundraising performer. Croft was not a coster but a road-sweeper who in 1880 (or 1886 - records vary) sewed pearl buttons to his clothes as a charity exercise for the Temperance Hospital on the Hampstead Road. Croft's centrality to this narrative however has been disputed as Charles Coburn (1928: 107), another music hall performer claimed that the pearlies were actually invented by the singer, Hiram Travers who had a costume covered with *brass* buttons.

Although Croft may have simply been copying the music hall 'cockney swell', he might also, simultaneously, be seen as the inheritor of several historic London traditions. Samuel and Stedman Jones link the pearlies to the figure of the Jack-in-the Green associated with much earlier pagan May Day rituals although this is disputed by Judge (2000) who concludes that it seems likely that the tradition was associated with milkmaids (later with chimney sweeps) and was first recorded in the middle of the seventeenth century. Pearl Binder (1975: 19) links them, rather hopefully, to a 'Lord of Misrule' character, the instigator of annual, permitted disorder but this is based on an inaccurate conflation with the coster community.

It is however as showmen that the pearlies symbolise a complicated working class insertion between authority and the poor: one that reinforces the 'imagined tradition' (Anderson, 2006) of the Chevalier cockney. Generally seen as a conservative force evidencing overt patriotism and defence of royalty, the pearlies were, counter-intuitively, instrumental in providing essential funds to pre-state based, hospital, charity and church organisations via their friendly societies.⁴⁶ The pearlies inherited, and then superseded, a nascent system of provident clubs, some of which were temperance based and some, like the Jolliboys, which met in pubs.⁴⁷

Their activities mark a move away from simple charity to alleviate particular categories of poverty to a more universal welfarism providing a class-based

⁴⁶ "... timorous, bien-pensant insurance clubs and wavering support for the Liberal Party." See - Anderson, 1964: 36.

⁴⁷ Binder asserts that the membership of these clubs were the link to the early pearly kings. See - Binder, 1975: 77.

alternative to direct patronage that linked bourgeois guilt to the failure of laissez-faire. Geoffrey Rivett (1986) in his *The Development of the London Hospital System 1823-1982*, relates that dissatisfaction with the hospital system had been growing since the 1850s and that charitable funds were a confusing and inefficient form of administration set against the idea of modernity. Nevertheless, the intervention by fundraising of a section of the London working class caused some consternation among the well-to-do middle class that managed the schemes. Indeed, "Working men... expected a *quid pro quo* as of right, and to have a say in management. They did not see their contributions as an act of charity but as a form of insurance" (Rivett, 1986). This interjection into the political process was concomitant with, but not intrinsically linked to, trades unionism. Publicly however the pearlys never deviated from an avowedly non-political stance, and this may account for their largely enthusiastic reception from the elites: pearlys were honoured by Princess Marie Louise in 1927 and were officially represented at the 1953 Coronation.

Pearlys in some form prefigured the arguments upon which the National Health Service would be based but its institution meant that they lost as a body much of their initial *raison d'être*. Their collections were often carnivalesque affairs that echoed such mediaeval gatherings as the Bartholomew Fair which transgressed rules and subverted authority (Bailey, 1988). So unruly did these 'carnivals' become that the pearly fund-raising hospital processions were finally banned by the police in 1928. Yet the pearlys, analogous to the eel and pie shops (that they continue to promote), remain as independent working class entities and emblems of class solidarity and pride.

The pearlys were however unequivocally not costers but rather in some senses their social inferiors. This was a sub-class of the poor but not the casual poor, that aspired to the perceived independence of the coster with his cart and merchandise, but who were in no position to attain the capital required to purchase them. Despite Chevalier's lyric in his, "The Coster's Serenade":

Mine is the noblest turn-out in the crowd
Me in my 'pearlies' felt a toff that day
Down at the Welsh 'arp, which is down 'Endon way

C. Duncan Lewis offered, “we laugh at the ‘pearliers’... the true London coster would never dream of sporting such buttons” (Stedman Jones, 1989: 386) The idea of a late nineteenth century cockney stereotype was however useful for the pearlies as an adopted identity that both raised and distinguished them from the ranks of the residuum.

As the likely representatives of the working classes that the intrepid bourgeois reporter would usually find on their safaris, the numerous pearly communities were likely partly responsible for the (mis)representation of the pearly/coster conflation (Samuel and Stedman Jones, 1989). As a result of this, the pearly community willingly adopted an identity that was a stereotype based on a fictive notion of a ‘respectable’ poor, fit for an imperial era.

2.8 Modernity, ordinariness and the first decline of the cockney

By the 1890s a generation of novelists sought to challenge the alternate comedic or violent depictions of the cockney in popular cultural texts. The so-called Cockney Novelists, Arthur Morrison, Henry Nevinson, Edwin Pugh, William Pett Ridge and Clarence Rook *et al* relied on first-hand research and activism to portray a more accurate personal and group identity.

These works, whilst not entirely free of some of the patronising cliches of the poor as ‘threat’ or ‘other’ in mid-century writing, do intimate some sense of the living interiority in London’s working classes centring notions of community and belonging whilst not flinching from depictions of brutality or crime.

The authors largely however failed to give any sense of wider class structures that surrounded their characters who have largely accepted their place within the political landscape, “rendered harmless by the new beneficent state machinery, controlled by the upper classes” (Keating, 1979: 221). This cockney is differently ventriloquised but equally stereotypical. He is now a patronised figure with a ‘heart of gold’ and a ferociously loyalty to his superiors despite the poverty that surrounds him. This is perfectly illustrated by Pugh’s short story, *Bettles: A Cockney Ishmael* (1898) where an East End drunkard redeems himself (dying in the process) through his courage

during the imperial campaign in the Sudan. Pre-empted by Rudyard Kipling's *Soldiers Three* (1888) this cockney is the perfect 'pet' for the elites during the First World War who celebrated his subaltern humour, bravery and stoicism.⁴⁸

The duality between this acquiescence and residual working class defiance is more usefully imaged in some of the depictions of the cockney in the elite's art of the period. William Rothenstein's *Coster Girls* (1894) references Hogarth but the subject's hands-on-hips stance shows a wholly defiant, independent young woman.

C.R.W. Nevinson, the scion of radical bourgeois parents led a group whilst at The Slade before the Great War that called themselves *The Coster Gang*. These adopted the dress and boisterousness of the cockneys (Fox, 1987: 152), seeking out mock, and sometimes real fights with the police, progressive students and even authentic costers. This imitation of the subversiveness and violence that lurked under the surface of working class life may, according to Lisa Tickner (1992 in Black 2003: 23), reflect the 'crisis of masculinity' in avant-garde circles of the period highlighting the tension between modernity and the dulling conformity of consumer capitalism. In 1914, Eric Kennington, later an official artist in both world wars, painted the stark, brutal and overwhelmingly modern, *The Coster Mongers* (fig. 3 in appendix). The painting, whose main focus is the confrontational glare of a muscular, red-waistcoated street seller seems additionally to conceal a longing from the painter. In both instances the cockney coster had become an image on which to hang a bourgeois neuroses; a ventriloquised and caricatured symbol of 'real' life.

By the 1920s, after the slaughter of the trenches, the ubiquity of the cockney identity as formulated by Chevalier and the Cockney Novelists had waned. Caught between the dialectic of imperial decline and the first, heroic phase of modernism, cockney henceforth would be only periodically and sporadically useful to its hegemonic creators as a motif and a warning siren that a certain *type* of Englishness was under threat.

⁴⁸ For these wartime recollections see - Hamilton, 1920.

By now, the East End had been captured by Labour. Although this in itself was by no means a systemic challenge (rather the result of campaigning by a timid political organisation rooted in a “defensive solution to the employer’s counter offensive of the 1890s” (Stedman Jones, 1982: 118)), the origin of that success might be partly responsible for the elites’ *re-identification* with a timeless, bucolic, England *profonde*. The transformation of this hegemonic idea of ‘Englishness’ had certainly started much earlier, but the codification of it as a reflection of its bourgeois image - the cloaking of “...its cold mercantile heart in swaths of chiffon sentiment” - was a relocation of it to the Home Counties where it continues to symbolically reside.⁴⁹

In London, the middle classes looked to the Metropolitan Line and its suburban havens; the sterile semis, housing the sons and daughters of clerks, accountants and returning colonial administrators who had imagined from afar an ordered, leafy home in the image of ordered, imperial cities like New Delhi (Wilson, 1982).

For the cockney, this sense of the pastoral had been encapsulated by the rise of the allotment from the late nineteenth century. In many East End boroughs these small plots of waste land enabled the working classes, especially those in casual employment like dockers, to grow their own food and to supplement their diet. The allotments also linked these (mostly) men with their peasant pasts and cultivatable land lost through previous centuries’ enclosures. It conjoined with notions of local community, civic engagement and, kept them out of the pub (Scott, 2010). In some senses it foreshadowed the Essex ‘pioneer’ movement which by the late 1920s saw East Enders built their own, sometimes rather makeshift, holiday homes and cultivate their own land in the county.

It is within this period that the institutions of contemporary England are formed: The Oxford English Dictionary, the national art galleries and the employment of English as an academic subject. The ‘Georgian’ poets; Rupert Brooke, D. H. Lawrence, Walter De La Mare *et al*, all evoked a romantic rurality along with the virtues of a moral responsibility tied to a particular kind of ‘Englishness’. Kipling broken by the death of his son, retreated to Sussex and Ebenezer Howard planned to create the

⁴⁹ Self, Will. *The Guardian*, 6 September, 2014: 19.

synthesis of a rural fantasy in satellite towns. However, the period was one where, everything seemed, “pregnant with its contrary” (Marx, [1856]1969: 500). This reinvention of Englishness coincided with a modernism (albeit as a confusing site of several intersecting discourses) that championed the city.

Although these ‘Modern Times’ were about the ‘experience’ of the new-fashioned and exciting city, they were also about uncertainty. Once, working class identities had been formed singularly within families or within artisanal living arrangements, but they were now assembled in different, more complex multi-dimensional spaces as workers flooded into city’s offices from working class satellites like Barking or Dagenham.

Although references to eel and pie shops are conspicuous by their absence in the editorial content of Edwardian London’s newspapers and magazines (a reflection of the continuing lack of interest and understanding of developing working class culture by the bourgeois press), they are visible in plain sight and seem to develop quietly within unexamined working class communities away from the glare and approbation from the seats of the wealthier patrons of the music hall (and subsequently the cinema).⁵⁰

Although the coster, with his horse-drawn cart was now increasingly an anachronism, this period was ironically a golden age for the eel and pie shops. These decades mark the start of the empires of the triumvirate of the great pie shop families, the Cooke’s, the Manze’s and the Kelly’s. Print advertisements from the period indicate an expansion of eel and pie establishments and the changing nature of their role and fare. The shops were still selling foods like soup that the Victorian street would recognise but by now they were a natural inhabitant of a contemporary working class high street.⁵¹ In one poor area of East London a plethora of modest

⁵⁰ Within all of my research, I can find only one music hall song that directly references the shops - *The Little Eel-Pie Shop* from the 1870s - that was sung by George Laybourne to the tune of Rossini’s *Carneval de Venice*. I understand this absence as indicative of the ubiquity but perceived cultural unimportance of them. See - Newton, 1975: 61.

⁵¹ *London Daily News*, 10 April 1902: 2 - “£25 eel pie and soup house old established, well-known business, near King’s Cross genuine living trade capital fixtures and utensils included.” *Kentish Mercury*, 12 December 1902: 1 - “Under distress for rent. 31 high-street, Deptford. Messrs Newell and Hamlyn will sell by auction at Two O’clock... the fittings and utensils in-trade of an eel pie

eating places are recorded that included no less than three pie shops and one hundred and twenty-three coffee shops.⁵² This would seem to indicate, likely because of housing conditions - necessity rather than choice - “that much working class life still took place outside of the home” (German and Rees, 2012: 157).

After the First World War, real wages fell, and inequality had grown (Cole and Postgate, 1971: 496-498). Music hall reflected the cockney uncertainties of the time with sentimental songs that dealt with evictions (“My Old Man said follow the van”), homelessness (“I live in Trafalgar Square”) and overcrowding (“If it wasn’t for the ‘ouses in between”). This period may also mark the first of a series of epochs of ‘forgettings’ (and subsequent ‘rememberings’) of the cockney identity and its allied culture in the eel and pie shops.

Although the Chevalier cockney of late Victoriana was palimpsestic, it was, in the final analysis, a fiction. Its subsequent haunting of the following century might be interpreted as a way to anchor both a lost authentic working class culture (based on a pre-capitalist form and an invented platform) and a temporal anchorage *against* the ‘time-space’ compression of the new modernist century (Harvey, 1989: 147).

For the youth of the elite, the inter-war years saw a flamboyant reassertion of class difference. The ‘Bright Young Things’, the inheritors of Stein’s ‘lost generation’ caroused with a Modernist *swagger*, whilst the cockney made do with a flickering projection of their refracted lives in the escapist cinema. The East End sustained itself with Bank Holiday excursions and summer camping in Kent fields picking hops.

⁵³ By 1920 there are 89 eel pie premises listed in the Post Office Directory.⁵⁴

and dining room business comprising counter, seats and tables, eel kettle, pie warmer, crockery etc. Auction offices 487 New Cross Road SE.

⁵² *Clarion*, Friday 28 October 1904: 5 - “A report issued by Poplar Borough’s Sanitary Committee inspires a contemporary to remark that there seems no chance of anyone starving in the borough *if he be in possession of a few coppers*. It was stated that there are in the borough the following establishments - Coffee Shops, 123; fried fish shops, 68; eating houses, 23; dining rooms, 35; cook shop, 1; eel-pie shops, 5; restaurants, 109; pie shops, 3; sausage shops, 4; tripe shops, 7. But what of the scores of people who do not possess ‘the few coppers’ wherewith the purchase the succulent sausage and the toothsome eel-pie?”

⁵³ At its height, from the Twenties to the Fifties, about 200,000 East Enders - mostly women and children - made the annual pilgrimage down into the Kentish hop gardens, filling the ‘hopper’s specials’ trains which left from London Bridge station in the early hours of the morning.

⁵⁴ *Post Office London Directory for 1920*, Commercial Directory, *Post Office London Directory for 1920*: 2131.

The cockney was, however, still a figure of occasional journalistic curiosity, principally for editorial 'colour'. Stephen Graham, writing in the *Westminster Gazette* in 1925, visits the East India Dock Road where he recounts a Saturday night's revelry in the 'four-penny gallery' where "coster flappers" wedge themselves "among the lads." Outside, "The public-houses have arcades, wherein an overflow of customers stand and smoke" and "One walks along to what may be called 'Eel Pie Corner' - for there is so much eel pie for sale."⁵⁵ The cockney identity is alive, well and boisterous, but largely ignored. Again, newspaper advertisements are often the only way to gauge the condition of the eel and pie shops. They seem to reveal that the shops are popular, capacious, and busy often with live eel stalls on the pavement in front of them.⁵⁶ A piece in *The Sphere* from 1925 locates the cockney and the eel and pie shop as both numerous and as a place to eat quickly and run - synchronous with the busy, 'modern', urban cockney:

In the jellied eel and eel-pie centres round the Elephant and Castle the standers gather morning and evening at counters or ledges, wolf their stewed eels, pay and depart.⁵⁷

By 1938, Mass Observation, forensically reported from The Old Kent Road how,

The market men don't pack up until after nine, and the pubs fill up quickly... At closing time... [the street] fills up again ... some sing. Some make for the fish and chip shops, others to meat pie and jellied eel establishments. In these main sale is 2d and 3d. hot meat pies, with pennyworths of mashed potatoes, which have lots of parsley chopped up with them (This parley garnishing seems peculiar to south of the river in London. Obs. has seldom encountered it on the north side, but every sausage and mash shop in the Old Kent Rd or Walworth Rd districts has it)

⁵⁵ Graham, Stephen, "London at night. In the four-penny gallery", *Westminster Gazette*, 25 February 1925: 10.

⁵⁶ An advertisement in the *Westminster Gazette*, 27 September 1922: 3, speaks of "shop fittings inc. eel tanks £175 all in..." Another in *Westminster Gazette*, 29 June 1923: 12, references an "Eel and Pie busy spot. Camberwell. Seats 25: 3 rooms... old estb..."

⁵⁷ *The Sphere*, 18 April 1925: 16.

The piece continues to render further fascinating detail that echoes Victorian health scandals but also offers up rare evidence that by now the shops sell eels, pies and mashed potatoes.

In this shop there is a large notice saying, 'I will pay personally to anyone £500 who can bring forward the newspaper showing I have been prosecuted concerning the contents of my pies.' And another notice, on glass 'Our celebrated pea soup Nourishes and Sustains. Per 2d and 3d basin.'⁵⁸

The mention of soup further gives lie to the contemporary claim that the shops have only ever sold their contemporarily (and false) memorialised combination.

These inter-war journalistic interventions, simultaneous with the reporting of the modernity of the elites, are part of a pivot away from an imperial, heroic national identity to a reinvention that privileged a private, domestic and understated ordinariness. The cockney archetype was now a useful metaphor for an everyday working class Briton defined by their modesty, quietness, simplicity and kindness to animals (Samuel, 1989: xxiv). This ordinariness would soon form the basis of a national fiction of the decent working class grimly 'carrying on' fighting Hitler. It would also form the basis of another fiction that Britons were a 'race apart' in that battle and subsequently contribute to an exclusively racial concept of citizenship that would develop problematically after the Second World War. For the time being, however, George Orwell could codify this native common-sense normality that "... centres around things which even when they are communal are not official - the pub, the football match, the back garden, the fireside and the 'nice cup of tea'" (Orwell, 1946 in Waters, 1997: 211).

⁵⁸ MOA: TC Music, dancing and Jaz, 38/2/C – The Lambeth Walk, XIV: 7 (image1381).

2.9 The cockney keeps calm and carries on⁵⁹

The co-option of the cockney's cheerfulness and determination in the face of the Blitz is the basis of the haunting of the present-day's austerity nostalgia. The roots of this may partly be found in the framing of the extraordinarily successful musical, *Me and My Girl* (1937). In it, Bill, a Lambeth cockney stands to inherit an Earldom but risks it all for his 'common' girlfriend, Sally. The Lambeth Walk, the dance the musical popularised (with the help of the massed ranks of pearly actors onstage), cemented the London cockney as "the class who knew how to have a good time" (Madge and Harrison in Stedman Jones, 1989: 313). It contrasted their 'traditional' culture with the 'fast', Americanism of the Jazz age, and also valourised the notion of cockney as crucially *biddable* innocents perhaps a remnant of the Cockney Novelists.

In the inter-war period, the ordinariness of the cockney had additionally been moulded by the 'benevolent bureaucracy' of Herbert Morrison's London County Council. Morrison's endeavours, via the most moderate Labourism, housed and educated many of the London poor, yet the prosperity of this vision depended on the unquestioned role of imperial commodities that by now were traded via a kind of Empire market bloc in contrast to the former rigours of Free Trade. This hegemonic concept was instilled by the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) whose activities (and films like, *Song of Ceylon* (1934) inculcated an idea of benevolence and protectionism that would eventually form an element of the Welfare State.

The successor to the EMB, the General Post Office Film Unit, was responsible for much of the lauded documentary output of its time, especially the film *Night Mail* (1936). The documentary, a precursor to much of the wartime propaganda, features real working class men who were, almost for the first time, not the anonymous subject of ridicule (McGahan, 2010). Notwithstanding the rather ironic aesthetic debt

⁵⁹ I use this slogan in an ironic sense to reference the contemporary nostalgia that surrounds austerity. The now ubiquitous phrase was discarded by the Ministry of Information after a test printing and never found its way to public display. Rediscovered, it was sold as a reproduction by Barter Books in Northumberland and then in the shop at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London where it coincided with the austerity regimes of the Conservative government almost seventy years later. See - Hatherley, 2016: 18.

to Socialist Realism, this prototype of the everyday hero was utilised in perhaps the most famous wartime film, *London Can Take It* (1940). Although cockneys are not specifically mentioned, the title is significant. In contradiction to the profoundly conservative rural locale of the pre-war, the title is geographically specific (much to the annoyance of bombed northern cities) and the heart of the nation is seen once again as London.

It was to this end that the Ministry of Information conscripted the cockney into the war effort. Contrary to the axiomatic notion that the cockney was a reactionary patriot who could be willingly bombed night after night and actually enjoy it, the booing of the royal family in the East End seemed to have been a genuine shock to the political establishment (Calder, 2012). Less so perhaps was the extraordinary rise in crime under the cover of Blitz darkness and the role of the cockney black market 'spiv' who, along with more positive representations, has remained in the public consciousness, forever associated with London crime (Leg, 2017).

The enduring duality of the cockney identity notwithstanding, the experience of wartime shelters had foreshadowed an inevitable period of radical social change. According to Lord Morley in 1941, "It is quite common now to see Englishmen speaking to each other in public although they have never been formally introduced" (Timmins, 1995: 32).

The end of the Second World War definitively marked the universalisation of bourgeois democracy and in many ways was also the culmination of the long, concomitant nineteenth century journey of the cockney and its culture. Its identity, so long defined as a subordinate vehicle of political exclusion, would now be irresistible as a defining character in the new nation as determined by an insurgent Labour administration.

The imperial foundations of that nation however could no longer contain even the most modest aspirations of the working classes. This national, cross-class populist project was a reward, not only for winning the war, but also for their loyalty to capital.

In the decade after victory, the cockney *per se* played a bit-part cultural role but its translation as the epitome of cross-class wartime solidarity was important.⁶⁰

In *Passport to Pimlico* (1949) it was only through an appeal to a 'Blitz spirit' that societal cohesion could again be achieved. In 1959, the Dutch historian, Johan Huizinga suggested that the only distinctive national character the British possessed "was their susceptibility to the illusion that they had one, and a very remarkable one at that" (Huizinga in Waters, 1997: 213). As Chris Waters suggests, "To enter the later 1940s and 1950s is to enter a new world in which the components of national identity that had been manufactured in the 1930s and early 1940s seemed to come unstuck (Waters, 1997: 213). That misplacement of identity is painfully dramatised in the semi-autobiographical *Limelight* (1952) and more presciently in *The Entertainer* (1957) with Laurence Olivier's Archie personifying the ashes of a post-imperial Britain through the character of an old and bitter music hall comic.

The bright hopes of a more equitable post-war society were soon dashed by America's insistence on both the rapid repayment of war debts and Sterling's return to full convertibility. It was also dashed by the Labour government's use of troops to break the strikes of the working class in the docks of the East End in 1945. The docks continued industrial action along with lorry drivers, bus and train workers in 1949 and 1950 when Arthur Deakin, General Secretary of the TGWU told them he would "not move one finger" to help them (Murray, 2008: 100). The Labour government again used troops against power workers and the Smithfield meat porters in 1950 and in the same year sent gas workers to prison for illegal strikes.

Fascism resumed its domestic march as a resurgent Mosleyite movement marched through mostly Jewish areas in the East End and overseas Britain ignominiously withdrew from empire to the bloody horrors of Indian partition and the Palestinian *Nakba*. Phil Piratin (1948: 89) one of two Communist Party MPs elected in the East End in 1945, revealed that only one tenth of the planned 1300 council houses had actually been built by 1948 but that money had been found to redecorate Clarence House for the new queen.

⁶⁰ The character of Mrs Mop, a cockney *char-lady* is likely one of the last mainstream representations of this period. See - *It's That Man Again*, BBC Home service, 1939-1949.

2.10 Disillusionment and the spoils of war

After 1945, as Blackwell and Seabrook (1986: 64) attest,

... what was not recognised at the time, however, was that the bonding which occurred between the Labour Movement and the majority of the working class had occurred at a moment of unusual turbulence and, far from being a base which had been one for all time, was actually a precarious achievement which would have to be fought for in order to be retained.

The palimpsestic cockney identity that had been inherited from the struggles of the nineteenth century was a mixture of different sections of the labouring classes. London had always been a city of artisans and small masters, clerks and shopkeepers that teetered between the precarity of petty-bourgeois trades, the employed working class and the enormous pool of casual labour decried as the residuum. After the First World War, this structure changed. Rapid industrialisation meant that by the early 1930s,

London accounted for five-sixths of the net increase in the number of factories, two-fifths of employment in new factories, and one third of all factory extensions undertaken even though it had only one fifth of the population. (Pollard, 1962 in Stedman Jones, 2014: 348)

However, the ambitions and security of this new proletariat was undermined by the shallow roots of the socialist, Social Democratic Federation and factionalism between skilled and unskilled labour. Overwhelmingly, the future of this class was in the hands of Morrison's timid Labour bureaucracy that had been absorbed into the state apparatus during both world wars. Unsurprisingly, the social structures of these communities, largely uneducated, insular, sometimes self-employed and inculcated by the first bloom of modern consumerism via the music hall, remained relatively conservative by nature.

John Marriot's (1996) work on the history of cockney areas like Canning Town, Silvertown and North Woolwich, however, is instructive. The original migrants to

these areas had been agricultural labourers (not peasants) “who had direct experience of capitalist social relations in the countryside, and casual labourers displaced from the East End by collapse of stable economies ... all brought with them the imprint of an older rural culture and kinship systems that proved remarkably resistant to urban modernity” (Marriot, 1996: 87).

These communities, celebrating their lives in overcrowded slums were insular, boisterous and inevitably, in an inversion of the Victorian imposed social order, the street was their entertainment. The street was important not only because houses were cramped and small but also because the community represented a form of strong local identity, usually the result of casualism. This meant it was necessary for workers to live very close to precarious employment opportunities.

Entire streets were composed of workers and their families who formed inevitable social solidarities connected by work. For Marriot (1996: 87), “street parties... the celebration of body over mind, sport ... and ‘crime’ elements of the carnivalesque survived among the metropolitan poor.” Indeed, the formative Dock Strike in 1880, of which some of these communities had been part, “bore as much resemblance to a mediaeval carnival as to a modern industrial strike” (Stedman Jones, 2014: 347). This epitomised the East End as a spatial disruption to the rest of the city: its occupants transgressive. These were places that the police kept away from “... for the people are rough and more than once water has been thrown over constables” (Ridenhour in Fishman, 1988: 23). In an echo of the earlier eroticisation of the poor as *other* by the bourgeoisie, East End women were inevitably sexualised as simultaneously chaste or bawdy. This dynamic is played out in James Joyce’s ‘Lundub’ (as he has it in *Finnegan’s Wake*) where cockney matriarchs, so important in the nostalgic histories of the pie shops, are “vaudeville, sexually desirable, disorderly and humorous” (Boland, 2016: 84). The growth of these areas to the East of London promoted a distinct cultural and political character. They were “... everyday worlds... multiple sites of resistance and contest outside of traditional political institutions [found within] families and households” (Rose, 1998 in August, 2001:196). If the roots of the contemporary cockney are to be found it is, along with the proletarian entrepreneurialism of the coster, located here.

In 1892 West Ham (South) had elected the first independent Labour MP and the first Labour council, but election turnouts were consistently low. Marriot argues that because the Labour Party was universalist in aims (likely seen as middle class, outside irrelevances) this reinforced a resentful sense of local identity, where “[L]oyalties to place then take precedence over loyalties to class, spatialising political action” (Harvey, 1989: 279). Marriot’s research is clear that certainly in the local West Ham Labour party, sensibilities were un-ideological in that there remained a virulent anti-communist, anti-cosmopolitan and overtly local prejudice that rejected any progressive moves that did not address hyper-native concerns.⁶¹ Extrapolating these tendencies across London areas seen as traditional and cockney, we find that in terms of electoral politics, voting Labour had crucially become a habit for these communities but not a part of their defining identity.

It is within these local ties (albeit in post-war Bethnal Green) that Michael Young and Peter Willmott’s (1957) sociological work was based. Just as the defeated post-Chartist working class sought sanctuary and consolation in the distractions of blossoming consumerism and the music hall, as Richard Hoggart (1992: 166), recognised, the “real things are the human and companionable things - home and family affection, friendship and being able to say ‘Enjoy y’self’”. What counted was not class politics but “neighbours, family, patrons who could do favours or provide jobs” (Hobsbawm, 1989: 10).

However, Jon Lawrence’s recent critical re-examination of the original transcripts of *Family and Kinship in East London* (building on significant, mostly feminist criticism from the 1970s) finds a subtly different world where “... notes paraphrase respondent’s testimony... [and] generally represent *reconstructions* of vernacular speech rather than verbatim testimony” (2016: 574). The re-examined research finds the streets that defined what was left of the post-Victorian cockney identity riven by micro-class differences, petty antagonisms and “specious ramblings about kitchen matriarchs” (Oakley, 2014: 58). Johnny Speight, the working class scriptwriter

⁶¹ Perry Anderson’s arguments about the nature and historical context of England having the first proletariat are significant here. “It was not until the 1880s that the working class really began to recover from the traumatic defeat of the 1840s. By then the world had moved on. In consciousness and combativity, the English working class had been over-taken by almost all its continental opposites. Marxism had missed it.” See - Anderson, 1964: 36.

responsible for much 'kitchen-sink' television in the 1970s, would write of his family moving four streets to a different house in nearby Canning Town in the same period.

It was almost a social upheaval. Some of the people in this new street even had aspidistras in the window. They all wore shirts. At the very top end they even wore collars and ties. The houses had bay windows. We still had an outside toilet...But we were a cut above the others. (Speight, 1973: 20)

Certainly, this may have been a place where "Anyone feeling lonely only had to stand at the door, and ...someone would come along ... and cheer their neighbour up" (Blake, 1977: 12). But it was also a place from which many people couldn't wait to escape from; where despite Young and Willmott's well-intentioned bourgeois socialism, many people *wanted* to move to new council estates in Debden. Bethnal Green was a place where people were scared to admit they liked opera because they would be seen as 'snobbish' and where 'respectability' was often performative. (Lawrence 2016: 576).⁶²

"The working class community, as it survived in the writings and in the political discourse of working class commentators was a retrospective construction" (Bourke, 1994: 137).⁶³ Although this assertion may be too broad, it seems that the allegiance of social solidarities were restrained by limited choice: to 'make ends meet' and 'to keep up with the Joneses'. Relationships based on 'cockney culture' were about negotiations of power structures within tiny community 'cells' - differences for example about how well people scrubbed their steps (Blacker, 1974: 165-166). Different communities were often hostile simply because they were geographically separate, and association was made through marriage, music and sport (Benson, 1989). As Trevor Blackwell and Jeremy Seabrook (although talking more generally about working class communities) presciently recorded in the 1980s:

⁶² Interestingly, the East End *wasn't* an entirely culturally barren zone. As Paul Newland suggests, during WWII, "The working class also enjoyed a surprisingly wide range of culture, including jazz, classical music and drama. See - Newland, 2008: 47. More, The Sadler's Wells Ballet had performed in Victoria Park in the summers of 1942 and 1943. See - Palmer, 2000: 145-146.

⁶³ For a rebuttal of Bourke's 'trenchant' critique of community, see - Jones, 2018: 122-125.

These discoveries serve the function of covering up what was actually happening, which was that working class people were deserting these very communities, as individuals and not as a class as soon as they could afford to buy their way out. (1986: 110)

Indeed, as Carolyn Steedman's (1987) autobiographical work evidences, the grand nostalgic affirmations of working class life found in Hoggart, Young and Willmott often fail to recognise complicated individual psychologies of, for example envy and the very real emotional desire for material *things*.⁶⁴ It is partly these clandestine individualisms that will eventually re-shape the late twentieth century cockney and form its contemporary notion.

Urban densities had been falling since the 1920s and many wanted to move to places where community and personal relationships would be based on love not "proximity and need" (Lawrence, 2019: 1). The fracturing of those casual-work dominated communities, initially by the Blitz, slum clearances and then the palimpsestic replacement of music hall by first cinema and then personal television, showed a world outside these restrictive, 'defended' neighbourhoods (Suttles, 1972: 21). The failure of Labourism to capitalise on the wider solidarities of the Welfare State (and its subsequent absorption into the establishment at both local and national level) led to a further political disillusionment and an embrace of modernity among London's working classes that was profoundly capitalist, leading to a reinforced conservatism that largely defines contemporary cockney identity and with it, the constituency of the eel and pie shops.

For the East End communities that remained after subsequent waves of migration down the A13, that social conservatism was linked to a hyper-local identity that historically defined (in a large part) the customer base of each eel and pie shop. The shops had been overwhelmingly street market-adjacent (or adjacent to where historic street markets or 'ghost-markets' had once been). It is this study's contention that these memories of distrustful, hyper-local micro-communities ensured both the

⁶⁴ Steedman's work is a useful counterweight to the heavily gendered rendering of monolithic, collective, working class life. For a more London-centric perspective, see also - White, 2013.

popularity of the shops in their immediate post-war heyday and their continued anonymity in plain sight to other classes. It may also explain the (partial) cultural distrust of outsiders unaware of local social codes and solidarities, until these bindings were loosened by the final breakage of the traditional high street by Neoliberal forces and increasing gentrification from perhaps the 1990s onwards.

The contemporary 'forgetting' and 'remembering' of cockney, contingent upon utility to the dominant hegemony, can be seen in this context as a modern continuation of a constructed fear and suspicion in an urban geography unmitigated by bourgeois intervention or control and mirrored in the parallel defensiveness and suspicion of cockney communities.

Whilst the Victorian cockney was still within living memory, Franklyn (1953: 45) could observe that, “

Hidden in the cockney soul there is a stubborn, almost sullen resistance to reform; this is based on a deep attachment to environment... [in] the apparent appreciation of all that is being done for him, there lurks a wilful grip on life as he himself thinks ought to be lived, and as he intends to continue to live it...

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the cockney, a specifically London identity born of the increasing primacy of the capital, has signified different meanings at different times. The contours of cockney have largely however been defined by the powerful and in that sense, the ascription of the term has long been a weathervane of changing class relations.

The identity appears to have been an early signifier of the developing tensions between the emergent urban capitalist forces and older rural authority and privilege. By the eighteenth century, cockney had become a site of conflict between the Old Corruption of the *ancien regime* and different stratifications of a new class. This cockney was defined as much through cultural sensibilities linked to urbanisation, modernity and democracy as through cold, hard commerce. Here was a class that had been ascendent during the Regency but by the early nineteenth century was still

politically unaccommodated. The cockney became a site of contestation between the idea of the courtier and the citizen (Thompson, 1991) and this tension mirrored the rise of a new kind of Londoner.

Dickens' early nineteenth century (auto)biography of this precarious interstitial petty-bourgeois group of grocers, journalists, shop assistants and (eventually) eel and pie shop owners further revealed that cockney was now partly informed by a new consumer dynamic. The cockney dandy of the period, reinforced by popular cultural forms performatively linked lifestyles in an escapist pantomime that celebrated the appearance of the elites. However, by his use of an already "obsolete" dialect characteristic of the poor (Mayhew, 1857: 5), Dickens increasingly tied the cockney identity firstly to an urban working class and then by extension to its feared apotheosis, the residuum. This formation conjoined with a performative, dynamic, dramatic identity that was further informed by street commerce (Jankiewicz, 2012).

The continuing class deterioration of the cockney evidenced the identity's increasing dualities. The cockney was now situated between the law-abiding and the criminal; between the repulsive and the erotic and between the 'respectable' poor and the worthless 'other'.

Dickens' representation of cockney likely influenced the music hall, which called for ever more 'authentic' performers (Scott 2002: 237). This striving for authenticity was largely reflexive, with performers often replicating already existing representations, rather than any real figure (Turner 2002: 256). The increasingly palimpsestic cockney identity was further constructed by its conscription into the imperial nation to help pacify a disruptive proletariat additionally signalled through theories of racial superiority and a limited democratic expansion. This coding was transmitted via the behavioural forms of popular song, public houses and the eel and pie shops in, as we have already seen, a culture of consolation (Stedman Jones, 1974).

Largely insignificant between the wars except as a nostalgic signal to a good humoured and dutiful subaltern, the cockney re-emerges during the Blitz to define a stoic 'ordinariness' that would become the basis for the Welfare State. By war's end, the cockney, a character built on the foundations of assumed identity and fragments

of working class reality, did not simply fade as Stedman Jones (1989) suggests but had become inherently unstable, its contradictions, as I shall examine shortly, increasingly evident.

The cockney had at times come to define the nation yet, like the eel and pie shops, it was both culturally coded and hidden in plain sight, insular and hyper-local, its meaning complicated and precarious.

The notion of cockney, and thus the significance and prominence of the pie and eel shops I argue, rises and falls in direct relation to its usefulness to capital at times of political stress. In this way, cockney identity contains dual manifestations of welcome and hostility and is rooted in a deeply conservative melancholia and saccharine nostalgia.

Identity is the landscape upon which the eel and pie shop culture is built; *memory* - which I shall interrogate in due course - is the vehicle of its transmission.

3. The Defensive Trench of Empire

Introduction.

In this chapter I return briefly to the nineteenth century to thematically contextualise the cockney identity within the notion of whiteness and empire.

I examine how the 'dirt and darkness' of the London poor (Marriot, 2003) was recorded and classified by the ascendent bourgeoisie, simultaneous with contemporary racial theories, into moral notions (Stallybrass and White, 1986). These depictions, I argue, imported as they were from the conquests of Empire, were analogous to the representations of the slave society built in America and largely in contrast to the previous (relative) cultural flexibilities of the Georgian city.

The stratagem of extending 'whiteness' to the working classes during the New Imperialism to constrain potentially explosive domestic social forces was I suggest, a fundamental shift by the elites from overt repression to a more consensual version of hegemony. This reframing of the nation as a racial singularity (Bonnet, 1998; Virdee, 2014) I argue was comparable to the elite's appeal to Protestantism during the seventeenth and eighteenth century wars with France.

I suggest that because the London working classes had been "invited to participate in the rule of others" (Mackenzie, 1986: 254), the eventual concessions of universal suffrage and the creation of the Welfare State were conducted within a racial context whose effects are entirely significant to the contemporary cockney identity memorialised in the contemporary imagination as emblems of a largely mono-racial, hyper-localism to which the eel, pie and mash shops are to a large extent a spiritual sanctuary.

By the extensive use of cultural texts, I thematically chart the cockney identity from the immediate post-war period to the New Labour era. The physical devastation of

the Blitz was for the cockney I suggest, a moment 'between two worlds'; the world of wartime Britain, its austere aftermath and the changed Britain that came after. I suggest that this subsequent memoryscape became a central motif within the social imagery of the period. Further I propose that this period and its subsequent reimagining retains enormous contemporary cultural and political relevance as a touchstone for the growth of anti-globalisation sentiment, populism and, eventually Brexit.

I link the destruction of cockney territoriality through generally unsympathetic zonal redevelopments, subsequent gentrification and gradual exodus to a partial paralleling of the Victorian 'clearing of the streets' which largely broke traditional kinship networks. I further connect these developments with the allied decline of long-established forms of labour and concomitant social structures simultaneous to the identity's contested relationship with modernity. In this I argue that housing and its allocation were central to the *ressentiment* towards mass immigration and the hastening of the transmission (and simulacra) of the cockney identity towards Essex and its 'dual class trajectories' (Watt, Millington and Huq, 2014).

In all of this I outline the contours of cockney as an identity concurrent to the evolution of a post-war national economy and a popular modernity celebrated in working class ritual of which the eel, pie and mash shops, although in a long trajectory of decline, remained relatively vibrant and central.

The traditional cockney identity I argue, simultaneously continued its role as a nostalgic conduit to capital but evolved multiple valances that spoke to an increasing emphasis on popular culture, age, choice and individuality (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2018) further complicating its continued existence as a palimpsestic construction. Through this notion I begin to trace a new and coexistent East End culture, born of an emergent multicultural narrative that corresponded to a social democratic project that birthed the ancestors of the contemporary cockney.

My research suggests that the cockney's role as a conduit to the forces of capital was reprised through the years of the neoliberal ascendancy as a signifier of tradition and as a nostalgic scaffolding. This in some ways narrated the "slow cancellation of

the future” (Beradi, 2011) by forces of the Right that captured elements of the East End working class by appealing to their race and their perceived abandonment through an ‘authoritarian populism’ (Hall, 1978). The contemporary reimagining of the eel and pie shops as a totem of a lost white, working class London is, I argue, firmly anchored within this nostalgic haunting.

Finally, I narrate the contours of the subsequent demonisation of the culture of the London working class by New Labour through Late Modernity’s valorisation of globalisation and aspiration. I suggest that the notion of ‘ordinariness’, once epitomised by the Blitz cockney, was now to be located in middle class values through the prism of culture not class. I suggest that Blair’s Labour Party had forced the white working class “to think of themselves as a new ethnic group” (Jones, 2011) and this would be increasingly reflected within the constituency of the eel, pie and mash shops.

3.1 The ‘whitening’ of the London working class

As the Victorian century opened, the bourgeoisie began to hegemonize and historicise their own ascendancy and distinction from the morass of the proletariat. Whereas the poor previously had been seen as simply criminal, the primacy of Britain’s industrial working class meant that it began to be defined in dark, monstrous terms: a creature born of a shadowy, labyrinthine city (Baldick, 1990). Progressively, the proletariat came to be seen, literally as a race apart and this notion was framed in terms borrowed from the subjugation of native populations conquered by Empire.

By the middle of the century, fear of decline and domestic disorder meant that delineations of race and class merged with pseudo-science and were recoded into an explicitly moral formulation around the ‘darkness’ of dirt and disease (Marriot, 2003). In this way, a constructed identity of ‘whiteness’ and racial purity became central to the bourgeois imagination. Its absence defined the location and exclusion of the poor within the nation. For the ‘fallen’ cockney of the late nineteenth century this categorisation would be crucial.

The gentlemen who explored the 'dark' inner-city colonies of London as brave colonial adventurers were a central conduit to this conceit. In this way, the journalist James Greenwood could reference in 1874,

Creatures that you know to be female by the length and raggedness of hair that makes their heads hideous, and by their high-pitched voices, with bare red arms and their bodies bundled in a complication of dirty rags (Marriot, 2003: 161).

Peter Stallybrass and Alon White (1986: 128) have successfully argued that dirt was an important signifier for the bourgeois cultural imagination as it could map a class-based otherness which might contaminate both the physical and moral boundaries of the city. This could be navigated, whereby "the axis of the body is transcoded through the axis of the city (1986: 145)". 'Good dirt' was the result of hard labour and 'bad dirt' the result of moral pollution. The correlation of London's topography in these terms was coterminous with Prince Albert's shocking death from Typhoid and dirt increasingly became a metonym for crime and anarchy.

In the gas, glass and gleaming counters of the early eel and pie shops we see this notion of hygiene and propriety internalised and translated into a nascent, aspirational working class culture. Ironically, of course the shops also traded in eels: a bottom-feeding creature that had been the staple of London's poor for centuries but at this stage, eel-eating still crossed class boundaries. Wesleyan allegories like 'cleanliness is next to godliness' however remain deeply rooted in working class domesticity, identity and memory.

After the mid-century, a racial coding of the home populations started to become central to the classification of the moral structure of the poor themselves. In this way, George Godwin, editor of the *Builder*, could in 1854 suggest that when in order to investigate the conditions of the working classes, "It is necessary to brave the risks of fever and other injuries to health, and the contact of men and women often as lawless as the Arab or the Kaffir" (Marriot, 2003: 161).

Domestically this paradigm created obvious contradictions. London's urban poor, an increasingly significant political and social force, were overwhelmingly white, and this meant that their 'blackness' had to be constructed within a framework of an 'internal colonialism'. The Irish had already been primed for this racial encoding as 'primitives' during the Famine in the 1840s (Thompson, 2013: 348). Against the backdrop of the Fenian campaign, they would be visually *simianized* as monsters in brutal cartoons (Curtis, 1996) and Carlyle would speak of them as "the white negroes" (Marriot, 2003: 165). Significantly of course, both the Cooke's and the Kelly's eel and pie dynasties share an Irish immigrant heritage but as working class entrepreneurs, they rose above "the floating armies of labourers who built the canals, the docks, the railways and transformed the face of England" (Bermant, 1975: 43).

Simultaneous with the new notions of social Darwinism, the theories of Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882) had specifically warned of miscegenation within the *abyss* that would lead to a degeneration of the race (Pick, 1993). In this way, *The Saturday Review* in 1864 could speak about the Bethnal Green poor as, "... a race apart... of whom we know nothing, whose lives are of quite different complexion from ours... offer a very fair parallel to the separation of the slaves from the whites (Malik, 1996: 93).

The Daily Telegraph in August, 1866 would refer to white, working class rioters as "... negroes... who have the taste in their tribe for any disturbance..." (Lorimer, 1978: 195). According to Edwin Hood, "the negro is in Jamaica as the costermonger is in Whitechapel; he is very nearly often a savage with the mind of a child's" (Malik, 1996: 97). Increasingly, there seemed a parallel between the representation of some of the London working classes and the slave society built in America. Bonnett (1998: 336) points out how this 'colour divide' was reproduced in cultural texts of the period and that "the popular stereotype of the Negro in the mid-nineteenth century owed more to the new world than to Africa" (Lorimer, 1978: 206). Indeed, during the Chartist agitation of the 1830s and 1840s there had been a rhetorical (if exaggerated) linkage made by abolitionists between the conditions of bondage of the British industrial proletariat and that of slavery in America and the Caribbean. By the end of the 1860s however, this moral, reforming correlation amongst sections of the English middle classes had started to flag. The Indian Mutiny/The First War of

Independence (1857-1859), The American Civil War (1861-1865) and the Morant Bay Rebellion (1865) had all shaken the notion that colonial subjects could be held captive at arms-length as voiceless subalterns. When significant bread riots followed the collapse of the Thames ship-building industry in the 1860s, adding to the vast and threatening casual labouring mass of the residuum, bourgeois fear led to the questioning of the confident utilitarian moral and economic rationale underpinning of the administration of the Poor Laws (Stedman Jones, 2014: 15).⁶⁵

By the mid-1870s in response to widespread international economic recession European powers scrambled to further exploit the wealth of their colonies by expanding their territories in a race that would become known as the New Imperialism. To simultaneously constrain domestic demands for social change and achieve popular support for such global conquest necessitated extending the notion of 'whiteness' to accommodate the working classes in a transition to a popular, socially consensual (and eventually, welfarist) form of Imperialism. In this way, the nation could additionally be reframed as a patriotic, racial singularity to exclude the racialised 'other' (Bonnet, 1998; Virdee, 2014).

The formula for this transition may however be found in a much earlier, significant extension of the nation that was the elite's appeal to Protestantism during the seventeenth and eighteenth century wars with France. This address was aimed at uniting an English nation with the Scots and Welsh against a Catholic enemy demonised since the Reformation. The ingestion of the idea of nation was a fundamental shift by the elites from overt repression to a more consensual version of hegemony. This national framework appears to have largely held in place when the English artisanal class enjoined an ideological struggle against the Old Corruption and when a specific class consciousness began to form within the early proletariat. Both of these strands coalesced around the rhetoric of liberty that looked backwards to a patriotism framed by the 'freeborn' Englishman's "birthright" (Thompson, [1963] 2013: 85) and forward to the ideas of Paine.

⁶⁵ Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life among the Lowly* (1852) was a well-known and popular novel of the time and the racism and segregation of the society it portrayed drew direct comparisons with the English working class. For the economic crisis and The Poor Law see - Jones, 2014: 15.

However, the early proletariat began to contest the elite's concept of the nation as unjust because it excluded other racialised groups that were seen as equally British. Indeed, contrary to the long-standing view that the working classes were a heterogeneous mass, Irish Catholic migrants appear to have been key actors within these early democratic developments uniting many "radical strands not least the emancipation of Ireland, the abolition of the monarchy and slavery" (Virdee, 2014: 14). Thompson ([1963] 2013: 483, 652-654) attests that the Irish workers were present in Luddism and Virdee (2014) cites both John Doherty, an Irishman who became a national trade union leader and William Cuffay, a leading Chartist and the descendent of an African slave as evidence of this cosmopolitan culture of proletarian solidarity. This nascent inter-racial and religious unity during the "heroic age of the proletariat" (Anderson 1964: 33) was a connected struggle against slavery, imperialism in Ireland and for emancipation. It appears to have terrified the elites.

The siding of the bourgeoisie with the upper classes around the 1832 Reform Bill and the subsequent banning of Combinations began to dissipate this political-racial unity. ⁶⁶Irish labour was used to undercut other working class wages and without political leadership, antagonism grew. As Nancy Stepan (1982: 4-5) suggests, identity began to be manufactured around "a more parochial and nationalist outlook." This was deployed by the elites against the Irish in the 1830s and 1840s and was a "racist discourse produced for the emergent English working class" (Hanley, 2016: 109).

The notion that the Irish were now 'other' became more firmly ingested within the English working classes who, after political defeat, entered a period of "prolonged catatonic withdrawal" (Anderson, 1964: 33). In direct relevance for the cockney, this historical, racial idea of nation according to Virdee (2014: 5) limited "the political imagination of even those who were representatives of the exploited and the oppressed."

⁶⁶ Combinations refer to an early form of trades union.

Whiteness had now been re-framed as ordinary and commonplace to signify “the homely virtues of quietness, tidiness, cleanliness and decency” (Bonnett, 1998: 330). Exactly the qualities that would coalesce around the identity of the ‘respectable’ working class, the eel and pie shops and their customers. Bonnett sees the project of ‘whitening’ almost exclusively as uni-directional but, as Jonathan Hyslop (1999: 402) contends, this “fails to give sufficient centrality to direct working class involvement and participation in, and movement through, the empire, as a historic formative force in British working class racism.”

Historically, notions of blackness as ‘opposite’ had long been connected with performances within English Mummery to represent ancient liberties against the foreign yoke. ‘Blacking-up’ had also used by poachers and dockside against pressing gangs (Thompson, 1977). Both strategies linked ‘blackface’ with protest against the enslavement of the ‘freeborn’ Englishman in some sense sympathetically connected subjugation to blackness whether inferiority was implied or not.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss in fine detail preceding working class racisms, yet it seems clear that previous colonial exploits were informed by notions of white supremacy transmitted through an earlier ethnic chauvinism. Charles White’s 1799 treatise *Account in the Regular Gradation in Man* had suggested all races shared a common heritage in the Garden of Eden, but that Africans were degraded by their lack of civilisation (Hanley, 2016: 118). Indeed, some radicals like William Cobbett appealed to working men to define themselves against abolitionist’s compassion citing the slave’s revolt in San Domingo as evidence of their “politically uninformed barbarism” (in Wood, 1999). A more conservative, overtly racist notion of patriotism itself began to supersede this earlier radical patriotism to enable “the working class to participate in the rule of others” (Mackenzie, 1986: 254).

Like the later cockney identity, it has long been argued that this racism (militarism and jingoism) was inculcated into the working class identity not only by the music hall but by the mass circulation of patriotic fiction (Hobson, 1901), compulsory schooling and semi-military organisations like the Boys Brigade.

By the late 1870s, the instilling of Imperial whiteness linked to a nascent (masculinist) Labourism saw an emergent 'waterfront' culture in the East End docks. This, the defensive trench of Empire was where a tight-knit, hyper-localism of sailors and dockers saw themselves as bulwarks against 'alien cultures' in their own vernacular version of the pure white Englishman (Cohen, Qureshi and Toon, 1994).

Labourism further disseminated whiteness through an imperial working class of British, Australian and South African workers that traversed the world (Hyslop, 1999).⁶⁷ The incorporation of the working class as racially white allowed capitalism to mutate towards a more interventionist form. This mollified the sharper edges of class struggle and simultaneously addressed the "increasing complexity and consumer orientation of capitalist production" (Bonnett, 1998: 329). It was clear that the battles for the eventual creation of the Welfare State (and elements of welfarism across the white Commonwealth) were not conducted in a context free from race. Indeed,

The Imperial working class of the pre-First World War era was unable to separate its hostility to its own exploitation from its aspiration to incorporation in the dominant racial structure (Hyslop, 1999: 418).

So, when it did finally arrive in 1945, "welfare came wrapped in the Union Jack" (Bonnett, 1998: 329).

This process was however not linear: Andrew Crowhurst (1997) posits that white working class people still continued to concurrently identify and represent themselves positively as 'black' or 'other' using earlier music hall traditions. Indeed, when the American cake walk (a dance developed from gatherings on black slave plantations) was introduced to the London music halls in 1898 it was adapted by South London cockneys in their own swagger and eventually became the first danced Lambeth Walk in 1903 (Howkins, Collis and Dodd, 1986: 47).

⁶⁷ Jonathon Hyslop's work on the trans-national nature of the Imperial working class is formative here. He charts the progress of a largely Cornish mining community with in-demand specialist skills imbued with a small-masters ideology of individual liberalism rather than a working class communitarian socialism whose influence on the labour movement was profound. It was their championing of white-worker supremacy within an Imperial commonwealth that dominated the Trades Union movement until after World War Two. See - Hyslop, 1999: 398-421.

Cockney culture was certainly *not* in itself inherently racist. Although the bourgeois construction of the cockney in the cartoon of 'Arry in Punch was deeply prejudiced, London had for centuries been racially mixed - what might be called an early 'ordinary cosmopolitanism' (Gilroy, 2000).⁶⁸ When racial tensions emerged (such as national race riots in 1919) they were almost always due to the economic stresses of scarcity within capital but referred back to the elite-created racialised 'other' of the early-mid nineteenth century. Testimonies of cockneys around race and whiteness in the early twentieth century are rare but Doris, a white resident of Canning Town's Crown Street, known locally as "Draughtboard Alley" for its racial mixing could reminisce about growing up alongside black and mixed-race families in the 1930s with little apparent tension.

There were lots of black kids. We used to play together, no animosity between any of us. There were white women married black, you know, West Indians, they were working on the boats. Got on ever so well together... Everybody in the street used to speak to each other, and all the children used to play together (Padfield in Caballero, Chamion and Aspinall, 2018: 142).

Similarly, Anne Bowes, a mixed-race woman from the same area would recollect that "Where we lived there was no feeling that mixed marriages were wrong. The white people we lived with accepted it" (Padfield in Caballero, Chamion and Aspinall, 2018: 142).⁶⁹

Such solidarities in London's working class communities reflected the rapidly changing nature of cockney territoriality. Mass Eastern European immigration from the 1880s into traditionally cockney areas had created, by the inter-war years, a confident and relatively integrated Jewish population that saw themselves as 'EastEnders'.⁷⁰ The concept of the East End and cockney, although now virtually interchangeable, were crucial spatial delineations of identity from Victoriana to

⁶⁸ For a historical perspective on London's racially mixed past see - File and Power, 1981; Bell, 2002; Shyllon, 1992.

⁶⁹ These interviews started life as a sensational *Daily Express* article, ironically about the 'dangers' of racial mixing with the inevitable brutally cropped photograph excluding smiling white children standing with their black friends. See - "The street of hopeless children" *The Daily Express*, 18 March 1930.

⁷⁰ For a fascinating treatise on Jewish linguistic integration in the East End, see - Sivertson, 1960.

modernity. In areas like Spitalfields, Jews came to dominate the shops and street markets. Some of these 'foreign' costers - especially around Hoxton and Bethnal Green - were members of large socialist and anarchist organisations (Knepper, 2008). It was members of this community that reinvigorated and radicalised notions of a wider cockney community that saw itself valorised at opposition to Blackshirts marching at Cable Street in 1936 and in the almost forgotten post-war struggles against fascism. Indeed, Jews played a crucial, if unintentional role in redefining the identity of cockney through the inter-war years by consciously identifying themselves as locals and to some extent, divisions between Jew and gentile broke down as a younger generation moved from the ghettos into more mainstream white-collar employment (Lammers, 2005: 332). It is this formulation of the cockney that rebuilt the East End from the rubble of the Blitz whilst an historically older, 'whitened' proletariat either decamped to Essex or became marooned within their mono-racial memories within more mixed communities.

It was, however, the arrival of the first wave of non-white British subjects from the Caribbean in 1948 to (in part) address the post-war labour shortage, that almost immediately unsettled the newly-won welfare structures of a constructed cross-class, racial-national community.⁷¹ Their landing coincided with the questioning of what it meant to be British in a post-war and post-imperial world. Bill Williamson (1988: 170) suggests that a more exclusive concept of citizenship had already started to develop and cites the Conservative opposition to the 1948 British Nationality Bill which had sought to expand the definition of citizenship linked to a multi-ethnic Commonwealth.⁷² A wartime national identification towards 'ordinariness' (the conscription and valorisation of the working classes into the nation) that centred around the domestic and private (Light, 1991) meant that "the migrant other was constituted as the 'stranger' *par excellence*" from the 1950s onwards (Waters, 1997: 228). Indeed, Bill Schwarz (1996: 73) pertinently perceives this period as a 're-

⁷¹ In fact, the Attlee Labour government was "taken by surprise by these arrivals of immigrants" but had no legal way to stop them as they were British subjects. The very real labour shortage, put at somewhere between 600,000 and 1.3 million workers, aimed to be stemmed by de-mobilised Poles and freed German and Italian former prisoners of war but not enough of them could be recruited. See Patel, 2021: 61. Indeed, as Neal Ascherson reports, "... the Windrush only put in at Kingston, Jamaica, because it was half-empty, and the captain - hoping to cut his losses - had put an advertisement in the local paper offering berths to London." See - Ascherson, 2021: 6.

⁷² I think it's important to note that Caribbean immigration was also seen as a 'return to the motherland' after Colonial efforts during World War Two. See the arguments in Patel, 2021.

racialisation' of England where the tropes of the colonial frontier came 'home' to Britain (Webster, 2001) along with a generation of Empire administrators creating an atmosphere that resembled the 'embattled' Afrikaner and whites in the American South desperately trying to cling to segregation. Here perhaps was the beginning of the notion of 'whites as victims' where the immigrant would eventually have the 'whip hand'. In cockney communities this may have fed into anxieties about the emasculation of the working man against the increasing gains of woman and of miscegenation. Immigrants, in an echo of the Victorian residuum were seen to live in vice and squalor as evidenced by Colin McInnes' *City of Spades* (1957) in opposition to an increasingly settled and domesticated working class normality. They were also a threat to white women. In Roy Baker's *Flame in the Streets* (1961), Trade Union leader Jacko Palmer upholds the rights of a black worker but struggles with news that his daughter plans to marry a West Indian.

The contestations of the rights and primary entitlements of the white population of East London, of which the cockney subsequently become the embattled motif, is one of the defining legacies of this period memorialised in the contemporary imagination as emblems of a largely mono-racial, hyper-localism: the eel, pie and mash shops, to a large extent, their spiritual sanctuary.

3.2 From the terrace to the tower block

The terrible damage of the war had erased much of the territoriality of the East End and in that sense, part of the historically geographic notion of cockney identity itself. The cockney sanctum, St Mary Le Bow, was lost during the Blitz of 1941. The bells were recast at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in 1956 but not installed until five years later. By the time they pealed again, they did so over a transformed landscape and an increasingly dissociative cockney identity.

This devastated cartography is shown in *Hue and Cry* (1947) in which East End school children battle crooks and spivs over bombsites that brutally expose the compressed multiple buried layers of the city's history. The film links the children's

ingenuity, the new energy of the age, with the lumpen characters of the cockney villains whose password, 'Lambeth Walk', links them to a pre-war *pastness*.⁷³ In *The World my Wilderness* (1950), Rose Macauley's central character Barbary Deniston squats a deserted flat in the anarchy of the destroyed inter-zone of post-war London and engages with a community of outcasts, criminals and deserters. The sites simultaneously speak of the past and the future and damaged cockney youth set against the new Jerusalem of the planners' dreams. Here, the vibrant and chaotic "green world" of the fast-growing rosebay willowherb (*chamaenerion angustifolium*) is contrasted to the grey austerity of London. Macauley suggests this is a potent period of innocence which the cockney children of *Hue and Cry* will never know again.

The children stood still, gazing down on a wilderness of little streets, caves and cellars, the foundation of a wrecked merchant city, grown over by green and golden fennel and ragwort, coltsfoot, purple loosestrife, rosebay willow herb, bracken, brambles and tall nettles, among which rabbits burrowed and wild cats crept, and hens laid eggs (Macauley [1950] 2018: 53).

Within these edge-lands, several generations of Londoners would hide, play and make love away from their impossibly cramped and conservative homes. Antecedents to prefabs and unauthorised, makeshift, re-purposed spaces were the emergent cockney youth's practical responses to the landscape. Eventually, this 'unofficial countryside' (Mabey, 1973) of allotments, pigeon fanciers and 'drosscape' was only to be found in the forgotten outer wastes of Stratford and Bow and would be finally destroyed in the corporate devouring of post-industrial wildernesses by the behemoth of the Olympic Park. Yet this 'temporary' cockney figure, a child of the post-war years that wandered, played and danced pan-like in nature before the city buried it again, stands in ironic opposition to the original mediaeval connotation of the urbanite fearful of the countryside.⁷⁴

⁷³ The film's childhood heroes are not so far removed from reality. During the London Blitz, seventeen-year-old Patsie Duggan, the son of a Poplar bin man, led a gang of children, some as young as ten that acted as unofficial firefighters and rescue squad and were responsible for incredible acts of bravery. They were photographed by Bert Hardy for Picture Post in 1941 but largely forgotten until the publication of a children's book in 2015. See - Ashley, 2015.

⁷⁴ For a description of some the last of London's lost wastelands, see - Sinclair, 2012.

The devastation narrative runs through to the 1970s in cultural texts and is finally contrasted in *Bronco Bullfrog* (1969) with the real and idyllic countryside where Del and Irene, the young, doomed couple temporarily flee to escape their drudgery and entry into adulthood. As Ben Highmore (2012: 75) suggests this devastated landscape became, like the Blitz itself, a central motif within the social imagery of the period. “It constituted an affective landscape that played host to a mood world... sometimes resilient or defiant, joyful and exuberant, and sometimes resigned.” The ‘cultural feelings’ around this panorama and its privation congealed over decades and have been reformed in contested contemporary memory-scapes in which the cockney, as an unwitting agent of nostalgic capital, is once again valorised as an exemplar of self-sufficiency and *robustness* via modernity especially within the Brexiteer generation.⁷⁵

This devastated interregnum is for the cockney, simply a moment ‘between two worlds’ (Hall, 1978); the world of wartime Britain, its austere aftermath and the Britain that followed. In *A Place to Go* (1963), Ricky croons in his local Bethnal Green pub about a council waiting list that is “a mile long” just before his family are given eviction notices as part of their slum’s clearance. The moment is, however, pregnant with possibilities - a rebuilding of the cockney areas in line with organic communities or within a bourgeois modernity: a sympathetic re-assessment of the city and its people or a Brutalist re-imagining. This rebuilding is, in some senses, the continuation of the Victorian project to literally sweep the London working class from the streets and re-zone them. The cockney is banished from this (temporary) Garden of Eden to face re-housing within concrete towers or dispersal to the hinterlands.

There is a forgotten context in which these communities might have been more sympathetically accommodated within a popular modernism whilst “[T]he leftist planners and architects who briefly dominated under Atlee were side-lined after 1951 in favour of developers... are still the usual punching bag for the latter's schemes” (Hatherley, 2008: 131). Raymond Williams however was very clear that the planning decisions taken during this period, while supposedly democratic, were used to mask

⁷⁵ See for example - Hyams, 2011; Jacobs, 2015.

a bourgeois authoritarianism. He ruefully called this the 'smokescreen of consultation' (Williams, [1961] 1992: 312). Opposition was ruthlessly suppressed and framed as "... the white working class as a 'hazard to modernity'" (Skeggs, 2004: 91).

The very public and violent eviction in 1968 of Stephen Hurn and his wife from their home in Victoria Road, Leytonstone following a compulsory purchase order is particularly telling. In Pathé footage the couple are seen behind a barbed wire barricade remonstrating with police and bailiffs who pay no attention to their pleas about their own little "freehold piece of England" and significantly, likening the council to the Nazis. Their appeal to an earlier, radical patriotism of the Englishman and his liberty is almost a century too late. They are beaten and dragged away.⁷⁶

The tower blocks and low-rises that came to dominate the East End throughout the 1960s, although initially welcomed by some of their new residents, destroyed the recognisable landmarks of communal spaces of places like the pie and mash shops. They imposed a -

privatised space of family units stacked one on top of each other, in total isolation... [and] the ... effect of redevelopment was to destroy what we have called matrilocal residents. Not only was the new housing designed on the model of the nuclear family, with little provision for large low income families... but the actual pattern of distribution of the new housing tend to disperse the kinship network... (Cohen, 1981: 79).

By the early 1970s white Bethnal Green residents that remained in traditional housing found themselves squeezed between their own decrepit living conditions and a (largely bourgeois) squatting movement enjoined by a small community of Bengali seamen living in equally squalid private lodging houses. New housing, predicated on council waiting lists that had traditionally kept generations of East Enders together and was seen as the white community's post-war reward, was largely allocated on the basis of need to the fast-growing immigrant population of

⁷⁶ Pathé. "Angry scenes during East London Eviction, 1968." See - <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/VLVA52HPMYO0ZRUY0BPPUAGXFFZRM-UK-ANGRY-SCENES-DURING-EAST-LONDON-EVICTION>

Bangladeshi's.⁷⁷ This was supported by new urban modernisers within the local Labour Party. There followed what Dench (2006: xviii) called "a lengthy period of undercover class war" where white residents were "required to submit to new social rules and rulers and above all to continuing immigration" (Dench, 2017: xviii). Increasingly branded by the media as racist and supported by far-right groups, many white residents moved out of the area (largely to Essex) leaving behind a mostly poor and elderly population who were joined by new "[M]iddle class whites who did not need to compete directly with international immigrants for public resources, and so could take pleasure in their exotic culture and pride in their presence" (Dench, 2017: xviii).

This so-called 'white-flight' from the East End however, had a long history. During the early 1920s, London had continued to grow at an enormous rate. It did so increasingly outwards, pushing towards the suburbs. Inwood (2000: 708) suggests that around "...two million migrants (a third from inner London, the rest from elsewhere in Britain) settled in suburban London in the interwar years" (Inwood, 2000: 708). Even so, by the 1930s, East London was still, along with the industrial North-East of England, the most overcrowded area in the county (Inwood, 2000: 758).

Many in the capital looked longingly to the fresh air of the of the Thames estuary, historically a place of day trips for London's respectable working classes. The landscape they would have passed through on the trains to the seaside became building sites for local authorities and private investors buoyed by low interest rates and the burgeoning building societies movement. Encouraged by the extension of rail and Underground lines, a building boom between 1934 and 1938 meant that in London's eastern outer suburbs there were several huge London County Council estates with a total population of around 250,000. By 1939, Becontree in Essex had 116,000 tenants, more than the population of Ipswich or Halifax (Inwood, 2000: 718). These homes, with indoor toilets, several bedrooms and outside garden space were a huge improvement on London's decrepit slums. There was something of an ironic

⁷⁷ Between 1971 and 2001 the numbers of Bangladeshi residents in Tower Hamlets, the borough that contains Bethnal Green, rose from around 4000 to almost 66000: from 2% of the area to just over 30%. See - Young, Gavron, and Dench, 2006: 227.

Empire notion about the idea of the East London homesteader colonising the empty veldt although many of the villages that were swallowed or annexed by these newcomers took a dim view of the new populace. The working class settlers, heirs of the world's first proletariat drew on the only image available to them for an ongoing vision of this promised land. This was the bucolic, ordered middle class suburbs of the well-to-do Home Counties - an image itself largely borrowed from returning colonial administrators. It would sometimes sit uneasily with the modern and often Brutalist designs that the post-war New Town designers would envisage.

After the devastation of the Second World War London still had a “‘crude net deficiency’ of 470,00 dwellings” (Inwood, 2000: 824). New towns linked to the 1944 Greater London Plan like Harlow and Basildon were constructed through cutting-edge architectural design and planning and all the while slow, steady emigration from the East End continued across generations. Older, better-off East Enders sought out their old holiday locations to settle for their retirement. In such matrilinear cockney culture, “where ‘nan’ went the rest of the extended family often followed” (Cohen, 2013: 67, 83).

In May 1948 Lewis Silkin, the Labour Minister for New Towns nodded to Ebenezer Howard's vision of a suburban utopia suggesting that the towns would “produce a new type of citizen... healthy, self-respecting... with a sense of culture and civic pride.”⁷⁸ John Reith, the first Director of the BBC and chairman of the New Towns Committee called them “essays in civilisation” (Cowley and Palmer, 2018: 132). Many of the new residents shared the Utopian dream simultaneously with recreation of a lost East End embodied in Welfarism, education and social housing. By the 1970s however, some of the New Towns began their inexorable decline with lack of investment revealing their “marks of early malnutrition” (Cowley and Palmer, 2018: 147). The children of the original settlers began to embrace the increasing cultural and politically assertive individuality that had emerged through the 1960s blended with a largely conservative, working class cockney heritage whose culture was one of small business and ‘betterment’. Ian Dury would attest to one half of this vibrant, dual culture that was “doing very well” in songs like “Billericay Dickie” whilst Mike

⁷⁸ Silkin, Lewis, Labour. HC Deb 08 May 1946 vol. 422 col. 1072-184.

Leigh presciently satirised the *nouveau-riche* inhabitants of Romford in *Abigail's Party*. These might best be described as emergent “dual class trajectories” (Watt, Millington and Huq, 2014: 127).

Both of these portrayals drew heavily on the ‘sociology of aspiration’ (Hall 1992) and the idea of the (alleged) dealignment of social class. These evocations of the ‘new’ Essex anticipated a significant turn to the Right as detailed in the MP for Chingford, Norman Tebbit’s book, *Upwardly Mobile* that would appear a decade later. It is between these twin geographical and cultural co-ordinates that the cockney and the pie and mash shops’ future would be reinscribed.

Hand-in-hand with the re-location of cockney families to Essex was the decline in London’s traditional patterns of work. Much of London’s skilled working class started to decamp to the New Towns and automation began to replace traditional artisanal skills that had been the backbone of London’s small industries. Tailoring, furniture-making and dock work slowly died by the end of the 1970s. In *A Place to Go* (1963) Matt, the epitome of the individualist working class cockney who had worked in the docks all his life remarks, “... in the old days a job was a job, and nobody told you how or when to work... but at least it was your own life, and you was in charge of it.” The docks represented perhaps the distillation of all that might be seen to be cockney. Here was a closed community that had fascinated the bourgeois since Pierce Egan’s wanderings, “...[the] patriotic cockney and congenial crook, heroic boxer and sexual rough trade” (Cohen, 2013: 67). The docks came to symbolise what Phil Cohen (1981: 80) suggests was,

a gradual polarisation in the structure of the labour force: on the one side, the highly specialised skilled and well paid jobs associated with the new technology and the high growth sectors that employed them, on the other, the routine, dead end: low paid and unskilled jobs associated with the labour intensive sectors, especially the service industries.

Work was no longer to be found locally and employment meant travelling further. The historic connection between the artisanal London workplace and the community was lost and social solidarities inevitably dissolved. What Cohen (1981: 82) calls the

working class 'respectables' were trapped between the pull of the new, rising suburban working class, their adoption of conspicuous consumerism and the downward pull of a residual precariat clinging to the dignity of manual labour. This had a disastrous effect on the young of the East End whose living examples of work and familial cultures disappeared and were replaced by the growth of youth subcultures.

The territoriality of the East End was not just disturbed by relocation to the Essex or Kent hinterlands, however. Emigration to the (white) colonies of especially Australia and Canada continued apace after the war with many fleeing the East End for the promise of a better future.⁷⁹ In reality, this was largely the result of an official policy to source cheap labour and reinforce a white managerial class in the colonies. This crude social engineering had in actuality been happening in various forms since the seventeenth century (Coldray, 1999). Although records are imprecise, it appears that British emigration into Australasia was around 50000 in the early 1950s and grew to a peak of 80000 in 1965 (Clarke, 2004: 321). Footage of Tommy Trinder, the cockney comedian, wishing young East End orphans from Barnardo's well before they set sail for a new life in Australia is incredibly poignant given the catalogue of abuse, rape and forced labour that many were subsequently subjected to.⁸⁰

In London, the streets themselves became a site of transformed meanings. The communities that had been built around working class terraces were specific responses to issues of space and social conditions. For good or ill, people gathered outside to socialise and used the street as a kind of neutral zone - a way of maintaining the privacy (and primacy) of the home (Townsend in Moran, 2012: 172). The growth of television sales during the 1950s and 1960s meant that the pivot of the street became focussed into the living room. Similarly, the enormous growth of motor traffic meant not only that roads were widened but were becoming dangerous to children's traditional outside play. Despite updated legislation that stipulated certain roads had to be closed to traffic in the evenings, by 1971, nineteen million

⁷⁹ See - Constantine, 1998: 176-195.

⁸⁰ For this abuse see Child Migration Programmes Investigation Report, March 2018 at <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/reports-recommendations/publications/investigation/child-migration>. More than one million people left Britain for Australia alone between 1945 and 1972. In 2010, the British Prime Minister Gordon Brown formally apologised on behalf of the nation to the child migrants.

cars meant that effectively children's outside traditional play was stopped.⁸¹ The pie shops, the focus of many working class neighbourhoods, reflected this change. Many, like the Cooke's shop in Stratford who found themselves next to vast and busy roads that had brutally cut through traditional areas, simply closed. However, for some of the pie shops the redevelopment was not all bad news. Roy Arment, the owner of Arments Pie and Eel shop in South London recalls that "... we still had some of the locals but also... we had the biggest council estate in Europe [The Aylesbury Estate] on our doorstep... we were massively busy in the 1970s and 1980s..."⁸² For other pie shops, the demolitions and remodelling of the city marked the end of an era. Chris Cooke, the co-owner of what was regarded as the city's most palatial pie shop in Dalston recognised that times and demographics had changed, "A lot of our customers had moved out... they wanted to improve their standard of living ... they wanted their own house..."⁸³ The experience of relocation outside the capital, especially of those who came from the Bethnal Green slums was summed up by Betsy, Ricky's sister in *A Place To Go* (1963) who has moved to one of the Essex estates. "The house is nice really, trees all down the street and that but it's just a bit lonely ...the nearest pub is miles away ... it was all so new and shiny [but] there was nobody in it."

In *Sparrows Can't Sing* (1963) Maggie, played by Barbara Windsor, symbolically refuses to embrace the new future that has been forced on her, leaving the modern tower block (and the dependable Bert) to be reconciled with her former lover, the violent cockney sailor, Charlie. Windsor of course was a real-life pivot between the complex social solidarities of the East End's working class communities and their dark underbelly of criminality and violence. Her (alleged) relationships with the underworld and specifically her friendships with the Kray Twins are a significant acknowledgement of the duality of cockney culture. For the Krays themselves, it is their courting of fame and celebrity through a reprised, performative role as conduits

⁸¹ In 1961, Section 49 of the Road Traffic Act updated previous 'Street Play' legislation allowing local authorities to "prohibit traffic on roads to be used as playgrounds."

⁸² Roy Arment, interview by author, 11 November 2020.

⁸³ Chris Cooke, interview by author, 17 November 2020.

to the powerful that connects the ‘modernist’ cockney back to the Victorian music Hall.⁸⁴

Simultaneous to the demolitions and relocations, another process, as yet unnamed, had begun around the mid 1950s to further destabilise London’s working class districts. Slowly at first but with growing confidence, young middle class professionals began to buy and move into the “unspoilt areas of the city... where they... live[d] cheek-by-jowl with the polyglot poor” (Raban, 1974: 181-182). The process of what would become known as ‘gentrification’ was a reversal of the bourgeois exodus of inner London in the nineteenth century. Yet these were not the “slummers” that the *Weekly Echo* had attacked as ‘do-gooders’ in 1885 by living amongst the poor but young couples enacting a bourgeois *lebensraum*.⁸⁵ These ‘Nigel’s and Pamela’s’ as Raban (1974) has them, took advantage of “the political vacuum created by the decline in the heavily-directed municipal planning of the immediate postwar period (Moran, 2007: 102).” Unsurprisingly, once ensconced they formed highly effective class pressure groups. One, the Barnsbury Society in Islington, successfully lobbied to create a conservation area and redirect traffic through neighbouring working class areas. By valorising their thrift and ingenuity they created a market for ‘heritage’, lifestyle goods, fashions and cuisine, publicising their achievements in the new weekend colour supplements for whom they worked. The traditional working class residents of Islington were largely puzzled by and suspicious of the bourgeois settlers yet seemed to prefer them to the other newcomers, West Indians (Bugler, 1968 in Moran, 2007: 114).

Through this inward immigration, house prices rose steadily through the period and the gentrifiers formed the basis for the eventual property speculation on which London’s contemporary economic landscape is built. They were initially satirised as ‘Hamsptead Lefties’ by the Right and then by their own class as evidenced by Alan Bennett’s BBC radio sketch show, *On the Margins* (1966). By the time Posy Simmonds started to draw a weekly cartoon strip for the *Guardian* in 1977 these

⁸⁴ It is alleged that on the first day of filming of *Sparrow Can’t Sing*, men in the employ of the Krays threatened the cast and crew because they hadn’t been consulted nor had given ‘permission’ for the filming in the East End. See - Price, 2021.

⁸⁵ *The Weekly Echo*. 30 May 1885 in Joyce, 1996: 521.

North London gentrifiers were more complex characters. Their financial security was matched only by their liberal self-doubt and their continued, entirely symbolic inability to communicate with the Heeps, their working class neighbours. Their focus was no longer on charming period features and colourful 'locals' but on liberal multiculturalism, cultural change and globalisation. They had become a class within themselves and would eventually form the 'liberal intelligensia' of the Blairite generation, or the "chattering classes" as their entirely unembarrassed bourgeois cousins categorise them.⁸⁶

3.3 The kids are alright

From the 1950s the late-Victorian cockney began to play several simultaneous roles still referencing what Williams (1977) might define as a residual cultural formation. Periodically useful to capital in the form of a nostalgic yet insightful character, the cockney was seen as an anachronism but also as a cultural signifier against urban renewal, town planning and the growing American hegemony. The character was additionally split between the strict traditionalist family and youth rebellion of modernity. The post-war East End became (and remains), a cultural and geographic backdrop for themes relating to a waning of authority, the decline of empire, family breakdown and crime (Hebdige, 1982).

Fittingly, it was partly in the performative arena of social realism, typified by the work of the Unity Theatre and Joan Littlewood's People's Theatre, that cockney was viewed as an authentic and politically revolutionary mirror to society. The emotion of loss for an older working class London is thoughtfully examined in John Krish's *The Elephant Will Never Forget* (1954) that symbolically mourns the city's last tram ("... past the pawnbrokers and through the street markets...") whilst the awkward, conflicted and modern generation of cockney youth is portrayed in Karel Reisz's sincere, *We Are The Lambeth Boys* (1959).⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Watkins, Alan. "The Chattering Classes," *The Guardian*, November 25, 1989.

⁸⁷ In Krish's film, the fear of forgetting the old working class city is underlined by the use of a song from the Music Hall (Archie Haldane's *Riding On Top of The Car*) as a soundscape to accompany a tram journey that sentimentally crosses the Thames. The narrator subtly warns us ("the trams were theirs") that these everyday objects so central to working class life - like the eel and pie shops - are passing and we should beware.

Inevitably, the replication of the cockney character found its way onto the emergent, single channelled television, via the genial (and by the end of the series in the 1970s, geriatric) Jack Warner as *Dixon of Dock Green*. Warner was the perfect establishment cockney; loyal, conservative and inevitably, hyper-local. It was however in the contribution to popular music that the 1950s cockney was perhaps most interestingly and effectively evolved. *My Fair Lady*, a Broadway musical based on the earlier *Pygmalion*, first performed in 1956 (and made into a film of the same name in 1964) internationalised the cockney stereotype. As Dave Laing (2003: 219) points out, this reference would be reproduced by Colin MacInnes in his *Absolute Beginners* (1959) when the modernist hero, the photographer 'Blitz Baby'... refers to a London barman as speaking in an "authentic old-tyme My Fair Lady dialect" (Laing, 2003: 217).

Stedman Jones (1989: 302) rightly suggests that the "earthy freshness" of the language of the cockney was lost to American slang in this period. In the West End, the site of a new, pioneering cosmopolitanism (Panayi, 2020: 52) London's taxonic cafes and tea shops were being replaced by coffee bars resplendent with Formica and the music of Bill Hailey and Elvis Presley within a kind of "working class bohemia" (Coutts-Smith in Medhurst, 2023: 54). Whilst most of the young English pretenders like Cliff Richard and Marty Wilde imitated an American accent, Adam Faith and notably Tommy Steele sang in a voice that as MacInnes suggested was 'Young England, Half English' with a cockney inflection (Laing, 2003: 218). The sinister Teddy Boy, an emergent working class subculture built around Rock n' Roll, wore as a uniform a pastiche of the American Zoot suit, Edwardiana and violence. The Teds were largely drawn from the ranks of unskilled and distinctly *un*-modern working class youth and like their Victorian forebears from the abyss, rough, unpredictable and dangerous to know. MacInnes links them to the racial violence of Notting Hill and has his 'yobbo' talk in a reproduction of the (pre) Victorian cockney confusion of 'w's and 'v's ("So a few of ver blacks got chived. Why oll ver fuss?") (Laing, 2003: 219). The Teds were an intersection of the bourgeois moral panic around the brutality and boredom of Lewis Gilbert's post-war landscape *Cosh Boy* (1953) and a distinctly American cultural brutishness of the American teenager, prefaced in the earlier perfect criminal foil to Sergeant Dixon.

Musically, a naive melding of traditional jazz and the austerity 'make do and mend' ethos of skiffle, (that owed much to American folk music) was fused for a time by performers like Lonnie Donegan who's upbeat, comic songs borrowed heavily from the nostalgic cockney and its music hall roots. His "Rock Island Line" (1956), "Does Your Chewing Gum Lose its Flavour on the Bedpost Overnight" (1959) and "My Old Man's a Dustman" (1966) link to a lost vaudeville tradition that was still within living memory.

More than anyone perhaps it is the figure of the gay, Jewish, East End socialist Lionel Begleiter - later Lionel Bart - that perhaps typifies the performed role of the cockney in the 1950s. Already accomplished as a writer of hit pop songs for Tommy Steele and Cliff Richard, his association with the author Frank Norman resulted in the musical *Fings ain't Wot They Used T' Be* (1959), produced by Littlewood's Theatre Workshop. The show opens up a world of pimps, prostitutes and *polari* (the underground gay language) couched in a nostalgic cockney slang. The words (some of which had to be changed for causing offence) neatly condense an anti-modern, sentimental, *pastness* typified by the cockney characters.⁸⁸

They changed our local Palais into a bowling alley and
Things ain't what they used to be (chorus)...
There's Teds in drainpipe trousers and Debs in coffee houses and
Things ain't what they used to be (chorus)...
Once our beer was frothy but now its frothy coffee well
Things ain't what they used to be (chorus)...
It used to be fun Dad an old Mum paddling down old Southend
But now it ain't done...

It was succeeded by his *Oliver* (1960) which transformed Dickens' workhouse orphan and the murder of a prostitute into a jolly musical caper. In the same year,

⁸⁸ Redacted and re-written lines included "How we used to pull for them, I've got news for Wolfenden" (that referred to the 1957 Wolfenden Report which advocated tolerance on homosexuality) and more bluntly, but still correctly referencing the very real gender violence of the day, "Once in golden days of yore, ponces killed a lazy whore".

the British actress Elsa Lanchester (famous from her 1935 role as *The Bride of Frankenstein*) released her album *Cockney London* and the comedian Bernard Cribbins sang the comic ditty “Right Said Fred” about hapless cockney removal men. By 1962 the cockney, his accent and his impertinent audacity was becoming normalised. Mike Sarne implored the bored and irritated Wendy Richards to “Come Outside” and soon Ray Davies (*The Kinks*) and Pete Townsend (*The Who*) began to familiarise ‘common’ London accents.

These cultural notions nodded to at least the appearance of a complementary shift in inequality via widescale nationalisation and a Welfare State. This mirrored the profound changes in Britain from the classic liberal regime towards a ‘Buy British’, *national* economy largely encompassing both the left and the right against American and EEC (as then was) free marketeers.⁸⁹ Indeed it was the Labour Party that could be seen as “...*the* nationalist party. It put nation before class” (Edgerton, 2018: 386). From the late 1940s into the early 1970s growth averaged 2-3% of GDP per year and by the mid ‘Sixties both Labour and the Conservatives were calling for (an ultimately unrealised) 4% (Edgerton, 2018: 283).

For the working class these were decent years of post-austerity and spending; a long boom with (generally) low unemployment and high union membership.⁹⁰ It is these years, building on the ‘Britain alone’ myth that I contend forms the contemporary nostalgic memory epoch of current populism that has coalesced around the eel and pie shops. In this period, “self-sufficiency in food increased steadily but slowly... as Britons got richer and ate British food” (Edgerton, 2018: 287).

Apart from Joe Brown’s (1960) comic sung homage to the jellied eel (with lyrics inevitably by Lionel Bart) the pie shops during this period remained relatively invisible in cultural texts reflecting their anachronistic status within the emanent modern city. Still very much located in unglamorous working class districts whose Victorian high street landscape of street markets, pubs and corner shops remained largely unchanged, they continued to be part of the traditional, gendered cockney *passaggiata*. For mothers dragging children between market stalls and the kitchen

⁸⁹ See for example - Nairn, 1972: 5.

⁹⁰ In 1960, the TGWU, the largest union had one million members - *The TUC General Council, Report*, 1960 at <http://www.unionhistory.info/reports/index.php>

sink they were the site of vital and connective neighbourhood chatter. For working men, an alternative to the greasy spoon cafés and part of the pre-match football ritual. At the weekends, a take-away relief for the housewife and a post-pub sponge after the 'local' had closed. Chris Cooke, the co-owner of Cooke's pie and mash shop in Dalston, remembers a post-war "heyday" for the shops which were busy and popular.⁹¹ Joe Cooke, his nephew, recalls the 1960s as working "six days a week and two nights slogging our balls off."⁹²

The mid to late 1960s however located the cockney seemingly polarised between two worlds. Alf Garnet, the cockney bigot in the BBC sitcom *'Till Death Do Us Part* (1965-1975) was very much the product of Empire and its defensive trench in a rapidly changing world of immigration and youth revolt. Garnett, like the dock workers and the Smithfield meat porters who marched in support of Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood" speech in 1968, represented the loyal, patriotic incarnation of the earlier century. Unsettled by the decline of imperial power and uprooted from their traditional territory and notions of racial supremacy by the forces of modernity, they provided the foot soldiers of an ascendent Right's economic and cultural counter-revolution against the gains of the Welfare State and (allegedly) faltering egalitarianism.⁹³

Yet concomitantly, the 'Sixties also located the cockney within an arena of working class cultural dynamism primarily through its youth. The roots of this lay in several places. Firstly, we might uncover it in the growing acceptance of the idea of the 'people's war'. This, as we have seen, grew from the desperate scramble of the elite's valorisation in 1940 of a one-nation 'ordinariness' in which the cockney played the starring role as a metaphor for the entire British working class. Secondly, the cultural shift engendered by the Angry Young Men's portrayal of changing class landscapes became something of a bulwark against the reassertion of the literary (and political) values of the Establishment. This prepared the way for 'authentically' working class cultural actors during the more radical 1960s. Lastly, the post-war

⁹¹ Chris Cooke. Interview by author, 17 November 2020.

⁹² Joe Cooke. Interview by author, 25 November 2020.

⁹³ Powell, a member of neo-liberal Mont Pelerin Society and the Institute of Economic Affairs had, along with the Chancellor of the Exchequer Peter Thorneycroft and his Treasury colleague, Nigel Birch resigned from government in 1959 in protest at plans for increased government expenditure in a move widely seen as one of the first articulations of 'monetarism' linking economic and political freedoms that would provide the cornerstone for the ideology of the later Thatcher governments.

cockney was clearly not immune to the attendant narrative of Americanisation and consumerism nor to the burgeoning siren call of 'youth culture'. Like their northern cousins (epitomised by Alan Sillitoe's Arthur Seaton in his *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, 1960), the young cockney saw little value in hard manual labour but hankered for an individual and more personal expression of 'style'.

The son of a Billingsgate porter and a char-woman, Michael Caine (originally Maurice Micklewhite) epitomised this ebullience. Along with David Bailey (the child of East London tailors) and Terrance Stamp from Bow whose father was a tugboat stoker, some fortunate young working class people found themselves at the heart of a new cultural formation that would last perhaps until the 1980s. However, they also remained between two worlds: wealthy but "a synonym for a working class jack-the-lad... and so sustained the 1950s representation of a cynical but *contained* [my italics] male rebelliousness" (Dodd and Dodd in Strinati, Dominic and Wagg, 2004: 125).

For most young cockneys however, not much had - or would - change. The doomed romance of Del, a mod from Stratford and Irene the daughter of an imprisoned armed robber, flowers when they flee to the countryside in *Bronco Bullfrog* (1969) only for them to return to their personal and class fate of drudgery and the new grey Brutalist concrete. The physical and cultural relocation of the cockney would lead Georgia Brown and Lionel Bart (both critically, Jewish 'East Enders') to ask, in a *schmaltz-laden* piece, *Who are the cockneys now?* (1968).

Norman Cohen's curiously unsentimental, *The London that nobody knows* (1967) showed a city increasingly distanced from itself. The film, edged by a haunting early electronica soundtrack excavates a forgotten city that is in sharp contrast to the 'Swinging' Sixties. The camera pans across Islington's Chapel Market and enters Manze's eel and pie shop, a gloomy, forgotten space that competes with the film's documentation of meth-drinkers and Victorian architectural oddities. Inside, we see a succession of elderly Londoners. They are wrapped in caps, scarves and grimy overcoats cheerfully eating pie, mash and bowls of eels in a dingy interior as if in a time-warp: a 'tribe' forgotten. As well they have been - relevant only within a nascent blooming of 'heritage' amongst the young early gentrifiers of the area and wealthy

flaneurs of the city's inner reaches. The only nod to the decade is a young Caribbean girl struggling to manoeuvre her knife and fork amidst the debris of a pre-cut pie and potato.

We get another rare celluloid glimpse, for all of four or five seconds of a pie and mash shop in the saccharine Peter Sellers vehicle, *The Optimists of Nine Elms* (1973) that is repurposed as a generic café.⁹⁴ The film is remarkable only for the texture of the shocking urban deprivation around the edge lands of the Thames that it reveals, the music of Lionel Bart and the hackneyed trope of Seller's faded music hall star.

David Furnham's extraordinary and forgotten documentary *Noted Eel and Pie Houses* (1975) opens to the mournful strains of an old pub piano and later introduces an elderly cockney chanteuse singing the Georgian ballad "Betty Brill". The film, the only dedicated audio-visual record of the shops up to this era, catches them in one of the first waves of their post-war decline. The film gives a sense of observing a living Victoriana. Initially focussing on the Cooke's family eel and pie shop in Broadway Market, the film surveys an almost derelict street and the adjacent rubbish-filled canal to the strains of a barrel organ. The squalor encapsulated the era's (so-called and contested) *Declinist* narrative; the strike-ridden, Sterling Crisis landscape of unrest and decay that 'inevitably' led to the economic redemption of Thatcherism.⁹⁵

Although Mary Cooke is shown dishing out pies in a very busy shop, one of her sons, Bob, merrily gutting eels in a stall outside laments, "You go down on a Tuesday and you see ten stalls where before there was a hundred."⁹⁶ The family matriarch, Lily Cooke, 91 at the time of recording, remembers a very different era when her father, drumming up business for his eels "... used to shout to a packed market, 'everyone a bright eye and silver belly' ... and you never hear that now".

⁹⁴ The shop featured is the long-closed Maggy Brown's Pie and Mash Shop on Battersea High Street, yet Seller's character clearly but incongruously purchases newspaper-wrapped fish and chips for the hungry siblings in his charge further reinforcing perhaps the untranslatability of pie and mash to the general audience.

⁹⁵ For a thorough reinterpretation of the historiography of post-war Britain and the ascendancy of the neoliberal narrative see - Tomlinson, 2016: 76-99.

⁹⁶In fact, records seem to indicate that even during the busiest period of the market - the 1940s and 1950s, there were only ever licenses for up to 69 stalls granted at one time.

Much of the area's urban decay stemmed from the demolition and subsequent emigration of traditional Victorian housing residents that bordered Broadway Market's south side. Fred Cooke, co-owner of the family's shop in Dalston presciently remarked "I should imagine it won't be many years before they [the pie shops] disappear because you've got Chinese, takeaway meals, Kentucky Fried Chicken and that's replacing them."

The first glimpses of the Neoliberal ascendancy that would come to epitomise the next incarnation of the cockney would be Bob Hoskins' portrayal of Harold Shand, the undisputed king of the capital's underworld in *The Long Good Friday* (1979). Self-described as "a businessman with a sense of history and also a Londoner", Shand is attempting to redevelop his idealised childhood stomping-ground, the now derelict Docklands, with the help of crooked local politicians ("the Corporation") and the New York Mafia. Shand is the embodiment not only of the coster writ large but also of his post-imperialist delusion. Hoskins portrays a different cockney in *Mona Lisa* (1986). Here he is George, a tough ex-con recently released from prison who is forced to drive for a high-class call girl. In the opening scenes, his cockney significantly registers surprise at how multiracial his traditional neighbourhood has become in his absence ("where did all this lot come from?"). Yet it is as an enduring moral signpost that makes his cockney significant. Interrupting his charge Simone whilst she is with an upper class customer he offers, "Put yer clothes on. Make yourself respectable..." It is within that charged phrasing that he is offered as the reprised historical cockney; a character of 'ordinary', dependable decency.

A gentler characterisation of the 'lovable cockney rogue' still selling from market pitches but with a more realistic sub-plot of the inevitable working class proscription to poverty is found in the BBC comedy series, *Only Fools and Horses* (1981). The lead character, 'Del-Boy' Trotter is one of a long line of bourgeois-viewed characters seen through the prism of malapropism and cultural confusion from earlier cockney stereotypes like the ventriloquised voice of Richard Whiteing's *Mr Sprouts* (1868). Trotter is redeemed however from the worst excesses of Thatcher's children by his warmth and humanity: still a simultaneous cockney trope.

Created in opposition to *Coronation Street*, ITV's long-running drama of northern working class life, *Eastenders* (1985) followed on from an earlier and forgotten BBC attempt to reflect the now disappeared cockney communality and territoriality of Soho, *Market in Honey Lane* (1967). *Eastenders* was on some level simply a revised cultural text, the latest manifestation of the malleable cockney character. It reproduced the politically expedient valorisation of the much simplified 1940s cockney and, according to the producers, attempted to encapsulate the East End in the phrase, "hurt one of us and you hurt us all" (Smith, 2005: 11). Despite valiant nods to themes of race, sexuality and gentrification (often portrayed in the style of social realist dramas of the 1970s), *Eastenders* took as its starting point the palimpsestic cockney identity, "... that invented past for the actual past, so the future look[ed] nostalgic" (Edgerton, 2018: 386).⁹⁷

Indeed, the early years of the Thatcher government were characterised, especially in advertising, by the accommodation of nostalgic working class cultural tropes utilised synchronously with an appeal to aspiration and social mobility. This was evidenced in the adaption by the BMP agency in 1979 of the 'cockney rock' music hall of Chas n' Dave into an advertising campaign for Courage beer ("Gertcha"). These campaigns, (along with the less successful George, the lager-drinking cockney bear) and those that dealt with American, blue-collar 1950s memories, (for example, Levi jeans) were examples of what Svetlana Boym (2001) has called a 'reflective nostalgia' that "engages in antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths ... build[ing] on the sense of loss of community and cohesion and offer[ing] a comforting collective script for individual longing" (Boym, 2001: 31-32). Antithetical to this cultural position was a rare and entirely authentic post-punk feminist homage to both cockney and pie and mash from the forgotten all-girl band, The Gym Slips. Their 1983 single *Pie and Mash* celebrates visits to (the now closed) Georges' pie shop in Canning Town. The song recounts their ritual enacted "every Saturday" where you would "... collect your spoon and fork/ shovel it

⁹⁷ After the first episode of *EastEnders*, BBC Breakfast garnered reactions to the show in an East End pub. Significantly one of the interviews suggested positively that "...it's not the usual cliché of pie and mash". Breakfast Time, BBC1, 20 February 1985.
<https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/a7f6ea355fc094a70fd0ba25a192b401>

down, no time to talk.” The song, a B-side to their *Big Sister* proudly chants that “Pie and mash is working class!”

Working class or not, the Thatcher project however (along with the simultaneous New Right Reaganite propaganda across the Atlantic) appealed to some “people who feared they no longer recognised the Britain that they had grown up in” (Blackwell and Seabrook, 1986: 153). It offered the battered and temporally confused working classes a national reconstruction of imperial greatness couched in the language of a Victorian domestic stability described by Hoggart. By utilising working class symbols like the decent, industrious and patriotic cockney, the Thatcher project simultaneously stole Labour’s appeal to workers and closed down the future with a capitalist realism that prefigured Francis Fukuyama (1992) by more than a decade.

3.4 The Unmodern

From the late 1970s onwards, the image of a heroic, wartime British proletariat had started to disappear from cultural texts and the white working class were, as Leon Hunt (1998) attests, increasingly identified with unmodernity. Yet this identification did not come from the working classes themselves. As Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite (2018) has suggested, what “‘ordinary people’ meant when they talked about class” had started to change significantly in this period and that shift directly related to the cockney constituents of the pie and mash shops and the process of the reformation of their identities during the next thirty years.

For the pie and mash constituents, the 1970s were a period of relative plenty. As Michael Collins (2004: 205) suggests, his working class Southwark family were emblematic of such class gains. “People were getting more things now - filling out their homes with new carpets or new sofas... dimmer switches, knotty-pine wallpaper, a bar in the corner and L-shaped Campari red leatherette sofa.” For Paul Kelly, his father’s pie shop in Bethnal Green was symbolic of a simple good life where people “... had a few bob [and the shop] ...was like the hub of the

community... the queue used to be 30 or 40 people.”⁹⁸ Similarly, Melanie McGrath (2018) recounts an interview about two branches of a different pie shop (also Kelly’s) on the Roman Road. “In the seventies it was so, so busy: three people working behind the counter, three continually making pies, two people baking and four people washing up’. And there’s yet more to do at the branch number 600.”

From the angry young man of the 1950s to Caine’s cockney hero as outlaw in *Get Carter* (1971), London’s working classes had become observers of, and participants in, a process of increasing and overt individualisation. With the end of conscription, greater access to education, growing consumerism, secularisation and, via the New Left, the ‘self-realisations’ of gender parity, many saw an era of greater equality. It was captured by a distinct culture of a post-war generation where “‘youth’ itself became a metaphor for social change” (Hall in Barker, 1978: 285).

In a sense, the 1970s were defined by and through this new working class cultural experience. Texts from the period portray a vigorous populism: mass entertainment, especially television comedy, took aim at privilege and pomposity and, for the first time valorised working class characters.⁹⁹ So-called ‘low-culture’ from football to seedy sex comedies reflected proletarian visibility; popular music and fashion reflected working class (sometimes even androgenous) heroes.¹⁰⁰ Yet this success was no revolutionary moment, rather a gate-crashing of the perceived fruits of capital. Its dependence on the Fordist peak spelt its inevitable end and the start of a counter reaction from the Right.

During this period, cockney as a one-dimensional music hall caricature and prop to authority had begun to wane. Its dance with modernity and youth I contend, bestowed the identity with multiple valences and in a sense, the increasing choices of a new generation. One could choose to be a cockney by attitude, by race, heritage or simply by location; but even this was now open to negotiation, largely the result of

⁹⁸ Paul Kelly, co-owner of Kelly’s Pie Shop, Debden. Interview by author, 15 December 2020.

⁹⁹ Television ‘situation comedies’ paved the way for this trend. *Steptoe and Son*, BBC TV 1962-1974, *The Likely Lads* BBC TV 1964-1966 (reprised as *Whatever Happened to the Likely Lads* BBC TV 1973-1974), *Porridge* (BBC TV 1974-1977), *Rising Damp* (ITV 1974-1978) and *Till Death Do Us Part* (BBC TV 1965-1975) are prime examples.

¹⁰⁰ See - Simonelli, 2012.

displacement, gentrification and mass immigration. This 'mobility' of identity echoes Robert Hewison (1988: 7) who comments that increasingly, "moral choices were now a matter of taste, and the collapse of a general system of accepted moral values culture acquired greater importance as a guide to political choice."

Some neighbourhoods like the Isle of Dogs would remain solidly white and firmly closed to outsiders for at least another decade but other cockney heartlands like Bethnal Green saw an influx of Asians. As Monica Ali (2003: 208-209, 92) would write two decades later of the area's changing motifs and cockney's racial structures,

In between the Bangladeshi restaurants were little shops that sold clothes and bags and trinkets... I'm talking about the clash between Western values and our own... the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one's own identity and heritage.

For Paul Kelly, "... the Asian immigration changed a lot of the landscapes of the [eel and pie] shops ... thus you weren't getting people shopping down the market...[and coming to his father's pie shop]" - but you were already seeing cockneys in curry houses.¹⁰¹

Hackney, previously the site of mass Jewish immigration, was now extraordinarily multicultural but especially Afro-Caribbean. The reggae rhythms (like the Blues before them) adopted by punk bands like The Clash and John Lydon would form the musical and cultural backing for a culture of anti-racism and cultural mixing that is the basis of a contemporary and hybrid London working class culture. Jimmy Pursey's Sham 69 articulated a harder edge to London working class life with songs like the semi-comic "Sunday Morning Nightmare" (1978) but it was songs like "The cockney kids are innocent" (1978) which attracted a problematic right-wing following that led eventually to the bands demise. The Cockney Rejects and other Oi! bands were less embarrassed by their "white proletarian masculinity" and their songs

¹⁰¹ In terms of food and constituency, Londoners are more likely to indulge in food from the "imaginary landscape' of former colonies of the British empire that have significant numbers of white settlers. This is the imaginary of the (post) colonial white British." Savage, Mike, David Wright, and Modesto Gayo-Cal 2010: 612.

attacked traditional cockney targets of the age - “hippies and the race relations industry” (Laing, 1985: 112). It is in the figure and music of Ian Dury however that the multi-valent cockney identity in this period reached its apotheosis. The son of a bus driver, Dury studied painting before evoking a music hall tradition that fused a cockney and punk ethos. His use of cockney speech, idiom and characters (“Clever Trevor” and “Plaistow Pam”) not only illustrate a modern, self-critical cockney but also the wider territoriality of the identity whose “...‘imagined’ centre” was shifting eastwards” (Newland, 2008: 151).

Despite the retrospective ascription of chaos in both culture and politics by the right to the 1970s, the New Economics Foundation found that 1976, in terms of national economic, social and environmental well-being was the best year since 1950 (Shah, Hetan and Marks in Beckett, 2009: 3). Class however had certainly not disappeared. If this was the era of ‘Workerism’, it was also the era that the reactionary Middle Class Association (1974) was formed.¹⁰² This was an organisation set up by a Conservative MP, John Gorst and the Ulster Unionist Captain Lawrence Orr that sought to represent the “persecuted, vilified and sneered-at ... minority of managers and the self-employed” (Bechhofer and Elliot, 1978: 57). After less than a year however it descended into a far-right pressure group and disbanded. Yet, the fear of working class gains fed an increasing notion of economic Declinism within the elites that echoed the Victorian and Edwardian cultural and racially inflected fear of Degeneration.

This powerful and melancholy trope was aided by hegemonic messaging from an ascendent New Right through The Monday Club and The Centre for Policy Studies. In 1974, Keith Joseph, a disciple of Friedrich Hayek and Monetarism, gave a speech in Edgbaston where he suggested that the “human stock” was threatened by the over-breeding of the poor and their chaotic lives.¹⁰³ This image coincided with both widescale employment changes and economic insecurity brought about by rapid

¹⁰² For Workerism, see - Edgerton, 2018: 408. For the Middle Class Association, see - Bechhofer, and Elliott, 1978: 57-88. For wider middle class campaigns of the era see - King and Nugent, 1979.

¹⁰³ <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/§document/101830>.

For more on Joseph, his “home-made casualties” and the transmission of deprivation between generations, see - Welshman, 2006: 107-126.

deindustrialisation and globalization.¹⁰⁴ There was further, as Emily Robinson *et al* (2017: 268-304) suggest, a growing frustration across society at the slowing trajectory of people gaining control of their own lives. Modernist solutions - and the 'experts' behind them that had scattered working class communities - were increasingly seen as failures.

For the traditional cockney, disillusionment with the largely unaccountable and remote forms of Wilson's technocratic government had perhaps chimed with deep artisanal roots within their own radical Enlightenment heritage. More, it spoke to their suspicion of bureaucratic and 'corrupt' local labour authorities and traditional politics in general.¹⁰⁵ The death-knell of technocratic modernism was the acceptance of an IMF loan in 1976 by a Labour Party bereft of new solutions within 'The Marketplace of Ideas' that opened a new consensus dominated by the Right. This intersected with a general paranoia around conspiracy, corruption and 'shadowy elites' that characterised the decade (Wheen, 2010).

Unlike the multi-valent and youthful cockney of the parallel popular culture, the traditional cockney formulation was increasingly used in mainstream texts of the period in the form of a nostalgic proletarian masculinism. The television film *Regan* (1974) opens to an East End pub full of grotesques singing the Marie Lloyd music hall song "My Old Man" before an undercover police officer from the Flying Squad ('The Sweeney') is abducted and murdered by East End gangsters.¹⁰⁶ Regan, the 'avenging copper', is thwarted by 'rules and regulations' in his pursuit of the villains. He is a moral cockney figure, but now, congruent with British Noir (and American Western tradition), he doesn't play by the conventional, discredited rules of the establishment 'do-gooders'. This theme of the so-called 'dishonesty' of liberal elites was a key narrative in this period of what Schwarz (1996: 65-67) calls the 're-

¹⁰⁴ The decline of London's manufacturing base in this period was shockingly rapid. In 1961, Greater London had a manufacturing workforce of 1.6 million. By 1974 this had shrunk to 900,000. See - Inwood, 1998: 895.

None of these issues were necessarily unique to Britain. The long post-war boom of capitalist economies was coming to an end and growth was slowing. It was not specifically that Britain was slowing down, rather than the rest of the world was catching up. See the arguments in Edgerton, 2018.

¹⁰⁵ For housing corruption in Hackney, see - Wright, 2009. For a revision of the corruption narrative of Labour leaders, especially with reference to housing issues, see - Griffiths, 2019.

¹⁰⁶ The Sweeney is itself a cockney slang for the fictional pie house murderer Sweeney Todd.

racialization of England'. Robinson *et al* (2017: 297-298) place race relation legislation squarely within the contexts of the critical intersection of the rise of popular individualism. They trace this law-making framed through state planning and consumer rights complete with "whole new professions of race experts and advisors... within *market relations* [my emphasis]... and equality of opportunity." The resentment that this sowed amongst the white working class, fanned by a hostile right-wing press, was allied to growing disillusionment with the framing of the Welfare State itself. If welfare had come "wrapped in the Union Jack" for a London working class that had been made 'white' only a century before, the identities it defined were being "marshalled... in ways that challenged the multicultural narrative of the social democratic project" (Hall in Robinson *et al*, 2017; 297). These narratives of compulsion were also antithetical to the increasingly every-day negotiations between traditional communities that, although problematic, were organic. For the Right in the 1970s and 1980s, the idea of 'unfairness' and 'white victimhood' picked up a key thread of Powellism and became a way to court the white working classes via a contract that would eventually re-categorise them again as largely 'unmodern'.¹⁰⁷

An antipathy to these state-imposed racial narratives was also to be found in the 1970s in what would become known as 'Thatcherism'. Whilst Margaret Thatcher blamed societal decline and the 'crisis of authority' in the 1960s on a Keynesian social democratic state that enabled permissiveness and profligacy, her austere monetarism was simultaneously and fortuitously (partially) congruent to the generational aspirations of a working class, consumer-led individualism enacted within the cockney identity. It (again fortuitously) chimed with a long dissatisfaction with traditional Labourism among some conservative sections of the London working class that it saw as largely remote and antithetical to its nascent entrepreneurialism but also the failure of a corporatist Labour Party to offer solutions to a state in crisis. The adoption of an 'authoritarian populism' allowed Thatcher to condense multifaceted popular discontents and channel them through an increasingly right-wing state. In this way, the project managed to construct a 'historical bloc' of contradictory forces - a reactionary, nationalist section of the white working class, an

¹⁰⁷ See the arguments of - Hewitt, 2005 and Rhodes, 2010: 77-99.

entrepreneurial, managerial petit bourgeois and older elites - that remains largely intact.¹⁰⁸

Fundamentally, the Thatcher project was about creating a new 'common sense' that simultaneously transformed the basis of British capitalism by colonising the past with what Stuart Hall (1988) categorised as a "regressive modernisation." Thatcherism sought to reconfigure (specifically English) memory to "erase the melancholy of a dead empire and to address the fears, the anxieties [and] the lost identities of a people."¹⁰⁹ As Hall suggests, it did this through simple imagery: the stiff upper lip, the Dunkirk Spirit - 'the Good Old Days' - all of which could be regained, though sacrifice, from the opium sleep of the degenerate post-war settlement. With the lack of an alternative mainstream narrative, the possibilities of a wholesale generational renewal of cockney receded and an older identity, reprised through comic caricatures like the self-employed East End plasterer 'Loadsamoney' (an updated version of the jingoistic Victorian, 'Arry from *Punch*) began to proliferate.¹¹⁰

The Thatcher project further re-valued the notion of class from an economic to a *moral* position and thereby, as Hall noted early on, constructed "an enemy within". This pitched the 'trade union bully boys' against, amongst others, the 'hard working cockney sparrers' so that eventually, "on council estates, a freshly painted front door and a copy of the *Sun* in the letterbox was a signal of Thatcher's achievements in remaking the Conservative party" (Clarke, 2004: 400). Cockney was, once more largely a nostalgic scaffold linking rulers to ruled. The pie shop, it's food, history and the lives it contained were now again congruent to a hegemonic message of a rediscovered Victoriana as a marker of stability and propriety in a changing working class landscape. The contemporary reimagining of the eel and pie shops as a totem of a lost white, working class London are firmly anchored within this nostalgic haunting.

¹⁰⁸ For a contestation of the exactitudes of this formulation of Stuart Hall's 'Authoritarian Populism', see - Jessop, Bonnett, Bromley, and Ling, 1984: 147.

¹⁰⁹ Hall, Stuart. "*Gramsci and Us*". <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2448-stuart-hall-gramsci-and-us>

¹¹⁰ 'Loadsamoney', the thuggish cockney plasterer who made a fortune from renovating and gentrifying homes for the middle classes was the product of the comedian Harry Enfield from around 1984. See - Biressi and Nunn, 2013: 32-37.

This trend however was not entirely linear. If mainstream texts were congruent to a regressive Victorian cockney, the conversations on inner-city streets of London were starting to sound different. In 1985, David Emmanuel, a black South London DJ who performed as 'Smiley Culture', recorded "Cockney Translation", a song that spoke to another valence of the identity - a more-or-less successful hybrid racial mingling. The song, largely in Jamaican patois (literally) translated the experience of black Londoners who were by now melding with a younger generation of cockneys and adding another cultural layer.

When New Labour came to power it largely accepted the parameters of the neoliberal state seeking only to blunt its sharpest edges.¹¹¹ However, central to its polity was the notion that struggle was now based, via what became known as Late Modernity, around culture not class.¹¹² Correspondingly, the Blair administration adopted a language of "aspiration... [that] attempted to exploit the fissures in the working class that had emerged under Thatcherism" (Jones, 2011: 91). It instituted a programme of cultural reconstruction to reabsorb what it saw as an incorrigible, recidivous white 'underclass' hooked on a 'dependency culture' into a modern, globalised, multicultural modernity. It did this by challenging the notions of welfare on which a racialized proletariat had been incorporated into the nation targeting "the white working class poor as symbols of a 'backwardness' and specifically a culturally burdensome whiteness" (Haylett, 2001: 351). According to New Labour, now associated with an increasingly professionalised political class, 'ordinariness' was no longer to be found in the stoic cockney of the 1940s but rather in a construction of middle class values (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst, 2001). According to Owen Jones (2011: 102), now that class had been superseded, "multiculturalism became the only recognized platform in the struggle for equality."

In this way, Blair's Labour Party forced the white working class "to think of themselves as a new ethnic group... [and refused] to acknowledge anything about [them] as legitimately cultural [which led to]... "a composite loss of respect on all fronts: economic, political and social" (Jones, 2011: 102). More, it ignored not only

¹¹¹ When asked her greatest achievement, Thatcher replied, "Tony Blair and New Labour. We forced our opponents to change their minds." Burns, Connor. 11 April 2008 - <https://conservativehome.blogs.com/centreright/2008/04/making-history.html>

¹¹² See - Giddens, 1990.

the heritage of very real residual racism in some London working class communities but also an organic, 'deep multiculturalism' - an unofficial assimilation, experienced and "negotiated" on a daily basis by the capital's inevitably mixed communities and the successful anti-racism of the previous decade, embedded in popular music and wider working class culture.¹¹³ It also stoked working class resentment by its "advocacy of immigrants and formerly marginal cultural groups... [which became the] ... moral justification of a layer of cheap labour and enforced entrepreneurialism" (Winlow, Hall and Treadwell, 2017: 70).

Through bureaucratic distance, an increasingly powerful 'liberal' commentariat and a 'fickle parent' style of governance, New Labour issued cultural and moral diktats that took aim at the working class gains of the 1970s.¹¹⁴ It demarcated the whiteness of the middle classes from those classified as 'chavs' or 'dirty' whites contaminated by violence and poverty within their zoned, concrete estates. One of the main arenas of this cultural demonisation was around the working class body and the traditional foods it consumed. I will deal with this notion, as a form of memory, in the following chapter.

Conclusion

The cockney, and his allied signifier the eel and pie shop, is the historical outcome of an intersectionality of identities. This ongoing dialectic is the result both of the interplay between an internal group identification and the categorisation of others; between an emergent nineteenth century working class, its indivisible bourgeoisie partner and modernity.

The identity that categorised the cockney who emerged from the Blitz rubble to stumble, jive, twist and then pogo into the 1970s, simultaneously forgotten and remembered, was not merely palimpsestic in a linear sense but rather the result of

¹¹³ For "negotiation" see - Back, 2017.

The re-written and imposed narrative of New Labour also ignored the very real anti-racism gains of the 1970s and 1980s that revolved around campaigns in music like Rock Against Racism, Red Wedge and the anti-racist / anti-fascist work of East End Trades Unionists like Micky Fenn - see - Fekete, Liz, 2016: 55–60.

¹¹⁴ For the 'fickle parent' argument see - Winlow, Hall, and Treadwell, 2017.

multiple junctures of memory and identity traces. In this way cockney, by the mid-twentieth century, consisted of (amongst many others) mediaeval notions of urbanity, eighteenth century assumptions around developing petit-bourgeois ascendancy, nineteenth century Irish immigrant entrepreneurial anti-authoritarianism and late Victorian propaganda around race and empire.

However, within a framework of mid-twentieth century modernity, the cockney began to play several simultaneous roles. It remained periodically useful to capital as a largely reactionary and patriotic force through which was channelled opposition to American consumerism and the expanding EEC. More, in defence of its Welfarist gains, adjacent to the forces of decolonialisation and amidst mass immigration, the cockney was used to bolster the colonial frontier that “came ‘home’” (Schwarz, 1996: 73) via Powellism. Additionally, however, the cockney developed multiple internal valances around the expanding horizons of choice and individuality via an expanding popular modernity. These were linked largely to its changing age demographic which were partly antithetical to its traditional role, again altering the course of the notion of ‘ordinariness’ within British society.

By the late 1970s cockney continued to embrace a vigorous low-cultured populism but simultaneously began to embody a more moneyed, conservative upwardly mobile element, birthed of a nascent proletarian entrepreneurialism which was valorised and subsequently liberated as politically expedient by forces of the Right, both elements held within dual class trajectories.

These contradictions, I suggest, highlighted by the neo-liberal ascendancy, provoked an increasing internal instability: a confusion around the changing physical and cultural loci for the cockney that accelerated its Great Trek eastwards towards Essex. Here, a simultaneous, adjacent but declining culture had been incubating. Originally birthed within the pioneering, progressive optimism of the Labourist New Towns this enjoined within the precarious memory forms of the new settlers to create a simulacra of what used to be ‘jellied eel London’ (Sinclair, 2004: 58).

Synchronously, within the active crucible of a modernising capital, cockneys changing territoriality, migratory composition, linguistics and transformed meanings

were central to the formation and experience of a new, composite and parallel identity. This was a stratified, multi-layered, modern cockney, increasingly racially mixed and as much contained within a structure of feeling or looser group identifications of cultural signifiers, as the traditional tropes of geography and occupation. These signifiers might be palimpsestic layerings of half-remembered music hall pub songs, a dropped 'h' to the fading "chalky villains, swollen knuckles, liver spots, back from a seven in Parkhurst" (Sinclair, 2004: 37).

As Calvino (1997: 14) had it, "[A]s this wave of memories flows in, the city soaks it up like a sponge and expands." The eel and pie shops, as a unique historical text, inscribed and re-inscribed with these ebbs and flows reflect a cockney whose London and its 'imagined centre' now points eastwards but whose history reminds us of its complicated past.

4. Tastes and spaces of resistance

Introduction

In the almost complete absence of any significant contemporary body of literature surrounding the workings and wider significances of the eel, pie and mash shops, I employ, in the first half of this chapter, a sensory ethnography utilising a ‘democracy of the senses’ (Rhys-Taylor, 2020: 6) to examine the sights, sounds and smells of the F. Cooke’s eel, pie and mash shop in Hoxton. The research was carried out during the autumn of 2019 but is additionally informed by years of work and visits to this and more than thirty eel, pie and mash shops over the last decade or more. Cooke’s is one of the last surviving London shops, its owner a direct descendant of one of the earliest Irish migrant dynasties that dominated the trade from the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Sensory ethnography is a phenomenological methodology that is influenced and guided by the senses, perceptions and experience. It is an emergent research field at whose heart is a growing interest in “new forms of ethnographic knowing and routes into other people's experiences” (Pink, 2015: 187).

I explore the space of the shop as a unique site of a hyperlocal, performative territory of working class culture that through ritual and the ‘secret habits of the home’ are zones of resistance to the modern neo-liberal city “from a stubborn past” (De Certeau, 1998). I suggest that these rituals are mythologised, signified and coded through the senses and the sedimentation of gestures. These remain unwritten but are, I suggest, part of the ‘true archives’ of the city (De Certeau, Giard and Mayo, 1998) that link hospitality, conviviality and memory within and upon the bodies of the customers (Connerton, 1989).

I examine the cuisine of the shops, the ingredients, the preparation and unique serving methods linking them to sensual “generous and familiar” ‘foods of necessity’ (Bourdieu, 1984). I consider the food’s unique historical significance within the British

working class diet using both historical reportage, contemporary theory (Bourdieu, 1984; Douglas, 2003) and examples from popular modernity. I place the food, especially the eel, in historical and cultural context and additionally within contemporary notions of disgust (Falk, 1991; Lupton, 1996) relevant to a changing and problematically memorialised habitus that surrounds them.

I use the sense of smell to conduct an olfactory and sensory history of London's proletarian sensibilities, poverty and memory which, in addition to parallel, embodied gesture, "brings the past into the present" (Serematakis, 1994). I further use the sense of smell to examine changing ideas of cleanliness, so vital to the culture of the historical shops.

The second half of the chapter situates the work within a theoretical framework that examines the significance of the shop, its food and memorialisations within a wider context of a changed and nostalgic working class identity. I examine how the food is an arena "for that most ubiquitous signifiers of class", the performance of respectability (Skeggs, 1997: 1), but also of a particular 'working classness', subtly delineated from the refinements of bourgeois dining and manners as 'microresistances' (DeCerteau, 1998). These I suggest may point to changes in how the contemporary working class may perceive itself (Bellah, 1985; Maffesoli, 1998) around a conflicted cockney identity leading to an inter-class contestation. Finally, I explore how pie, mash and especially eels by their class contestations are a crucial insight into why class tastes have not wholly declined with modernity as Stephen Mennell (1985) has previously suggested but rather, as Beverley Skeggs (2004) notes, are subtle, changeable and subject to a process of constant production.

4.1 Resistances from a stubborn past

It's lunchtime. In the market, people move rhythmically, meandering between stalls selling fruit and vegetables in colourful bowls, cheap winter coats and catchpenny cutlery. The greasy spoon café is filling up and several people wait in soft rain for complicated coffee orders at a mobile barista. A small queue of three elderly women has formed outside the pie and mash shop. One has a tartan shopping trolley and is having some difficulty negotiating the small step at the entrance.

F. Cooke is a former bank refitted in 1987 and owned by Joe Cooke and his wife Kim. Joe is the fourth generation of Cookes to sell pie and mash and grew up with his brother in the family's pie shop (now closed) in Broadway Market, several miles to the east which opened in 1900. The Hoxton shop has Victorian inspired green signage and a glass front with windows inscribed in gold type advertising "jellied eels, tea, coffee, mash, pie mash, fruit pie, ice-cream, cold drinks".¹¹⁵

The space inside is cavernous; high ceilings with white walls lined with white and green tiles. Rows of plain iron and wooden communal benches sit beneath heavy marble tables. There is a scattering of sawdust in the floor. The long counter to the right stretches across the whole of the width of the shop and leads to the kitchen at the back from where food is carried in to be served. The space is utilitarian: clean, bright, functional and unfussy. The movement of the food through to the serving area is linear, fast and efficient. Pies are carried from the kitchen in steel baking trays and emptied, still in their piping hot individual pie cases into a lidded, hinged metal receptacle under the counter ready to be plated by hand. The mash and liquor are brought from the kitchen as needed and emptied from steel buckets into antique heated urns on a ledge that overlooks the street. Cooked eels are brought to the plate when required from the kitchen.

As one enters, one is surrounded by noise and bustle: the clatter of plates, the clack of cutlery. These create a wall of echoing noise that competes with shouted orders and chatter and laughter. There is heat and the room smells of warmth, hot ovens, baking, pastry and because of the drizzle outside, very slightly of damp clothes. There is a constant flow of people coming in, ordering at the counter, being served, sitting, eating and leaving. There are multiple, overlapping conversations. In the far corner an infant is being fed with a mixture of mashed potato and liquor. By the wall, a man devours a pie covered in white pepper and vinegar. Another has a bowl of eels in liquor that he swirls around his mouth indulgently sucking at the flesh. He

¹¹⁵ For a visual comparison to an earlier historical taxon that echoes the plate glass, see - "The Betting Interest, its origins", *The Sporting Life*, 30 May 1861: 1.

uses his spoon to spit out the bones back onto the plate underneath. In another corner, a waitress stacks and clears empty plates and wipes down a table.

This is a transactional space full of action. On the one hand it is "...a social world, taking part in a play of sociability within the confines of the marketplace" (Erickson, 2007: 22), on another it is I contend, a unique and living archaeology of an early industrial feeding station caught and ossified in the transition to modernity where habits, rituals and preferences have inscribed upon and within the body.

There is a sense that the food served here could *only* be served here, the space inimical to the gustatory offering. This is, to paraphrase Marx's notion of 'species being', a place where the historical and contemporary socially constructed cockney body is being fed; an "entity in the process of becoming" (Schilling, 2012: 24).¹¹⁶ Here the (cockney) body is a nexus of class and modernity; the food a negotiation between the worker and the owner. The shop is the interstitial space of that negotiation.

The eel, pie and mash shop and the food it serves might also be defined by what it is not. Based on the specificity of its menu and the nature of its temporality it is neither restaurant nor a café. The eel, pie and mash shop is not a place for daydreaming where time is measured in Prufrock's coffee spoons nor the 'layabout' cafés that Quentin Crisp (1981: 33) remembered where "you would sit through lunch, tea and supper without ordering anything more than one cup of coffee..." In very clear terms, "You're meant to queue up, get it [the food], find an empty table ... hopefully if you're a good shop that chair's still warm ... eat it as quick as you possibly can and fuck off..."¹¹⁷

London's dwindling pie shops are almost what Ray Oldenburg (1999) calls a *Third Place*. These are social spaces that are not 'home' (first space) nor work (second place). Third places - like barbershops for example, are sites that anchor communities through informal ties that stimulate and nurture broader social

¹¹⁶ Shilling refers to Marx's notion from *The German Ideology* (1846) that the full potential of the body as a biological *and* social entity could only be realised in a future communist society.

¹¹⁷ Greg Camp, joint owner of T.J. Kelly, Debden. Interview by author, 5 October 2021.

convivialities. They are “public place[s] that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work (Oldenburg, 1999: 16). Anna Marie Steigmann (2017: 46) also suggests that within late capitalism “retail and gastronomic facilities” have blurred distinctions between private and public life. Accordingly working class spaces are arenas that have become “important symbols in postmodern life.” These are spaces where different social classes may meet, and entry isn’t based necessarily on social capital - a place where people might “rub elbows” (Rosenbaum in Steigmann, 2017: 47). In some respects, because of the gentrification of places like Hoxton Market and its surrounds this is increasingly true.

Rainer Kazig (2012) suggests that in all of these type of businesses, the owners often exhibit the behaviours of a host and create an atmosphere where everyone feels at home.

The old lady at the door, a regular for many years, is still having trouble getting her shopping basket over the threshold. “Come on in love” shouts Joe from the kitchen, “we don’t bite.”

The eel, pie and mash shops have become semi-secret spaces where only locals may tread. These are territories that in a sense cannot be seen from the “normal globalised street”: where locals, or “ordinary practitioners” make use of spaces that are only semi-visible (De Certeau, 1988: 93). The pie and mash shop in this sense becomes a sort of secular *eruv* - a Jewish tradition where an outside space is temporarily and ritually redefined as part of the home. This religious loophole is usually made by natural or man-made boundaries and is sanctified by the sharing of food that merges the spaces. Within this space, ‘home-like’ behaviour is tolerated, and, in that sense, the shops bridge a space that exists between “the public world of the market and the private world of the home and family” (Erickson, 2007: 22).

Historically, the early eel, pie and mash shop, as a response to working class hunger around the capitalist temporality of labour, sat between the home and workplace. As Hoggart (1957: 35) has it, “‘home cooking’ is always better than any other... café food is almost always adulterated ...” Yet of course, ‘home’ cooking often wasn’t an option for some of the shops’ original customer base. As we have already seen, working class Londoners were often forced to eat away from where they slept either

because of work pressures or lack of cooking facilities. The 1911 Census of England and Wales showed that in London, Finsbury, Shoreditch, Bethnal Green and Stepney were all areas where a third or more of the population were living two or three in a room, while in Southwark, Holborn and St Pancras just over a quarter lived in overcrowded conditions (Oddy, 1971: 265). Unsurprisingly then, as Maude Pember Reeves (1914: 103) recounts, in similar areas, “The Lambeth woman has no joy in cooking for its own sake. The eating of food then was therefore seldom a social occasion and, in terms of diet, “the limited consumption of animal foods indicated their uses in working class diet as a vehicle for consuming larger amounts of carbohydrate foods.” Meat, in Benjamin Rowntree’s (1913: 308) words, was often “a flavouring rather than a substantial course.” That said, “potatoes are an invariable item. Greens may go, butter may go, meat may diminish almost to vanishing point, before potatoes are affected” (Reeves, 1914: 98). Yet, “a good deal of pastry consumed. Some housewives make nearly half the flour into pastry, ... It is usually regarded by the worker as more satisfying than bread; and it saves butter” (Rowntree, 1913: 39).

Inevitably, by the turn of the nineteenth century, the food offerings of the eel, pie and mash shops reflected these basic tastes (largely jettisoning additions like pea soup and baked potatoes for example) and seem to have settled for easily available and cheap ingredients in a simplified meal that in some sense mirrored the food of ‘home’.¹¹⁸ The ‘homeliness’ of the shops was a result of an intimacy that nodded to notions of bourgeois hegemonic ‘respectability’ but represented a ‘sensual’ food pleasure - a food that was warm and filling, eaten in the spirit of the “generous and the familiar” (Bourdieu, 1984: 179). Indeed, in 1938 *Picture Post* quoted a customer in an eel-pie shop in Lambeth honestly remarking that the plain food was “... something that fills you and after all, that’s the chief thing.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ In an interview with Graham Poole from Manze’s he explained that “we stopped doing that (soup) just after the Second World War because that was a meal in itself ... we still make it at home as a family... you get a marrowbone, cook all the marrow out, add the split peas and handfuls of mincemeat. It was almost like a ragu – so by the time they’d had that, customers wouldn’t want pies.” Graham Poole. Interview by author, 14 December 2020.

¹¹⁹ Barber, Ada. “Life in the Lambeth Walk”, *Picture Post*, 31 December 1938: 47-53.

These spaces were not ‘posh’ (an adjective that encompasses an entire gamut of ‘non-working classness’) but because of their origins they contain within them negotiations with a bourgeois respectability where we “speak and act against our feelings and ... control our passions” (Finkelstein, 1989: 130). They are also places where in the words of the “Lambeth Walk”, you might (within limits) “do as you darn well pleasey”. Here, people might additionally indulge in the ‘secret’ habits of the home. People might eat with spoons; they may slurp their tea - laugh and eat with their mouths open. These are zones of *de facto* working class rules and respectability that have organically formed within these spaces. Indeed, within living memory people spat eel bones on the floor and smoked at the table.¹²⁰

Although the less sanitary eating habits may have disappeared, the performative element within this ‘cockney eruvim’ means that people (especially men) appear to become *more* cockney here. Once temporarily freed from the strictures of the globalised city (and perhaps more so in the new out-of-London pie shop locations like Essex, the Kent coast and Norfolk to where the London diaspora has emigrated), one may experience an over-emphasised, almost caricatured behaviour, ironically mirroring the original music hall creation of the character. This is particularly noticeable within a demographic of the post-war generation of the 1950s and 1960s (a generation largely, although not entirely, responsive to Thatcherite and subsequent Brexit messaging). This over-emphasised behaviour is evidenced by men gruffly ‘bowling’ and ‘strutting’ in from the street and affecting a slang dialect where they might exaggeratedly drop their ‘h’s or replace the ‘th’ sound for an ‘f’ sound.¹²¹ They become, as Paul Kelly reports of many that come to his shop in Debden, Essex, “more ‘London than London’... they hear the stories... that’s how things should be, pie and mash, West Ham. That’s what they aspire to be and that’s how they portray themselves.”¹²² Prescient here is Marcel Mauss’ seminal essay, *Les Techniques du Corps* (1934) that showed how societal membership meant that people use their bodies in situation-appropriate activities like walking, sitting, eating

¹²⁰ Rita Arment. Interview by author, 20 November 2019. Rita, now in her 90s recalled people spitting eel bones onto the floor into the 1950s.

¹²¹ For the cockney ‘bowl’ see - Kersh, [1938] 2007: 38. “... the swagger of the Cockney costermonger, the indomitable fruit-vendor, tougher than leather, more indestructible than the stones of the City...”

¹²² Paul, Kelly joint owner of T.J. Kelly, Debden. Interview by author, 15 December 2020.

and marching. The food served within this TARDIS-like space is a sensory and gustatory conduit for this behaviour: a foci for an increasingly re-imagined city and a temporal and spatial anchor for a projection of a past identity.¹²³

In this way the meal, as Margaret Visser (1991) contends is multi-faceted, simultaneously a social interaction, a commercial transaction and in some cases, a form of art. Within the space of the contemporary eel, pie and mash shop, staff and customers appear to collaborate (self-consciously or otherwise) in a thoroughly post-modern performance where they bring together these elements together. For the eel, pie and mash shops, these foods and behaviours are according to Michel De Certeau (1988: 133, 141) like “resistances” to the planned city “from a stubborn past.”

4.2 No mate, this is a pie shop...

A young, fashionably dressed man with a fashionably dressed beard who has been queueing behind the elderly women comes to the counter and asks Julie, one of the staff, what kind of pies are served. Joe Cooke, on his way out from the kitchen and, wiping his hands on a tea-towel simply but politely answers, for her. “Meat” he says and then almost as an afterthought, “but we can do you a vegetarian one.”

The man’s eyes look upward to the (limited) menu on the wall in front of him. He sees:

1 LARGE PIE & MASH 4.50; 1 SMALL PIE & MASH 3.90; 2 LARGE PIE & MASH £7.60; 2 SMALL PIES & MASH 6.40; VEGAN PIE AND MASH £3.40; SMALL EELS & MASH £4.90; LARGE EELS & MASH £8.30; JELLIED EELS £3.50.¹²⁴

¹²³ TARDIS is a reference to a time machine and spacecraft in the BBC television series *Dr Who*. I use it to signify an expansive and expanding internal space that defies logic where a whole re-imagined world of the past is performed and glorified.

¹²⁴ This menu echoes Malvery’s description of an East End eel shop. “The windows of these places were generally placarded with printed slips which conveyed the information that hot stewed eels were to be obtained at *3d.*, *2d.*, and *1d.*, a basin”. See - Malvery, 1908: 74.

“Do you do anything else?” he asks. “No mate” says Joe plainly still wiping his hands, “this is a pie shop”. With that, the man turns and, without another word, leaves. The space and the food remain untranslated for those who are not local in the geographic and cultural sense. Within this cockney *eruv*, there is a “... collective convention, unwritten but legible to all dwellers through the codes of language and of behaviour...” (DeCerteau, 1988: 16). Behaving in a certain way is expected. De Certeau calls these “miniscule repressions”, and they are I suggest, a code for hyper-local and hyper-situated behaviours.

The next customer is another young man but one whose paint-splattered overalls suggest that he might work locally, perhaps renovating one of the many ex-council properties that have found their way onto the open market and are being traded for huge profit.¹²⁵ Clearly a regular, he orders in a code that few outsiders would understand. “Two and two and a coke please love.”¹²⁶ Kim, who has taken his order shouts to the kitchen for more pies to be brought out of the oven.

This insider language is reminiscent of that used in an earlier taxon of working class eateries at the turn of the twentieth century. Olive Malvery, the Anglo-Indian investigative journalist writing about working class life, reports that whilst working undercover in a cheap coffee house, customers would order from her in similar terms:

- Now then miss, ‘arf of thick, three doorsteps, and a two-eyed steak”
- Rasher an’ two, three and a pint”
- Large tea, two slices and a neg, my dear (Malvery, 1906: 152)

¹²⁵ The so-called ‘Right to Buy Scheme’ was a cornerstone of Conservative government policy in the 1980s. By the end of the 1970s, almost one in three homes were owned by the state. The policy subsequently forced the remaining council rents to rise to cope with a shortfall and contributed to some working class families leaving the area completely. The current market rates for ex-council houses around areas like Hoxton are prohibitive and even small properties now occupied by gentrifiers are exorbitantly priced. The situation has created much anger and resentment amongst the remnants of ‘traditional’ communities that either still cling-on in (very) diminished social housing or come back to the market and the pie shop to reminisce.

¹²⁶ The figures simply refer to the number of pies and servings of mash potato: two pies and two helpings of mash.

Now, mashed potato is brought from the kitchen in a steel bucket. The potatoes are usually *Maris Piper* that are boiled and mashed in huge pots without the addition of either salt or butter. “It’s plain and honest” Kim tells me. Crucially, it is *never* scooped onto the plate with the help of an ice-cream scoop as some pie shops use, rather it is *smear*ed and *scrap*ed over the side of the plate. “Joe’s mother taught me (how to do it) ... you stand your mash up on the plate... its tradition... it’s my way or no way...”¹²⁷ This performative culinary exceptionality is, for regular customers part of the attraction. The anticipation of “seeing them smarm the potato on the plate on the pie and what I’d call rubbery pastry and the liquor... you wouldn’t dream of doing it in your own home...”¹²⁸

These repetitive ‘movements’, these ‘ways of doing things’, these ‘gestures’ are a living ethnographic archaeology that links generations together. For De Certeau (1988: 141) they are “... the true archives of the city” and are the “bricolage” of a palimpsestic cockney identity “that Lévi-Strauss recognised in myths.” They are echoed in the way that Joe Cooke still bones out his own meat bought from Smithfield; in the way that he mixes the pastry, the way that he moulds (“podding”) pastry pie tops onto filled pie tins. They recollect the worldview of Bourdieu’s (1984:173-174) old cabinetmaker: “... the use of his language and choice of clothing are fully present in his ethic of scrupulous, impeccable craftsmanship and in the aesthetic of work for work’s sake which leads him to measure the beauty of his products by the care and patience that have gone into them.”

With deft, practised hands, Kim empties two pies from their scalding tins onto a heavy, white china plate and, with a wooden spoon, scrapes two piles of mashed potato onto the side. With a ladle she spoons a liberal amount of liquor from a steel urn over the entire plate. She leans back and grabs the customer a tin of Coke from the shelf behind her. She takes his money, proffers his plate as he walks further down the counter to collect his cutlery.

¹²⁷ Kim Cooke. Interview by author, 2 December 2020.

¹²⁸ Eileen Errol. Interview by author, 22 October 2021.

The meal “brings diverse factors together... [and] in doing this, no one factor, not even nutrition or attentive experience to the food, is the [whole] point of a meal” (John, 2014: 258). According to Mary Douglas, the mid-century British anthropologist, pie and mash is an anomaly. Douglas, sought to classify working class meals within a set of rules by delineating their serving order and ingredients. The working class cooked meal - a ‘proper’ meal - with a centre piece of meat, fish or eggs must, according to Douglas’ research, be served with a carbohydrate like potato from below the ground. This is usually accompanied by another (green) vegetable from above ground like peas, beans, brussels sprouts, cabbage or broccoli. Gravy is the “essential but last ingredient of the meal, the element which links the other components together to form a plateful (Douglas, 1975: 273). No addition of cold foods like jellied eels are accepted on or with the plate. Additionally, meat and fish cannot be mixed so that meat pies and (hot eels) should not exist simultaneously.

The role of gravy is substituted for liquor in the shops as a sort of false green vegetable. Liquor is a simple sauce that contains fresh parsley and historically (although generally no longer because the shops do not keep fresh eels) the juice from the boiled eels. Douglas suggests that in working class households, if these dietary ‘rules’ aren’t followed, disharmony will result. Yet eels, pie and mash are an example of a London gustatory exceptionality that additionally defies eating times for main meals. Indeed, the food is still eaten for breakfast, lunch and evening meal further revealing its historical roots as fuel for workers.

The young man in overalls reaches noisily inside a plastic tray to collect his cutlery as the cash register crashingly rattles shut. He slides into an available bench and shuffles along to make room for others, nodding to his near neighbour - a stranger - in an unspoken yet meaningful micro-conversation of mutual recognition and acknowledgement of spatiality. This simple movement speaks to the heritage of communal eating. Once painfully associated with soup kitchens or the workhouse, the contemporary pie and mash shop excavates a pre- or early- capitalist “conviviality that sweeps away reticence and restraint” (Bourdieu, 1988: 179). A place where “those who choose to eat together tacitly recognise their fellow eaters as saliently equal” (Korsmeyer, 2002; 200). Falk (1994: 25, 20) suggests that

although “the role of the meal as a collective community-constituting ritual has been marginalized”, this kind of space-sharing signals “the incorporation of the partaker into the community simultaneously defining his/her particular “place” within it. The contemporary eel, pie and mash shop is, by definition a negotiation between a premodern “eating-community” and a modern individualised space: between what Pasi Falk (1994: 20) suggests is an “open” and “closed” body that is both “eating into one’s body/self and being eaten into the community.” In that sense, the shops are a kind of living tableau of older London solidarities that in some senses pre-date the restaurant form completely.

After delivering a tray of hot pies to the serving area, Joe Cooke has emerged from behind the counter with a large mug of tea inscribed with the words ‘salaam alaikum’. He jokingly shouts over to a woman who is a regular customer sitting eating with a friend, “You back again? I thought we banned you...” Several heads turn and there is a general murmur of laughter. Joe squeezes onto a bench next to another man with an exaggerated movement and a comic expression of pain and enters into a conversation that starts with him enquiring about the health of the customer’s mother.

These interactions are as much genuine conversation with frequent customers as they are what Anne Marie Steigemann (2017: 49) refers to as “alibi practices” that allow for small talk with people that are known or not yet known. These “... small social life worlds are created ... through ... social practices on a very local level, yet each life world is always linked to broader national and global levels.” Specifically, “the on-site practices link the global (e.g., sold products - in this case the food) with the national (e.g., the legal framework) and the local level (e.g., the business ethos) ...” (Steigemann, 2017: 49).

Karen, the shop girl weaves in and out of the tables, delivering a mug of tea that has been ordered and picking up a fallen fork from the floor. The pie shop seems to run like a machine: no-one runs, no-one bumps into each other; everyone knows the rules that have been passed down through families within this hyper-local community. There is an almost *performative geography* - a sort of dual *dance* of service and of customers. Steigemann (2017: 50) suggests that there is a kind of

“business ballet” where staff ‘dance’ for the audience who wait to be entertained or served. This almost echoes June Jacobs’ (1961) “intricate city side-walk ballet”: the pie and mash shop as an interiorised fossil of the faded coster markets.

The customers and owners have their own unwritten rules and unspoken regulations to which outsiders are not party. There is a “consensus - a tacit understanding between consumer and shopkeeper” (De Certeau, 1988: 20-21). These are the rituals for ordering, the recognition of regulars and the *structure* of exchange. These, especially in the pie and mash shops, signal to both a theatre and performance that recall the late nineteenth century music hall. This echoes Erving Goffman’s (1949) notion of ‘front’ and ‘backstage’ behaviour where the ‘self’ is a performed, if collaborative, character. This approach is reproduced in Philip Crang (1994: 696) writing of his work as a waiter on the English south coast where the *context* (my italics) of interaction “was...’located’ through a range of meanings of there and here, presences and absences.”

London’s eel pie and mash shops are, however, a unique type of space. They can be seen as a version of Oldenburg’s ‘third place’ yet they are additionally arenas where “... rather intimate practices, such as touching, shouting or teasing, along with other practice that are considered to belong to rather private social settings, such as hugging, child-caring and nursing... create a different type of sociability” (Steigmann, 2017: 53). Although the shops are primarily businesses, it is their heritage of ‘working classness’ that delineates them as uncommon. These are spaces, hidden in plain sight, where generations of the same family still visit and the continuities of the family dynasties of their owners provide a unique backdrop to working class family life. Indeed, the shops, by their warm, intimate welcome to regulars are in some senses linked to the distillation of the physicality of the lost Bakhtian carnivalesque of an earlier London. This embodied closeness and affection may mean that “[m]oving in or through a given place, the body imports its own emplaced past into its present experience (Casey in Feld, 1996: 93). Simply put, people eat where they are comfortable and, within the communities that use the eel, pie and mash shops that is largely based in memory. These ‘embodied’ memories become part of our habitual physical movements as well as part of particular environments (Pink and Mackley, 2014). It is to that bodily memory I shall turn shortly.

4.3 Too heavy to steal

As two o'clock approaches, the flow of customers has begun to lessen but is still steady. An elderly man shuffles onto a bench and places his plate, replete with a single serving of pie and mash, onto one of the distinctive marble tables that look like "slabs of old streaky bacon" (Sommerfield, [1936] 2010: 163). When Olive Malvery takes a temporary job in an eel-pie shop in Lower Marsh in Lambeth at the turn of the century, she describes the shop's interior in an exceedingly rare piece of reportage.

... the shop was furnished somewhat after the manner of an ordinary coffee-house with a number of pew-like compartments, each containing a small wooden table flanked with benches. The shop, however, was more bare; and the fittings and appointments were poor and scanty. Tablecloths were superfluous luxuries, and the eel stew and pies were served in basins on the bare tables. (Malvery, 1908: 74)

Gerald Kersh in his *The Angel and the Cuckoo* ([1966] 2011: 57) recalls the remnants of these furnishings, still common to various taxons of cheap London eating places in the Edwardian city and now much prized by the remaining eel and pie houses. "There were tables of cast-iron frames and marble tops, such as used to be favoured by the keepers of poor men's eating houses because they were too heavy to steal, required no cloths, showed no dirt, and might be wiped with the corner of an apron." The benches themselves are wooden, iron and old. They *look* simultaneously antique and Italian which is of little surprise given the immigrant experience of those that came to work in London's burgeoning catering trade in the second half of the nineteenth century. Graham Poole, one of the brothers descended from Michael Mansi, who now runs the Manze shops in London and Essex, recalled a visit to Italy on holiday.

... last year we were walking round a market in Florence, and we went past a shop, and it was Tower Bridge Road to a spit. They weren't selling pies but

Italian food - but it had the marble tables, the benches the mirrors, the sawdust... it was all the same...¹²⁹

in

Not all of the pie and mash shops evoke a *fin de siècle*, Italianate style. The Castle's shop in Camden dates from 1934 but at some point, in the early 1970s it was re-decorated with plastic, orange seating and a Formica counter. Although this would no longer be considered a 'classic' pie shop by purists, the styling nods to the utilitarian outlook of working class space that often attempts a pastiche of bourgeois fashion of the time. The (now closed) Cooke's shop on Kingsland High Street epitomised for example, the late Victorian aesthetic with stained glass and ornate mirrors. The (now also closed) Manze's shop in Walthamstow was resplendent with a pressed tin ceiling. Newer shops, (mostly in Essex or the London suburbs) or recently renovated shops like Harrington's in Tooting have re-interpreted their look to match a contemporary zeitgeist of bare brick walls and industrial lighting.

The pensioner stills himself in front of his plate of food and picks up his cutlery. Instead of a knife and fork, he has chosen a fork and a spoon. This, according to Joe Cooke, is a tradition across all traditional eel, pie and mash shops although few people seem to know from where it originates. Some suggest that it stems from a shortage of metal during World War One, others that knives were discouraged for use in the shops for fear of stabbings (although their use in other working class eateries would suggest that this was not the case). That said, the echo of criminality was reflected in the writings of Malverry (1906: 165-166) who recorded at the turn of the century that "[I]f they were to eat in, the customers were given knives and forks inscribed with 'stolen from Mrs A'. This chimes with the recollections of Rita Arment, ninety at the time of interview, who remembered some pie shops did indeed have their names stamped on cutlery to deter pilfering.¹³⁰ From a utilitarian point of view, it seems likely that the spoon is simply a remnant, first of eel-eating - a vehicle to convey the fish to the mouth and a temporary receptacle to discard its bones back to

¹²⁹ Graham Poole. Interview by author, 14 December 2020.

¹³⁰ Arment, Rita. Interview by author, 20 November 2020.

the bowl - and secondly a relic of the almost-forgotten dish of soup that some shops historically sold.¹³¹

Fully equipped with his cutlery of choice, the man turns over the pie on his plate so that the crust is facing downwards and pauses.¹³² Anticipating. This "... brief ritual prayer is a striking deferral of eating by very hungry people" (Eileen, 2014: 258). He smothers the entire dish in vinegar from a bottle on the table and dissects. As the spoon enters the pie, there is a puff of steam, and the man takes a second to breathe deeply.¹³³ An aroma of pastry and meat and ovens and heat and consolation and family and pleasure is cut by the vinegary tang. The man breathes it all in and starts to shovel. The meal is bland and unseasoned and comforting: it has a 'pre-globalization' smell and has all the madeleine-esque connotations of childhood that may likely be understood fully only by those that were weaned on this culinary (allegedly) 'uninspiring' fuel. The man smiles. He is at home and surrounded by the sensory bouquet of his past.

4.4 The lower classes smell

'What's wrong with the East End anyway?' she demanded as they walked along...

Sure, it smells. It smells of public houses and marketplaces and fried-fish shops. I love the smell of fried-fish shops, don't you? Come and have some chips. (La Bern, [1945] 2015: 153)

Although Georg Simmel ([1907] 1997: 119) saw the sense of smell among the 'lower senses', he suggested that "they penetrate so to speak in a gaseous form into our

¹³¹ Arment, Rita. Interview by author, 20 November 2020. Arment remembered that during the Second War, her mother-in-law buying meat bones to make a hearty broth that was sold in the shop. In a story in *Picture Post Magazine* from 1938 a poster in a pie shop clearly advertises pea soup as a main dish. See - Barber, Ada. "Life in the Lambeth Walk", *Picture Post*, 31 December 1938: 47-53.

¹³² This seems to be an odd but reasonably common affectation (along with some customers' preference for burnt pies) for which I can find no reason except perhaps a sensory preference for soaking the thicker upper crust in liquor for longer and making it softer.

¹³³ Some customers douse the entire plate of food in plain, non-brewed condiment vinegar (sometimes chilli vinegar) others use it only to season a cut-open pie. Often (white) pepper is additionally added to the food. These are traditionally the only condiments that are offered. Some customers 'open' their pie from the crust, others from the base. Some prefer - ask for and receive - pies that are blackened (slightly burnt).

most sensory inner being.” It was significantly for Marcel Proust not only the taste of the madeleine that evoked memories for Charles but also its aroma.¹³⁴ Indeed, the senses of taste and smell are interrelated in a ‘synesthetic’ dance and in this I use the word, following David Sutton (2001: 312), to define a unity of senses that work together to evoke something larger.

The sense of smell has long been associated with notions of moral probity and as a judgement on social rank (Largey and Watson, 1972; Low, 2005). As George Orwell ([1937] 1975: 112) ironically had it, “... the real secret of class distinction in the West [is that] ... *The lower classes smell.*”

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Henry Mayhew described the ‘smell’ of the working class that was the imprint of labour on the body and the olfactory residue of the herring that poor Londoners ate in huge quantities. These were doubtless the aromas that surrounded at least some of the customer base of the early taxons of the eel-pie shops that mingled with the warm, doughy breath of the baking ovens. The smell from bodies that knew hard manual labour and the warmth of sustenance.

The East end of London itself of course had for centuries been the site of polluting and foul-smelling industries situated far from the genteel western seats of power and influence. Dickens highlighted this nascent threat, neatly condensing the bourgeois fear of the vapours of the poor, their work and ultimately their humanity in a speech in 1851 when he suggested that “The air from Gin Lane will be carried, when the wind is easterly into Mayfair” (Fielding, 1960: 128). The wealthy were able to escape from the East wind: a situation that only recent gentrification in London has to some extent alleviated (Heblich, Trew and Zylberberg, 2021). During the nineteenth century, these progressive middle class migrations from the source of their wealth meant that on a very basic level, the olfactory textures of the city were no longer shared across classes and the sensual codes of common taste, still visible in Hogarth’s illustrations, were broken. Whereas once gentlemen like Egan’s Jerry Hawthorn might have eaten a street pie, his descendants would likely not have crossed the class threshold into a pie *shop*. The pie itself, its smell and taste, would

¹³⁴ In Proust’s drafts, the madeleine started life as toast and then *biscotto*. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/oct/19/proust-madeleine-cakes-started-as-toast-in-search-of-lost-time-manuscripts-reveal>. See - Proust, 2015 (the edition contains Proust’s early drafts).

still be enjoyed in different circumstances by different classes marked by an aesthetic delineation of taste and proximity: a culinary nod to a romanticised 'Olde England' but not one to be shared with the residuum. The working class pie, their arenas of sale and consumption were now zones of corruption and defilement.

At the start of the twentieth century, the East End still literally smelt of poverty. As John Sommerfield had it in his *May Day* ([1936] 2010:30), it was "... [a] zone of smells - stale cooking and wet washing, cats, old clothes, sweat and urine, the odoriferous motifs in a symphony of poverty." In James Curtis' *They Drive by Night* ([1938] 2008: 36) an inter-war London caff, certainly a historic taxon of the eel, pie and mash shop, is described in comparable olfactory terms: "Sweaty bodies, an open coke fire, cheap clothes drying from the rain, coarse, dirty fat used for frying eggs. Why, the joint smelt exactly like a cheap kip house." During the Second World War, the air-raid shelter was a salon of smells. In Robert Poole's *E1* ([1961] 2012: 169) Pinkie rankles at the suggestion she should sleep in one. "With everybody eating fish and chips and scratching all the time? No thank you."

In his *The Spiv and the Architect, Unruly Life in Postwar London* (2010: 3), Richard Hornsey describes the incongruity of the malodorous, fetid, almost unofficial working class side-street cafés that lingered as a response to the city's devastation. These were increasingly at odds with the post-war "collective moral project ... to (re)construct [London's] social stability." The cafes were seen as largely 'unsavoury' by the authorities: they had been hang-outs for spivs and black marketeers and were as disreputable as the mobile coffee stalls that they competed with. They were contrasted with the now almost 'staid' image of the eel and pie shop. Although inevitably catering to different sections of the London working class, the shops remained, largely I believe due to dynastic control, primarily a family-friendly space that sold hygienic and hearty food. The 'caff' spaces were delineated as much by the smell of the food as of the customer. Now extinct, some of these cafes mutated into the mid-century modernism of the Formica milk and coffee bars, early high street competition for the pie shops, that in turn have largely disappeared.

We might only conjecture what an historical eel pie shop, or more precisely what their customers, smelt like but the shops were always, and continue to be, judged by their (neo-Victorian) propriety that was partly dependent on cleanliness. The shops certainly smelt of the changing patina of London working class life. They smelt of the food and the people and their complex lives but were also the repositories of subtler aromas. Up until perhaps the 1970s, there would have been a definitive scent of smoke, smog-damp and coal fires. Personal hygiene has certainly changed in the last fifty years and weekly baths in working class homes or public baths have been replaced by daily showers and indoor plumbing. Men's clothing, from cheap gabardine to de-mob suits, worn until frayed or kept for Sunday best were always imbued with tobacco memories. Now the streets of inner London are more likely to be suffused with the spicy tang of curry houses, the spiky, oily piquancy of numerous fried chicken shops and the sickly-sweet stench of e-cigarettes.

Today, the Cooke's shop smells of baking, warmth and contemporary working class domesticity; a subtle whiff of pine disinfectant, a customer's slightly too-strong perfume and vaping residue on someone's coat. There is a nippy piquancy of vinegar that competes with an aroma of meaty gravy and an indistinct but definite grassy odour of the chopped parsley that goes into the liquor. There is none of the greasy smell of fried bacon from the market café opposite nor the slightly burnt hazelnut notes of the artisanal coffee shop a few doors down: commonplace, strong smells. The perfume of Cooke's is more nuanced and less familiar to the uninitiated, yet the pie shops are part of a long olfactory history of classed spaces within the city and the general consensus within epidemiology and the sociology of food is that class differences are still clear enough and that they flow from particular orientations grounded in possession of resources (Atkinson and Deeming, 2015). As Graham Poole, the heir to the Manze shops recalled.

My earliest memory as a toddler is opening the door to the kitchens at Tower Bridge and the smell that would come up... and I can still go into the shops now and I can still smell... it's just a lovely smell... it just reminds me of my

life... I've known nothing else... I've known no other constant in my life except the pie shop.¹³⁵

As Deborah Lupton (1996: 124) suggests, these sensoria and sensibilities are points through which “disparate cultural histories, and the bodies carrying them *potentially* converge” but the pie shops remain almost exclusively white and working class spaces, hyper-local and defended by opaque traditions and what might be seen as boring, plain food with the addition of exotic eel. Only so much of the modern world bleeds into the pie shops and the past is always near the surface.

The lunch-rush in Cooke's is over but people are still ordering pie and mash. Kim shouts to the kitchen to enquire if there's enough mash left. She does this in an indecipherable argot that is another ancient cockney *cant* known as 'back-slang'. Originally mentioned by Mayhew in 1851 it was definitively charted by John Hotten in his *A Dictionary of Modern Slang, Cant and Vulgar Words* (1860). The language utilises a simple reversal of letters in a word to frustrate the uninitiated. Although rare, back slang remained alive in (especially) London butchers' shops until perhaps the 1980s. It is now, as far as I am aware almost completely extinct outside of the Cooke's family shop.

Two teenage girls from one of the local estates, sit together on a bench, robotically scrolling through their smartphones whilst simultaneously spooning food into their mouths. Their colourful acrylic nails clack in a measured staccato that is echoed by their spoons cutting through their lunch. Although side by side, they ignore each other, their historical, human gestures in stark contrast to their rhythmic response to modern technology. These embodied, almost instinctive movements are sensual memories, not fixed as mere repetitive behaviours, but are a “transformation that brings the past into the present as a natal event” (Serematakis, 1994: 6). In a parallel of Edward Casey's (in Feld, 1996: 93) suggestion that “[M]oving in or through a given place, the body imports its own emplaced past into its present existence”, the digital messaging, the temporality of the immediate past relayed through technology, is

¹³⁵ Graham Poole owner of Manze's Pie Shop, Tower Bridge Road. Interview by author, 14 December 2020.

simultaneous with the corporeality of the experience of growing up eating this iconic food and the way in which one does so. These concurrent habitual movements, the modern and the traditional, are - or become part of - particular environments, “[T]hus, our experiences of place - and its social, physical and intangible components - are inextricable from the invocation, creation and reinvestment of memories” (Pink, 2015: 44). These memories are triggered by a “world filled with smells, textures, sights, sounds and tastes” (Stoller in Serematakis, 1994: 119).

As the teenagers are finishing their pies, Kelly, the shop girl brings a bowl of jellied eels to an elderly customer who has sat patiently at an adjoining table. Another woman and her friend who clearly know the man comments “I don’t how you can eat that mate... oooh, no...” and visibly shudders.

Turning, the man smiles and salutes them with a spoon full of quavering fish and aspic, grey in the afternoon light.

“Lovely” he says. “You dunno wha’s good fer ya...”

4.5 The Eel and the East Ender

Hunger is the best sauce in the world. (Cervantes)

Although the pie has immense gustatory and cultural significance for London’s working classes it was the eel that had been the staple of their food.

Eels had been caught for centuries in the Thames either by line or by eel-bucks (wicker baskets thrown across whole sections of the river), yet it was only in 1922 when Johannes Schmidt’s paper on ‘The Breeding Places of the Eel’ was read at the Royal Society in London that it was finally and definitively proved where and how this mysterious and secretive creature spawned (Fort, 2003: 209,103). As their immense popularity had mirrored the growth of London, local eels had eventually to be supplanted by imports. According to the Victorian naturalist, Frank Buckland (in Fort, 2003: 212), it was the Dutch that had largely controlled this lucrative trade. Eels were brought up the Thames in great quantities by eel *schuyts* from the Netherlands and

these were commended for helping feed London during the Great Fire of London 1666. Although their eels were seen by some as inferior to the domestic variety, the British government rewarded them by Act of Parliament in 1699 granting exclusive rights to sell eels from their barges on the Thames thus bypassing the notorious middlemen at the fish market in Billingsgate.

Malvery (1908: 74), writing of a turn-of-the-century eel-pie shop for *Pearson's Magazine*, describes the process of buying eels from the Dutch. As she recounts – “Nell says ‘We’ll git ‘em on the *Dutchman*...’ She hails a boat at the river’s edge and is conveyed to a Dutch boat at moorings ‘under the very shadow of London Bridge.’” From the bottom of the flat - but carefully perforated boat, Dutch crewmen use a wicker basket to weigh the eels from the hold. She takes twenty-eight pounds of eels “all alive” The two eel boats she visits “may constantly be seen lying off Billingsgate”.

According to Katsumi Tsukamoto and Mari Kuroki (2014: 7-8), the decree to allow the Dutch to sell directly to Londoners was in place until 1938 “when the last remaining barges packed up and left due to declining trade.”

If, by the mid-nineteenth century, the itinerant pie-man was becoming a rarity, eel sellers were not. David Badham, a Victorian curate writing in the book *Ancient and Modern Fish Tattle* (1854: 383) notes:

London from one end to the other, teems and steams with eels ... turn where you will and ‘hot eels’ are everywhere smoking away ... and this too at so low a rate, that for one halfpenny a man of the million ... may fill his stomach with six or seven long pieces, and wash them down with a cup full of the glutinous liquor in which they have been stewed. The traffic of this street luxury is so great, that twenty thousand pounds sterling is annually cleared by it. One million one hundred and sixty-six thousand eight hundred and thirty pounds’ weight, on average, are brought from Billingsgate every year by itinerant salesman, who cook and retail them on their different beats: customers are not entirely confined to the lowest orders; some of the inferior ‘bourgeoisie’ condescend to frequent the stands of the most noted retailers; and there are instances reported by some of these hawkers, of individuals coming twice a

day for months, and eating to the alarming extent of tuppence of time, or, in other words of devouring from 30 to 40 lengths of stewed eel, and decanting down their throats six or seven teacupfuls of the hot liquor.

Though our sellers of cooked eels have no disgraceful exemption to boast of, of unpaid taxes and city dues, like their ancient brethren of the same calling at Sybaris yet are they too men of importance in a small way and generally make a good thing out of this savoury calling.

It seems that at least the prosperous sellers even had a recognisable outfit. Badham recalls their outfit which included a “white hat with black crape [sic] round it, and his drab paletôt with mother-o’-pearl buttons, and his black kid gloves, with the fingers too long for him...” (Badham, 1854: 383).

An itinerant pie seller suggests that the poor would even eat the scraps of this popular fish; “... the boys often come and ask me, said an eel pie man ‘if I’ve got a farden’s worth of heads; now I don’t sell heads; the woman at Broadway, they tells me, sells them at four farden, and a drop of liquor; we chucks them away, for there’s nothing to eat on them - but boys though can eat anything” (Badham, 1854: 383).

It appears that what would become liquor in the eel, pie, and mash shops - the cooking liquid - served the same function as the liquid refreshment found at the coffee stalls. Badham sympathetically notes that “there can be no doubt that a warm cupful at early dawn, in a November fog must be a wonderful comfort to the working classes in London” (Badham, 1854: 384).

By the early nineteenth century however, the Thames was so polluted that it could no longer sustain significant eel populations and the Dutch ships had to stop further upstream to prevent their cargo being spoiled, “... first to Erith, then to Greenhithe, then to Gravesend” (Fort, 2003: 103, 215). Yet as Malvery’s earlier testimony demonstrates, some *schuyts* clearly continued to moor adjacent to Billingsgate in fouled waters.

Local lore suggests a Dutch trader, John Antink, sold fish, eels and perhaps pies from a makeshift shop at undetermined dates during the middle of the 1800s although *Kelly's Trades Directory* doesn't mention this business, situated at 331 Caledonian Road, until 1880 (Hunt in Hawkins, 2002: 16). In the same year another Antink, Elise Gerrard, almost certainly an immediate family relative, has a shop listed at 12a Kentish Town Road.¹³⁶ It seems that the Antink family certainly has a claim (albeit an unofficial one) in opposition to the Cooke's as progenitors of the eel and pie shops via their connection to the fish trade - although without further written proof, this remains conjecture. However, by 1898 the Antinks had bought an old fried fish shop at 74 Chapel Street (Market) in Islington and converted it to an eel and pie shop. They sold the lease in 1902 and the shop was re-leased with repairs and improvements (and conjoined with 73) by Luigi Mansi, a relation of Michele Mansi (of the Manze dynasty) who had also been involved in the eel and pie trade. This business (although no longer owned by the Manze family for some years) only closed in 2019.¹³⁷

Mayhew in 1851 had suggested that by the middle of the nineteenth century an estimated 932,340,000 tons of fish and seafood were sold by London street vendors each year. Although the eel had long been a popular and nutritious dish it was modernity that seems the driver for this extraordinary profusion of fish into the Londoner's diet. Changes to fishing boat design and propellers replacing sails and paddles meant that by the 1890s industrial amounts of seafood were being landed and transported by the new railways to the capital. These advances had certainly made many types of seafood plentiful and cheap, yet working class London does seem to be an outlier in its avowed taste for the sea. The Daily Telegraph in 1910 reported that "old superstitions die hard, and the poorer classes in England have long fostered a prejudice against fish, on the supposition that it doesn't contain anything like the amount of nutritive value as meat. The idea has been that there is

¹³⁶ *Post Office London Directory for 1880, Eel Pie Houses: 1721.*

¹³⁷ *British History Online*, accessed 19 March 2020. <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol47/pp373-404>.

"M. Manze closes: Chapel Market punters 'terribly sad' as historic pie and mash shop closes." *Islington Gazette*, April 30, 2019.

Currently, The Noted Eel and Pie House in Leytonstone is the last pie shop to store and slaughter eels on the premises. The owner, Peter Hak's great grandfather was a Dutch eel fisherman and married into the Newton pie shop dynasty around the turn of the twentieth century.

no strength in fish and that it is rather food for children and weaklings than for grown men” (in Oddy, 1970: 136).

It would seem however that the East End in particular did have a penchant for seafood. As Alex Rhys-Taylor (2020: 102) suggests of the now-closed but iconic Tubby Isaacs’ seafood stall in Aldgate, this account of a cockney craving for the fruits of the sea is seemingly “transmitted intergenerationally through the blood and culture of an ‘island race’, [only] interrupted by the city’s new global connections.” For the cockney, along with pies and mash, eels might be seen as a self-defined and so-called ‘cuisine of origin’ (Panayi, 2008) that are “specific flavours generated by environmental factors ... integral to the rituals that bind discrete communities of people together” (Martens and Warde in Rhys-Taylor, 2020: 102). More, these foods signpost how cultural communities are “‘sensed’ and experienced” within national and local mythologies (Howes and Classes in Rhys-Taylor, 2020: 102). Seafood in general as Rhys-Taylor suggests was a potent symbol for a London working class, co-opted into Empire that spoke of a clearly-defined island geography, imperial ambitions and a maritime tradition. Eels spoke also to a deeper, earlier colonial history of the high seas, ‘discovery’ and trade. This older chronology whispered by a preceding Catholic England that demanded fish on a Friday but also to the glories of Tudor sailing (and piracy) that had been “technologically and economically implicated in the advancement of the navy and the emergent colonial trade in commodities and humanity” (Loades in Rhys-Taylor, 2020: 106). It also spoke of the mediaeval commerce of the Hanseatic League that became enormously wealthy from, amongst other things, herring.¹³⁸

However, to relay Panikos Panayi’s notion of ‘cuisine of origin’ that suggests (specifically jellied) eels are quintessentially ethnically British fails to recognise the role of the migrant entrepreneurs (specifically the Irish and Dutch) and their food negotiations that were responsible for the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops.

¹³⁸ The Hanseatic League was a defensive guild-based trading bloc that at its height comprised 194 cities (including Kings Lynn and London) spread over 16 countries.

These negotiations have for many Londoners continued apace since the post-war period, increasing the diversity of foods and tastes available. The steep decline in contemporary eel stocks mirrors in some ways the dwindling appetite for the traditional cockney taste for seafood and eels in particular. Eel stalls, usually outside eel-pie shops and seafood sellers in pubs were a relatively common sight in London until perhaps the early 1980s when the forces of globalisation and immigration changed the food landscape of the capital. Robert Poole's novel, *E1* ([1961] 2012: 34) evokes this very well.

Outside the pie-shop near Bethnal Green Road, was a live-eel stall. They always stopped there for a few minutes so that Jimmy could watch the blue-black eels slithering round the pieces of ice in the shallow metal trays. You just picked out the eels you wanted and the vendor, dripping with blood and guts, chopped them on a wooden block into still-quivering two-inch sections.

The eel remains a re-occurring trope of the 'slippery' cockney. In Robert Westerby's *Wide Boys Never Work* ([1937] 2008: 189), 'The Eel' was a cockney criminal "who made a living out of phoney passports." Innumerable 'spiv' characterisations from popular culture exhibit this threatening, sometimes comic, sometimes lubricious, always deliciously unreliability figure. From Private Walker in *Dad's Army* to George Cole's Arthur Daly to any number of Ray Winstone's roles, the eel acts as an important metaphor in the shifting and unstable role of the historical cockney itself.

4.6 A Regime of Disgust

I'm not a great lover of cold things in jelly.¹³⁹

Although the eel was historically at least part of the bourgeois table, it was essentially a food of the London urban poor. Live, the creatures could be kept in puddles of water for extended periods, boiled and then jellied. With the addition of a common herb like parsley to its cooking juices, it could be served hot. In the Bourdieusian sense, the eel in this form was a 'food of necessity'. Indeed, Malvery

¹³⁹ Graham Poole owner of Manze's Pie Shop, Peckham. Interview by author, 14 December 2020.

(1908: 73) suggests that this food was “indulged in generally by sections of the poorer working classes.”

The decline in eel-eating since the end of the Second World War, but particularly within the last thirty-or-so years has been marked. Although most contemporary eel, pie and mash shops keep at least some stocks of jellied eels in their refrigerators (which can be easily converted into a hot dish by warming and the swift addition of liquor) according to Robert Kelly, “nobody eats it now” and it is reasonably rare to see it ordered.¹⁴⁰ The question is why?

It seems clear that by the 1960s what people meant when they talked about class began to change. The expansion of education, growing individualism, and the decline of deference meant that the axis of traditional class boundaries now appeared blurred (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2018). People increasingly saw themselves as ‘ordinary’ (Savage, 2005) and the subsequent Thatcherite hegemony conflated this with a panoply of middle class values. For the aspirational cockney this process was crucial in delineating a nascent individualism separating those in work from those on benefits and was synchronous with the final decline of its late nineteenth century incarnation. Essex became its spiritual home as a place for people who wanted to ‘better themselves’ and this seemed to engender “a privatised, as opposed to solidaristic civic culture” (Butler and Watt in Millington 2016: 275).

The gustatory de-centring of the eel was coterminous with this process linking a developing dynamic of taste within the London working classes with how they saw themselves. The decline in eel-eating I contend is encapsulated in what Stephanie Lawler (2005: 434) significantly suggests is “a decline in the *worth* of the working class itself.” The eel was a poor man’s food of necessity. Those that continue to eat eels are typically elderly or tend to be male and from a specific demographic that have a political interest in doing so. Many in the pie shops still call themselves working class (“I’m working class because I work”).¹⁴¹ However, this definition likely differs substantially in cultural (and sometimes economic) terms from that of their

¹⁴⁰ Robert Kelly. Interview by author, 15 December 2020.

¹⁴¹ David H. Interview by author, 14 April 2022.

Fordist parents' generations and for some, generally relies on solidarities that do not (largely) extend beyond their own ethnicity.

Whereas the pie is still popular as a moniker of a vague working classness, in general younger people, male or female, below the age of around forty will simply not countenance eating eel in any form. Much of that can be further evidenced by excavating the unstable sensory notion of disgust.

The eel appears to affect people on a distinctly *visceral* level and the gut itself - the viscera - has long been used as a metaphor to describe and gauge innate bodily thought processes: hence the notion of 'gut feelings' (Probyn 2003). In the cartography of the body, the mouth can be seen as a guardian and functions like a "safety chamber" (Rozin and Fallon, 1981).

For Mary Douglas ([1975] 2003), disgust - as evidenced through dirt or 'impurity' - was a cultural construct theorised from the Old Testament. The eel was an abomination because it came from the sea but had neither fins nor scales. The creature is encoded as a *moral* object of disgust - doubly so as it looks and moves like a snake, another Judeo-Christian symbol of sin. Of course, the basis for such 'socio-biological' explanations tends towards a 'common sense' idea that revulsion is inculcated in certain foods (or creatures) because they may be poisonous. Despite the fact that, as in the case of the eel, such ritually 'impure' foods may well be entirely nutritious (Fischer 1988: 285), this coding may easily result in feelings of disgust, revulsion and nausea.

The idea of 'uncleanliness' and morality combined within the Victorian bourgeois psyche with the discovery of the microbe and psycho-sexual hesitancy around bodily orifices. This axiom was decoded and interiorised by the proletariat themselves resulting in a self-policing hierarchy that inevitably valorised probity as a mark of their own respectability within capital. In a typical post to a private Facebook group about pie and mash shops, a customer reviews Maureen's in Crisp Street market with particular and favourable attention to its cleanliness.¹⁴²

¹⁴² The Pie Mash 'n' Liquor appreciation society, August 30, 2021. Accessed August 30, 2021. Maureen's is a popular pie shop opened in the 1950s by a husband and wife, Dave and Maureen and

This 'common sense' remains largely current within the eel and pie shop community with the valorisation of 'clean' British restaurant spaces and food as opposed to 'dirty' and 'brown' (potentially adulterated) immigrant food ("none of that foreign muck").¹⁴³

Food has the potential to corrupt the body according to Lupton (1996: 113) "because it passes through the oral boundary of the 'clean and proper' body; it becomes abject when its nature is ambiguous." More, as Lupton suggests, food, like sexual fluids occupy a sort of 'liminal' state in relation to the body's porousness. Food can be simultaneously exterior and interior and may be seen as threatening when its form is unclear and ill-defined thus threaten the integrity of the whole. Eels as both phallic and slimy, may represent this 'intimate fluid' analogy and Rhys-Taylor (2013: 234-235) further notes that the (cold) jelly surrounding the eel, and its ability to adhere to the skin, further limits our body's sense-boundary. This aspect does to some extent appear however to be highly culturally determined. As Michael Ashkenazi (1991) suggests, the Japanese appear to delight in the sticky and the slimy. Similar arguments are made for increasing hesitancy around the green liquor that is served over pies and mash and over hot, stewed eels. "My girl won't touch it - she says it looks like bogeys."¹⁴⁴

To some extent of course, we *become* what we eat by the simple act of the absorption of food into the body. Claude Fischler (1988) suggests however that it might be more correct to speak of 'incorporation' into the body and this has an ironic aspect to the mono-cultural cockney identity as the eel of course is multinational. The mouth, the symbolic gateway for bodily control is the ultimate arena for disgust and in an apposite allusion to the cockney's accent and speech pattern, Marion Halligan (in Lupton, 1996: 18) points out that the "... tongue names and the tongue tastes." What we do with our mouths, *how* we eat, is also significant. Constraints over methods of eating were, as Mennell (1985) suggests, slowly internalised as

was originally located in the East India Dock Road but moved to its current locale in Chrisp Street Market in Poplar in 1993.

¹⁴³ In the BBC series, *Till Death Do Us Part*, the cockney bigot, Alf Garnett often rails against 'dirty' foreign food as "foreign muck".

¹⁴⁴ Freedman, 2017: 212.

practises of self-control and moderation, based on emergent bourgeois notions of propriety. The eel was always a difficult fish to eat, and, in a recall of older table behaviours, bones were, as we have seen, spat onto the pie-shop floor. As a Victorian etiquette manual records, “eating is so entirely a sensual, animal gratification, that unless it is conducted with much delicacy, it becomes unpleasant to others” (Kasson in Grover, 1987: 125-126). In this way, discriminatory behaviour both about types of food and also the manner of its consumption was class-based and crucially progressed and confirmed distinction.

The humble eel and the eating of it is then an unlikely indicator of the formation and re-formation of change within the cultural sensibilities and tastes of the London working class. For the contemporary cockney, imbued with notions of social mobility, eel eating is generally identified with a squeamishness that links pastness and poverty. Simultaneously however for a very few customers, especially in Essex and within the ‘newer’ pie shops the continued eating of (especially jellied) eel as a ‘food of ordeal’ particularly as a pre-football match ritual has become a performative cultural re-enactment of a selective memory-scape based largely within the post-war 1950s and 1960s whose ‘white diaspora’ identities combine with localisms found in food (Floya in Watt, Millington and Huq, 2014: 124).

4.7 A Working Class Taste and Space

Perhaps in a nod to earlier forms of polite, communal working class eating, at the end of the meal pie and mash shop customers have traditionally taken their plates and cutlery back to the counter. In Cooke’s, this gives some of the customers a further opportunity to chat to Joe or Kim underlining the specificity of the space. These are pie *shops* or pie *houses* with their own class rituals and manners. “Be lucky... and don’t come back” says Joe laughingly to a former East End couple who regularly return to Hoxton from their adopted home in Essex to see friends and walk the old streets.

If, as Loïc Wacquant (in Skeggs, 2004: 28) suggests, it is “the location of the *cultural* practice within a system of objects and practices that define its social meaning and significance”, then for the owners and customers of the eel, pie and mash shops,

knowing the 'rules' of bourgeois society - how to 'behave', what to eat, how to eat, how to hold cutlery and to conduct oneself with 'refinement' in a restaurant space - is only half the issue. What actually matters is how these foods and practices are objectified and approved in relation to the dominant culture. And of course, they never can be. According to Bourdieu (1986: 511), the working class in the eyes of bourgeois culture will always lack "taste" and "the right ways of being and doing" - the result partly of their initial, denuded educational habitus, and more fundamentally of course because we "are born into unequal social relations."

For Marx ([1848] 1980: 44) the working class, and indeed, the very notion of class itself, is brought into existence by the bourgeoisie ("the special and essential product of the bourgeoisie"). This group was consolidated by its need for overtly political - and hence cultural representation - that Dror Wahrman (1995) evidences by the solidifications around the 1832 Reform Bill. Yet, "whereas the middle class were able to use the term 'class' to make claims on the state for recognition and to draw moral distance from the aristocracy, they depicted the working class as immoral and forced them to become accountable to the state" (Skeggs, 2015: 5). Skeggs suggests that one of the ways that the working classes were able to gain even meagre recognition as a group with an identity (as opposed to an amorphous mass) by the state, was appeal via welfare claims. To do this it had to 'perform' respectability in order to survive (Butler and Shusterman, 1999). The eel, pie and mash shop and its food are one of the very few remaining working class arenas (which additionally include football culture) that evidences this dual and complicated navigation around a relationship with propriety and virtue.

As Lawler (2005: 434) suggests, "An entire social and cultural system works to continue the constitution of white working class people as entirely devoid of value and worth." Yet, as Angela McRobbie (2002: 136) has it, "...even the poor and the disposed partake in some form of cultural enjoyment which are collective responses which make people what they are." Crucially, "working class culture ... has a different value system, one not recognised by the dominant symbolic economy" (Skeggs, 2004: 153). Indeed, London's traditional working class, as seen through the prism of their fading eel and pie shops "appears to have an alternative understanding of cultural judgement, seeing it as they practice it, as a group matter... They are not

in awe of legitimate culture and find no value in refinement (Bennett *et al*, 2009: 205).

Skeggs (2016: 5) echoes Bourdieu when she suggests that this classification “brings the perspective of the classifier into effect” and then captures “the classifier within the discourse.” Class and its allied notions of taste and acceptability depend therefore on who defines it. Ultimately, ‘working classness’ for the overwhelming majority of London’s working class is valued *more* than by London’s bourgeoisie. Further, I suggest, even for the eel-pie shops’ customers who consider themselves no longer working class in the sense of meritocratic success, this ‘essence’ of background, this vague but pertinent memorialization of the past, is vital in their self-definition and self-mythologising. That is one of the reasons why the shops still remain spaces that are significant (and more so in the current so-called, ‘culture wars’) and the food valorised. That is also why the middle classes in general, except for some vague notion of ‘heritage’, see the shops as irrelevant and their food - at best a neo-peasant cuisine and at worst - as a disgusting slop. There is simply no need for the middle classes to define their own culture in relation to it because it has no exchange value for them, is no threat and ultimately insignificant. More succinctly, the working class is marginalised from the channels of cultural engagement dominated by the middle classes and rendered invisible from them (Savage, 2000).

However, just because some working class people who use the shops can’t or are reluctant to talk in class terms doesn’t mean that they don’t recognise class, their position within capital or its signifiers. More, just because some working class customers of the eel and pie shops believe themselves to be middle class that “does not mean they stop being exploited by the capitalist class” (Skeggs, 2016: 3).

Class, more than simply an economic qualification is additionally an arena for competition around the uneven distribution of *value* that may be charted by delineating different symbolic matrices (for example, gender and race) that dispense fluid and changeable advantages (Skeggs 2004: 3; Savage, 2015: 22). The shops and the food evidenced within are a rare oasis where working class Londoners have been largely free of the historic legacy of the imposition of bourgeois meaning and accountability or at least have been able to negotiate its limits. Indeed, I would argue

that eel, pie and mash shops remain largely intimidating and exhibit the sort of reverse symbolic violence that Raymond Williams (1958) experienced in a Cambridge teashop where he was made to feel inferior to the ‘cultivated people’. As Adam Boutall has it, “When you go into a pie and mash shop you’ve got to have an old East Ender behind the counter ... I think it’d seem weird otherwise if there’d be some posh person serving you ... all the staff look a bit rough-and-ready; you know what I mean? Every pie and mash shop I’ve ever been in there’s someone in there that looks like they was born and brought up on it ... everyone’s a bit rough ... but it’s like the old pubs: it’s like ‘ooh, you wouldn’t go in there.’”¹⁴⁵

In essence, the food and the culture that surrounds them are *differently* valued by the working class people that use them in different and unique ways to navigate a specific kind of culture. So, what might constitute an essential and authentic working class food culture represented by the London eel, pie and mash shops? Michel DeCerteau in his *Practice of Everyday Life: living and cooking* (1998: xxi) uses food as evidence of ‘subordinate’ people’s resistance strategies. Within the contemporary neoliberal city working class food, and especially eels, pie and mash I conjecture, offer a refuge from the dominant forms of cultural production. The shops are essentially, hyper-local microresistances, “... which in turn form microfreedoms, mobilise unsuspected resources hidden among ordinary people, and in that way displace the veritable borders of the hold [of] social and political powers.” In this vein, Paul Kelly recalls his childhood in the 1980s when the pie shops in Bethnal Green were local hubs where “everyone knew each other; people were talking across tables and there was a real good buzz... if they weren’t down the pub, they’d be down the pie shop... you didn’t have to be respectable, you could be half-pissed if you wanted to.” The shops were “full of hooligans, rough houses, you know the type - what most people would say [was] an East Ender... and everyone was the same... everyone was trying to nick a pound note...” They were places “where someone’s knocked over a butcher’s van...” and would then try and clandestinely sell the meat.¹⁴⁶ The pie shops remain, as Greg Camp puts it, an arena “of ducking a

¹⁴⁵ Adam Boutall. Interview by author, October 19, 2021.

¹⁴⁶ Paul Kelly. Interview by author, December 15, 2020.

diving... a place to hear the banter; to hear the sounds - to know that you're socially with people..."¹⁴⁷

The shops, the sites of these resistances, are now perhaps in some ways closer to what Jukka Gronow, (2018) suggests are 'social worlds in themselves' - similar to Robert Bellah's 'enclave culture' (Bellah, 1985) and Michael Maffesoli's ideas of 'neo-tribes' (Maffesoli, 1998). Here, new forms of solidarity have emerged into a post-modern *sociality*. The Marxist model of a 'class-in-itself' may no longer necessarily be a 'class-for-itself', rather a more relational model is postulated that is more loosely formed through a series of external identifications. Individuals form overlapping, temporary subcultural (interest) groups that are based on taste, choice and everyday interactions - like eating. Cohen (2017: 114-115) suggests that collective identities associated with becoming working class, such as 'informal' apprenticeships constituted by family, school or workplace have become "decentred" into individual, atomised interest groups, grievances or desires/demands. In this way there is a sentimental nostalgia for past solidarities - but this is simply a "material sensation of mobility" that is "an evanescent momentum which mirrors an underlying socioeconomic stasis." The failure of these endeavours, however, often result in a 'centripetal' trajectory - where groups may reform to redefine themselves as the sole or 'rightful heirs' of these traditions through a performative habitus, that may appear as a stable point for "re-formatting working class identities" but remains "haunted by a sense of their social dislocation." The 'tribes', formed around groups within the London working classes - from so-called 'chav' to self-declared 'middle class' property-owning Essex 'refugees' - bond around "common filiations, fixed identities and more or less fictive kinships, as well as shared memoryscapes linked to local places of pride" (Cohen, 2017: 116).

The shops are also perhaps a living archaeology of some elements of what remains of the pre-capitalist conviviality, lost to the 'internal enclosures' of the mid-Victorian street-market clearances. These remnants in turn echo earlier, largely rural festivities that celebrated the season's changes. This fading reverberation flickered in the Pearlies' street parties before they were banned in the 1920s; it was re-kindled in the

¹⁴⁷ Greg Camp. Interview by author, October 5, 2021.

welcome of the Victorian coffee stall and lives still in the warmth of the steamy-windowed eel-pie shop.

The shops and their food are then portals to a certain past - but not a direct one. Bourdieu (2011) echoed Marx when he suggested that the social world is “accumulated history.” These are multi-headed gateways: different shops have different heritages and different shops and their locales evidence slightly different tastes and traditions. Much depends on their specific hyper-local history. Social media post about rivalries between shops reflects this and that history leaves traces on the actions of social actors - but also on the *context* of their actions so that the shops are also a palimpsestic negotiation with a disputed and reimagined authenticity “... *and* the lived traditions and practices through which these understandings are expressed” (Hall in Samuel, 1981: 26).

There remain the myriad inscriptions upon the working class so that one might be simultaneously a ‘cheeky, lovable’ cockney as well as an East End gangster. This dual projection has enabled the working class to “generate their *own* [my italics] use-value *and* to exist beyond moral governance, enabling a critique of the constraints of morality (Skeggs, 2004: 22). This duality is the basis for the anti-pretentiousness of the food and the culture within the eel and pie shops, simultaneous with music hall performers who (carefully) satirised the ‘snobs’ and the ‘affected’ bourgeoisie (Vicus, 1974). This notion remains a cover-all mechanism against the ‘posh’ and defends the ‘ordinary’: the home-cooked, the comfort and the warmth of a simple meal and a way to “de-value the valuers” (Skeggs, 2004: 114).

Anti-pretentiousness also remains an armour against conceit - a resistance against the “false consciousness bred into the bones of the workers” (Engels, 1953: 522-523). This is of course double-edged. In one sense it has somewhat insulated a working class movement yet has failed to articulate a resistance to capital which has kept the London working class entombed within and constrained by the acceptance of social hierarchy. Typical of this is the character of Jimmy’s mother in Robert Poole’s *E1* ([1961] 2012: 98) where, “She wished ‘e won the scholarship, but what was the good? They only got their ‘eads full o’ strange ideas and got too big for their boots.”

For all that, the pie-shop exhibition of the ‘piss-take’; the ‘having a laugh’ (and also the contemptable modern, ‘banter’, so often a cover-all for politically incorrect, micro-aggressions) remain a way to reject authority. Paul Willis (in Skeggs, 2004: 114) suggests that this kind of humour isn’t just about getting through the monotony of the working day but a kind of ‘doubling’ where the real is simultaneously taken to be fictitious but also “as a practical cultural form in which the variable and ambiguous nature of labour power is articulated.” Oddly, these ‘micro-resistances’ may have reshaped contemporary cultural capital in that the form “now takes cosmopolitan and ironic forms that appear to be pluralist and anti-elitist (Savage, 2015: 51). In this sense the identification of class as evidenced in working class spaces like the eel and pie shops is part of a process of evolution. For Skeggs (2004, 117), this “is central to understanding contemporary class relations. The significance of representations lies in the way in which they become authored and institutionalised through policy and administration, how they produce the normative, how they designate moral value and how they are positioned by negative and pathological representations are both aware and resistant.”

So, the accrual of taste, even within different circles of the working classes themselves, is ascribed by middle class values that are enforced within a reproducing power relationship to differentiate themselves and attribute value. For example, to making oneself ‘tasteful’ through judging other people as ‘tasteless’: this is *exactly* the process that is aimed at people from Essex described as ‘vulgar’ and unmodern. Yet, working class culture is *differently* valued amongst itself, and the eel, pie and mash shops offer a rare glimpse into a realm of space, taste, freedom and relaxation that are at least a negotiation with the hegemonic culture.

Conclusion

Food is a universal signifier for membership, solidarity and belonging. As Falk (1994: 70) remarks, “...members of the same culture eat the same kind of food.” Within this contemporary framework, pie, mash and eels are simultaneously ‘the London ambrosia’, a legitimate and proud working class institution as Michael Collins (2021) has it, and a living gustatory link with an early-capitalist past and a gastro-nationalist present.

If the eel, pie and mash shops and the food they serve are anything, they are arenas of security. They are one of the few places where working class people are not silenced both literally and metaphorically. The shops are a foci for lived bodies that are framed by cultural practices in which identity is performed through a sensual inscription that constitutes “a realm of shared intelligibility” (Charlesworth, 2000: 17). This freedom, exhibited through palimpsestic gestures and gustatory taste, is held in the physical body of the customers through a sort of ‘comportment’ as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (in Charlesworth, 2000: 17) suggests where the body goes through a kind of “postural impregnation” sensing and ‘feeling’ signification. This is a classed experience of place and taste: the body relaxing when it enters a space apposite to its class background evidenced by the changed, ‘classed’ behaviour of the customers. In this way, the physical landscape is inscribed by working class bodies and the working class bodies are inscribed by the space and the food (Bourdieu, 2000: 141).

I suggest that the food literally ties the East Ender to the ‘terroir’ of the London street with its complex notions of cleanliness and anti-pretension but gives us a unique insight into what the convivialities of a closed, almost secretive heritage of traditional working class culture in late capital actually looks like. This simple, historical dish, built from ‘foods of necessity’, is a prism through which an urban proletariat and a decamped suburban diaspora dispute authenticity and originality in an ironic Appadurain dual over a dish that no-one is interested in appropriating because it is unable to travel outside its ‘field of exchange’ (Bourdieu, 1997).

In conclusion, I suggest that the shops are a living archaeology of early capitalist conviviality, the remnants of Victorian feeding stations and a successful taxonomic descendant of London’s first popular working class eating houses. In the contemporary neo-liberal city, they offer an insight into a private ‘working classness’ that is a negotiation with, and a micro-resistance to, the hegemonic culture memorialised within a largely insular, conservative cockney culture infused with a local patriotism (Tuan 1974) that signals to the contemporary ‘culture wars’ around issues of immigration and gentrification.

The eel, pie and mash shops show us a glimpse of a different way to live and a different way to taste.

5. The cockney saudade

Introduction

“Walking through streets that were memories of streets, correct in some details, quite wrong in others, down through Bethnal Green and Whitechapel...” (Sinclair, 2004: 112).

In this chapter, I explore the contemporary landscape of the eel, pie and mash shops and their concomitant interrelated cockney identity through the different types of memories and nostalgias that are performed within them.

The memories that breathe and multiply within the present day shops are linked to the historical specificity of London and their unique but largely overlooked place within British gustatory and political culture. The current memorialisations partly derive from the primary source of the largely invented Victorian music hall character of the cockney. The shops also simultaneously embody earlier, potentially antecedent capitalist notions of conviviality as well as the cultural repercussions of nineteenth century class privation and defeat that led to them as zones of consolation (Stedman Jones, 1974).

The memories of the shops are further entangled and complicated within the simultaneous memorialisations of a separate owner and customer class. The former, largely the historical product of an ideology of the small masters concomitant with notions of Radicalism and individualism has melded with an entrepreneurial proletarianism. This group valorises working class culture, largely sharing customs and language but is generally economically superior. The latter is a customer base that currently comprises of a white, proletarian precariat clinging to their traditional hyper-localities against a backdrop of globalisation, immigration and gentrification. They are further enjoined by a diaspora of re-located Londoners and their descendants found mostly within Essex and the Medway towns who are (generally

but not exclusively) conservative and Conservative in their culture. It is this group, self-defined as the heirs of past class solidarities through re-imagined performities and shared, hybrid memoryscapes linked to historical hyper-localities (often via football team loyalties) that remain “haunted by a sense of their social dislocation” (Cohen, 2017). These tangled, interrelated and often contradictory memorialisations increasingly encounter and compete with each other on (especially) social media and I refer to them as ‘polyphonic’.

The cockney is by nature an essentially nostalgic and sentimental creature. From its humbled, primary incarnation as a rebellious horde of the abyss to its rebirth as a theatrical, largely loyal hostage-servant of the elites within early modernity, it was made to perform respectability to gain even meagre welfare claims (Butler and Shusterman, 1999; Skeggs, 2016), being remembered and forgotten concomitant to its usefulness to capital. Throughout its numerous incarnations it has always looked backwards, yearning for a better time and valorising its privations as central to its integrity and spirit. Each episodic memory epoch, from the jingo of ‘Arry to the brave cockney of the Blitz has contributed a palimpsestic layer to its nostalgic self-remembering and testament.

Memories of cockney and the shops were, I contend, historically mediated by each generation apposite to their own context but largely congruent with their predominant contemporary hegemony. This confluence begins to break down by the 1990s and I argue that the present reimagining of cockney and recent valorisation of the eel, pie and mash shops was initially provoked by the cultural ruthlessness of New Labour’s embrace of globalisation and its acceleration of neoliberal reforms which further undercut the traditional structures of working class life.

I argue that the contemporary cockney memory scripts being performed and reinscribed are those of a largely ageing post-war generation confused and bitter at the ending of the gains of the *Trente Glorieuses* - an ending for which as enablers of, and a conduit to, an initial neoliberal embrace via Thatcherism, they hold part responsibility, the culmination of a sort of working class death drive. These confrontations coincided with an established melancholia around the loss of the fantasy of a British omnipotence crystallised as a post-colonial nostalgia.

These were the underlying causes of the Brexit vote, the alleged turn to populism and the contemporary so-called culture wars. In this chapter I trace the contours of this contemporary memory epoch and thereby simultaneously examine the changing nature of the twentieth-first century cockney.

I take as my starting point the “slippage of terms from the personal to the cultural” (Radstone, 2010) to consider how personal memorialisations of a humble but ritualised food impact on a wider culture that identifies through what Yi Fu Tuan (1974) refers to as a ‘local patriotism’ with a national referent. In this way I move from the personal to the political. First, I trace the context of, and what I identify as, the trigger for the contemporary anger of London’s white working class.

5.1 “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.” (Brillat-Savarin, [1825] 1970: 13).

In the 1970s as Wolfgang Streeck (2017) has it, capital had begun to seek expansion and flow outwards from the protected markets of the recovering post-war economies turning “nation-states into markets”. As an antidote to economic stagnation and the growing power of workers, what was to become known as neoliberalism came to be seen as fundamental to the reimposition of a capitalist hegemony. The role of food and diet, undertheorized in this historical context, was a small but significant arena that was part of the social landscape of neoliberal change. Initially, and concomitant with the ‘relative’ decline of a national agriculture policy that mirrored a growing internationalism of imported food, the eating habits of an increasingly affluent working class remained broadly unchanged (Edgerton, 2018: 479). Especially true of what would become known as the ‘non-aspirational’ working class, people invariably ate a version of what their parents had eaten. These were the meals that Douglas (1975) had explored and charted, the configuration and rhythm of which had remained largely consistent for a century or more. By the Thatcher era, the food landscape had begun to alter significantly. Local markets had been largely superseded by supermarket conglomerates and so-called ‘fast’ and frozen foods began to affect the footfall around the eel, pie and mash shops. Diet, like the pace of life itself, was becoming increasingly based on speed of preparation

and 'sophistication' - an idealised, cosmopolitan vision that mirrored the aspirational, hegemonic striving of the 'competitive individual'.

The everyday food landscape of the London working class had always differed slightly from national norms in that it included large immigrant communities whose diet inevitably spilled into its culture and onto its plate. In that sense, and because of what patronisingly might be called the valorisation of 'ethnic food' by the gentrifying middle classes, the Londoner's palate was by definition slightly more diverse. The entrepreneurial cockney, from the Victorian 'counter-jumper' to the Mod of the 'Swinging Sixties', always had a taste for 'the finer things in life' that might be found in abundance not far away, 'up West'. However, whilst family-focussed communities in the East End remained, the traditional cultures of greasy-spoon 'caffs', dingy, smoke-stained pubs and eel, pie and mash shops lingered on in the ever deepening penumbras of old ghost markets and crumbling, neglected council estates.

At the tail end of Thatcherism and the during the Major interregnum, a complex nostalgia centred around this 'traditional' way of life flowered and was simultaneous with a partial bourgeois colonisation of popular culture. By the end of the 1990s this revived valorisation of 'ordinariness' would feed into the larger political phenomena of the so-called 'Third Way' to become the dominant cultural motif of the era adjacent to the ideas of the End of History (Fukuyama, 1992) and the collapse of the Soviet Union. This was an era where a generation traumatised by the failure to find an alternative to a seemingly never-ending Conservative polity disavowed politics and embraced culture: a rebellion against the seriousness and allegedly dour 'worthy causes' of the 1980s. The Blair years were marked by an initial and expedient but ultimately deceptive cultural convergence with the symbols of working class life. Its re-joining to an authoritarian populism (Hall, 1978) was, I argue, ultimately at the root of current disillusionment with much of the contemporary political process.¹⁴⁸ As Stuart Hall and Martin Jaques (1998) would suggest, Blair embodied "...the ultimate pessimism - that there is only one version of modernity, the one elaborated by the Conservatives over the last 18 years."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Dahrendorf, 1999: 13–17.

¹⁴⁹ Stuart Hall and Martin Jaques on Blair quoted in Harris, John. "Marxism Today: the forgotten visionaries whose ideas could save Labour". *The Guardian* 29 September 2015

During the early Blair years, and led predominately by the style press, there was a brief and complicated colonisation of some of the textures of proletarian life, its food and its locations. Set largely in the fading, physical detritus of the post-industrial city, they were used as props in editorial features but also as a marker of ‘authenticity’ for the young and hip.

As far back as 1912, Thorstein Veblen had recognised that class distinction could be quantified through conspicuous consumption and during this period what became known as ‘poor chic’, an inverted appropriation of “multiple symbols traditionally associated with working class and underclass life” (Halnon Bettez, 2002: 503) became a significant trend. Celebrities affected what might be called a “lower class masquerade” of impersonating poverty in what Karen Halnon Bettez (2002: 516) suggests was a “rationally organised type of class vacationing” which treated poverty as a destination to visit that temporally (and safely) objectified the fear of downward mobility. One might encounter the ‘heroin chic’ of Corinne Day’s models posing in a fish and chip shop or Blur, a British band that partly came to symbolise the era, photographed initially as “dandyish fops” and then “streetwise casuals” lounging in a greasy spoon cafe, their lead singer affecting a ‘mockney’ accent (Maconie, 1999). This further pointed to a convenient cultural appropriation of popular modernism which the cockney youth of a previous generation had, in their own way, authentically embraced but in whose 90s iteration Mark Fisher (2014) would later presciently describe as ‘the slow cancellation of the future’. Not for nothing would Blur’s second album be titled *Modern life is rubbish*.

Chris Clunn, a working class photographer shooting mostly music in this period saw his chance however and managed to publish the first book about the (then) fast disappearing pie and mash shops in 1995 with the help of the Museum of London who briefly saw the shops as an object of heritage. “In hindsight” he recalls, “I think they might have taken it on because it was a novelty ... something that they didn’t know about.”¹⁵⁰ However, the shops made no real imprint on lasting bourgeois

¹⁵⁰ Chris Clunn. Interview by author, 17 February 2022.

consciousness unlike London's decaying 'caff' scene having little exchange value apart from their novelty amongst an increasingly gentrified landscape.¹⁵¹

The 'New Lad' phenomena which segued into Britpop and Blair was almost entirely retrogressive and sought comfort in the cultural ephemera of its devotees own 1970s teenage years.¹⁵² It celebrated a retrenchment of sexual stereotypes and sought (alleged) alliances with a long-established and largely conservative proletarian culture from which its parents had emerged and challenged. It was acquisitive and once again danced to "the joyous ringing of capital's cash tills" (Blackwell and Seabrook, 1986: 10).

Football, a corresponding and traditionally central feature of London working class life and identity, historically linked to the rituals, memorialisations and masculinities within the eel, pie and mash shops, also experienced a significant cultural colonisation by forces of capital. Dogged by hooliganism for decades, both the Taylor Report (1990) and the launch of the Premier League (1992) marked turning points that meant the sport was no longer to be regarded as simply a part of what Stedman Jones (1974) had referred to as a 'culture of consolation' but as a reborn arena of distraction around the middle class dinner table. Nick Hornby's memoir, *Fever Pitch* (1992) concomitant with the capture of the television rights by Rupert Murdoch's BskyB and the developing internationalism of the game made football a palatable dish for the chattering classes - a bone of contention that continues to rankle with working class fans to this day.

These allegedly class-transcending notions were almost all however, according to the critic Andy Medhurst, invented personas created by those on the fringes of the cultural industries. "Loaded, Fantasy Football, Men Behaving Badly [were] all created by middle class men with degrees. This celebration of working class culture is an assumed identity" (Turner, 2012).

¹⁵¹ For an exploration of the resurgent interest in London's post-war modernist café culture, see Maddox, 2003.

¹⁵² The term 'New Lad' was coined by Sean O'Hagan in *Arena Magazine* in 1993.

By the dog days of the Major administration there had also begun the framing of a long delayed cultural contestation around the notion of Englishness itself. Blair had situated himself apart from the former premier's invocation of "long shadows on county grounds, warm beer [and] invincible green suburbs" by draping his party in the Union Jack.¹⁵³ New Labour, utilising both Elgar's *Nimrod* and *Land of Hope and Glory* in party political broadcasts, unashamedly sought to reclaim the flag. As Peter Mandelson had it, "[I]t is restored from years as a symbol of division and intolerance" (Davey, 1999: 11). Indeed, despite a furore around the singer Morrissey's lyrics ("England for the English...") on songs like *The National Front Disco* and his appearance against a backdrop of skinheads at Madstock in Finsbury Park 1992, the iconography passed into passive acceptability with Oasis and the Spice Girls appropriating it as an 'ironic' nod to the Carnaby Street 'Swinging' 1960s. Hywel Williams writing a leader piece for the *Observer* around the fiftieth anniversary celebrations for VE-Day in 1995 drew a line from Blair's walk down a flag-festooned Mall to Atlee's post-war landslide as the creation of "a seductive, subterranean folk memory" (Turner, 2013: 304). Yet this patriotic renewal would grow deeper roots, not only in the gathering pace of (at this point largely irrelevant but growing) Euro-sceptic sentiments on the fringes of the Conservative Party but also in the generational angst about masculinities and fatherhood combined with an invocation of nostalgic military pride of a generation untested in combat. This was the first era in which those in politics or public life had not directly fought in a war but ironically in an age of 'liberal' interventions subsequently started several very significant ones.¹⁵⁴ John O'Farrell's *The Best a Man Can Get* (1997) and Tony Parson's *Man and Boy* (1999) largely echo the sentiments of Gary Sparrow, a character in the BBC sitcom *Goodnight, Sweetheart* (1993) who journeys back in time to the East End Blitz and reflects how, "Our fathers, they did national service... experiences that marked their shift into manhood". The show, interesting in itself by its use of condensed temporalities around the character of the cockney, articulated gendered fears that masculine purpose like the 'stoic' East End itself was disappearing - "fading in the light of late capitalism" (Millette, 2017: 127). At the Labour Party conference in 1997, Blair suggested that he wanted to make Britain "pivotal" in the world and "to use the

¹⁵³ John Major. Speech to the Conservative Group for Europe, 22 April 1993.

¹⁵⁴ For the context of these neoliberal conflicts see - Ali, 2015.

superb reputation of our armed forces, not just for defence, but as an instrument of influence.”¹⁵⁵ This salute to an overt militarism would inhabit the next decades eventually genuflecting towards a crude racial reductionism, a resurgent British nationalism and an anti-immigrant polity which would once again find favour within the white working classes of the East End and Essex.

By this time, “...some of those creators of this culture were starting to have their doubts, concerned that what had been a nuanced retreat into the security of a middle class adolescence was now little more than an ill-educated caricature”. As Simon Nye had it, “I do feel like I’ve created a monster... I despise job culture” (Turner, 2012: 54-55). As it gathered momentum, the culture grew less ironic and started to appeal to a younger, more proletarian audience. This moment was however profound for Britain’s working classes as within a couple of years the notion of the ‘chav’ would enter into the class lexicon to describe “those who behaved like lads without the income or education to justify their conduct” (Turner, 2013: 55). ‘Chav’ became a new orthodoxy in the language of class and went well beyond Orwell’s much quoted line about the working classes as either objects of pity or comic relief. This, a revitalised distinction through contempt as if the ‘popular’ gains of the 1960s and 1970s had never happened was deployed against a backdrop of increasing poverty and declining social mobility marking the passage of appropriation of working class culture to its overt demonisation.

In the first few years of New Labour, and despite the denigration of the terminology of class in favour of ‘inclusion’ and ‘social mobility’, food and indeed working class corporeality re-emerged as a main arena of social distinction (Cheng, Olsen, Southerton and Warde, 2007). The term ‘obesogenic’ became current to describe social and environmental factors that pointed to what in 1995 the UK Low Income Project Team described as ‘food deserts’ where poverty led to diminished access to sources of healthy food (Colas, Alejandro, Levi and Zubaida, 2018: 197). Indeed, Will Atkinson and Christopher Deeming (2015: 878) suggested that it was clear within the contemporary sociology of food that not only “particular orientations [continued to be] grounded in possession of resources” but that for a large section of

¹⁵⁵ Accessed at <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=203>

the community - and despite Richard A. Peterson's (1992) suggestion of a growing 'omnivorousness' - "[T]he heavy, the substantial, the functional, the cheap, the sugary/salty ... [were] most closely associated with the dominated class, indicating a prioritisation of matter over manner rooted in particular conditions of existence..." (Atkinson and Deeming, 2015: 878, 886). In an ironic reversal of Gilray's satirical cartoons from the late eighteenth century, it was the working classes that were now likely to be fat but the attachment to a behavioural and especially moral perspective of this was still prevalent. Once again, the working class culture and body, regardless of circumstance, was perceived as deficient.

The Blair years increasingly saw within culture a retrenchment of 'ironic', politically incorrect satire that mercilessly parodied the working classes. These drew on much older stereotypes of criminality, fecklessness and miscegenation and came to re-project bourgeois disgust back onto an 'ordinariness' that only a short time before they had culturally valorised. Its widescale application might be seen as a class revenge on the gains of proletarian popular culture of the previous two decades. Imogen Tyler (2008: 31) succinctly points to the role of laughing at the poor as "boundary forming" to situate them as 'lower' and 'othered'. Food and its signalling was a prime battlefield.

Whilst the New (Labour) Establishment ate at Granita and the River Café ("... a very expensive restaurant where you eat peasant cuisine and drink out of cheap beakers"), it proclaimed meritocracy and equality of opportunity.¹⁵⁶ For the neoliberal managerial and corporate classes that now held cultural ascendancy across the political spectrum, those that concentrated on "getting fed" and focused on the "here and now" were deemed insufficiently aspirational (Atkinson and Deeming, 2015: 878). Within this formulation and Blair's advocacy of a 'European café culture', middle class denial was contrasted with "working class excess... [that was] represented through vulgarity" (Skeggs, 2004: 102).

Congruent to this language, the celebrity chef Jamie Oliver, perhaps the era's epitome of 'Cool Britannia', lambasted parents, who, for whatever reason, failed to sit

¹⁵⁶ De Lisle, Leanda. "New Labour, same old snobbery" *The Guardian*. July 8, 1999.

around a table to eat dinner as "what we have learnt to call 'white trash'".¹⁵⁷

Anticipating the contemporary so-called 'culture war' by two decades, Oliver linked the economic choices of millions to a moral judgement. As Katie Beswick (2020: 82) has stated, these crude representations of working classness became "totalising narratives" increasingly damning those whose identities had been formed around, for example, pie and mash shops and the original communitarian culture they represented.

The broad brush strokes of derision painted by a Third Way bourgeois evangelism however failed to articulate a London-specific context of an increasingly global city with its concomitant cultural transmission where a cockney might well now not be white nor simply the clichéd shaven headed 'white-van man'. More, it failed to articulate the delineations (and indeed confusions around definitions) within and around the London working class itself. It was not uncommon and remains the case as Nicola Ford suggested of the pie and mash shop where she works in Harold Hill, that one might see "a Jag or a Roller" parked outside a pie shop, it's owner revisiting his (or her) past food heritage.¹⁵⁸ Robert Cooke regularly sees in his Chelmsford pie and mash shop "... bricklayers from Brentwood... wearing Rolexes"¹⁵⁹ Indeed, the owners of both the Cooke's and the Manze's dynasties always had a penchant for expensive cars and large houses, emblems of their extraordinary wealth.¹⁶⁰

Cockney was always about, as Dick Hobbs (1988) has it, "entrepreneurial proletarianism" and some had done as Ian Dury sang, "very well". It wasn't that the cockney working class was necessarily antithetical to contemporary gustatory fashion (or 'posh food') rather they relied on a memorialisation and self-valorisation of a food that was based on comfort, and which held within it its origin story. Indeed, initially Blair as an heir to Thatcherism had largely carried the conservative, aspirational working class cockney, historically suspicious of the state, expounding dreams of home ownership, enhanced individualism and financial opportunity. The

¹⁵⁷ O'Neil, Brendan. "Roasting the Masses" *The Guardian* 27 August 2008.

¹⁵⁸ Nicola Ford. Interview by author June 12, 2022.

¹⁵⁹ Robert Cook. Interview by author, September 10, 2021.

¹⁶⁰ Graham Poole. Interview by author September 16, 2021. At his prime before the Second World War, Michael Mansi, the founder of the Manzi dynasty had fourteen businesses and a collection of Italian cars.

image of the 'welfare scrounger', a well-designed folk devil as articulated by Stuart Hall, was (and remains) very appealing to the cockney working class. Here potentially was a place where 'Mondeo Man' and 'White Van man' could meet. However, the (alleged) initial championing of working class culture and its subsequent demonisation was, I argue, an early trigger point for the beginning of a rebellion against the project of what became to be seen as an over-educated, remote, metropolitan liberal elite. As Streeck (2017: 10) succinctly puts it, however this was "a cultural struggle of a special kind, one in which the moralisation of a globally expanding capitalism goes hand in hand with the demoralisation of those who find their interests damaged by it."

When Blair declared the class war over in 1999, a statement confirmed by subsequent Conservative governments, he accelerated a de-coupling of class and vote and indeed ushered in the emergence of "class non-voting" (Evans and Tilley, 2017: 193). Here perhaps was a start of a nostalgia for a pre-globalised world, a disillusionment and rage at what became to be seen as 'cartel parties', succinctly noted in an Essex pie shop as "...all these pricks, the politicians... [with their] ... general elections and fucking bye-elections and all the rest of it... fuck 'em they're not worth it."¹⁶¹ Here perhaps were the hazy beginnings of a polity that opposed so-called 'experts' that would lead eventually to an age of 'post-factual politics' (Katz and Mair, 1995).

For the cockney, distinction, the denigration of class habitat and a cuisine of comfort was entirely significant: it meant that despite the fact that many had become wealthy during the previous decades, they were still largely unable to join the 'respectable' table. The cockney East End turned increasingly to Essex down the A13 carrying with it a "freight of memory" (Sinclair, 2004: 58) that would become "a key political signifier in contemporary British culture" (Dave, 2006: 152). Here it would combine and synthesise with older, reimagined, fluid but contested polyphonic memories of what cockney culture was and 'should be' creating an odd simulacra of that which Sinclair (2004: 95) suggests "used to be jellied-eel London."

¹⁶¹ Ken, (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 20 May 2022.

The sustained attack on working class corporeality, food and wider culture that began under Blair but continued under successive Conservative governments was in no small way a starting point for both the contemporary indignant populism evidenced amongst some sections of the London working class and its allied, multivalent, reinscribed and performative nostalgias. This populist anger saw its fruition in the vote for Brexit.

The Brexit narrative significantly correlates to the constituency of reactionary populism that can be found within the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops, especially in Essex. As Danny Dorling (2016) has conclusively shown, only 24% of social classes D and E and voted to leave the European Union giving lie to the statement that Brexit was simply a cry from the economically impoverished, 'left behinds'.¹⁶² Rather the vote united two significant contemporary trajectories congruent to a modern cockney identity.

The first was an Empire nostalgia valorised largely amongst an ageing post-war demographic birthed within the security of a national economy that significantly ignored (or more succinctly I suggest, were never taught) the projects' colonial past (Virdee, Satnam and McGeever, 2018). The second, the result of a continued cultural demonisation of the working class and the politics of austerity following the 2008 crisis, led to the resurrection of a dormant, racist Powellite English nationalism framed within the politics of white working class victimhood (Ware, 2008). This had (very long) roots within a significantly earlier inculcation of a racialised national identity by the elites within the working classes that started after the defeat of Chartism. This had been periodically deployed over generations by the State through one of the many subsequent cockney identities as the 'defensive trench' of Empire. This fusion of a 'whitened' working class into an Imperial Britain was historically a Conservative project but had been sustained by a Labour Party historically loyal to the State. When Thatcher declared that there was no such thing as society, let alone class, a new social contract predicated on race had to be built to consolidate the nation (Barker, 1981; Gilroy, 1987). Now,

¹⁶² The National Readership Survey classifies social classes D and E as the unskilled working class and the non-working (state pensioners, casual low-grade workers and the unemployed claiming benefits).

race became the modality in which class [was] lived, the medium through which class relations [were] experienced, the form in which it [was] appropriated and 'fought through' (Hall, 1980: 341 in Virdee, 2014: 163).

Significantly, the defeat of traditional working class political structures, including those of anti-racism during the 1980s, led to a realignment of the forces of the nationalist right that seeped across mainstream political parties and the press to form an emergent consensus.

After the 2001 riots, largely framed as racial, Maurice Glassman's Blue Labour faction, in pursuit of 'traditional', largely right-wing Labour voters, championed the social conservatism of 'flag and family' against the now Muslim 'other'. This was aligned with a growing discourse against multiculturalism, the nebulous 'political correctness' and for immigration controls (Virdee, Satnam and McGeever, 2018). After the 7/7 bombings in London, a narrative grew that "Muslims were the beneficiaries of a weak state and a misguided liberal multicultural policy" (Rhodes, 2010). In 2007, the Labour MP for Barking, Margaret Hodge deployed the language of the BNP to decry "the legitimate sense of entitlement felt by the indigenous family overrides the legitimate need demonstrated by new migrants."¹⁶³ The following year the BBC screened the notorious 'White Season' that in part reintroduced and 'beatified' the ideas of Enoch Powell (Bourne, 2008). This was as Bottero (2009) suggests, nothing less than the construction of a new and excluded 'cultural' minority - the white working class.

Between 2005-2010, despite the financial crisis, immigration was deemed a priority by the electorate (Evans and Chzhen in Sobolewska and Ford, 2020: 163). The concomitant national 'sovereignty' narrative, confined so long to the fringes of the Euro-sceptic Right, re-emerged within the mainstream of the Conservative Party. Indeed, "[I]n domestic elections UKIP was mobilised in the same kind of voters, with the same kind of concerns, as the BNP" (Ford and Godwin in Sobolewska and Ford,

¹⁶³ Hodge, Margaret. "A message to my fellow immigrants", *The Observer*, 20 May 2007.

2020: 167). This trajectory was adjacent to Nigel Farage's allied UKIP rhetoric around the elite's benefit from neoliberal globalisation against the 'common man'.

In 2005, David Cameron an old Etonian married to an Astor had become the leader of the Conservative Party. Formerly the Director of Corporate Affairs at Carlton Television, Cameron fitted well Farage's subsequent populist jibe about voters being "fed up to the back teeth with cardboard cut-out careerists in Westminster".¹⁶⁴

Cameron, at heart a social liberal, attempted to steer his party away from its growing libertarian right wing and the burgeoning grassroots Eurosceptic insurgency of UKIP. These he had previously described as "fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists".¹⁶⁵ On becoming Prime Minister in 2010 as part of a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats, and despite his attempts to mollify the right of his party with plans for a new immigration and asylum policy, Cameron found it increasingly difficult to quieten Farage's triangulation of identity politics, patriotism and working class opposition to globalised mass immigration.

In 2013, to placate his Eurosceptic backbenchers and win back Tory defectors to UKIP, Cameron promised an 'in' or 'out' referendum on membership of the European Union if he won the next election. This did not entirely appease his distrustful backbenchers nor UKIP voters whose "primary demand was immigration control" (Sobolewska and Ford, 2020: 185). Re-elected in 2015 with a Conservative majority he selected the 23rd of June 2016 as the date for the referendum on whether the UK should remain within or leave the EU. Cameron campaigned for Remain with 'Britain Stronger in Europe', a cross-party lobbying group whilst Boris Johnson, a populist politician, journalist and former London mayor recently returned to the Commons, became one of the figureheads of the Vote Leave campaign. The subsequent slim victory for Leave led to Cameron's resignation. He was replaced by Theresa May whose 'hostile environment' strategy became the cornerstone for ongoing immigration policy. Her premiership, dominated by the Brexit withdrawal agreement was ended after a vote of no confidence in her negotiations with Brussels. She was succeeded by Johnson in 2019 with the populist mantra 'get Brexit done'. His victory

¹⁶⁴ Accessed at <https://www.ukpol.co.uk/nigel-farage-2013-speech-to-ukip-conference/>

¹⁶⁵ Carlin, Brenden. "Off-the-cuff Cameron accuses Ukip of being 'fruitcakes and closet racists'". *The Daily Telegraph*, 5 April 2006.

symbolised the annexation of the Conservative Party by a libertarian faction wrapped in a flag of xenophobic nationalism.

What became known as Brexit did not however happen overnight but was rather a culmination of decades of coalescing forces. Growing public distrust of a political class recruited increasingly from a professional, managerial background was felt especially (but certainly not exclusively) amongst older, less well-educated working class communities. In addition, a re-racialisation (Schwarz, 1996) of British politics from the immediate post-colonial era had been revived in an age of neoliberal precarity. Apparently ‘Enoch was right’ after all. This focussed working class anger especially onto recent Eastern European immigrants and the murder of Arkadiusz Jozwik in the Stow shopping centre in Harlow, Essex in 2016 “encapsulated the febrile summer of the European referendum” (Cowley, 2018: 128). Much of this was articulated by the radical right’s UKIP messaging of ‘Brussels plus’. This succeeded in channelling the deep post-war racial disaffection of a generation that had additionally lived through the legacy of deindustrialisation and saw a memorialised way of life slowly fading. In this sense, the EU simply “came to represent all of the ills of modern society” (Ford and Godwin, 2014: 275).

Reflecting largescale demographic changes around class, income, education and ethnicity, 59% of London voted to remain in the European Union.¹⁶⁶ Two of the UK's five districts with the highest percentage of people which backed Brexit were in Essex.¹⁶⁷ London had irrevocably changed for the cockney who nostalgically identified with a mono-racial, post war landscape. For some who had made the Great Trek eastwards, Essex was now a place for those like ‘Brian’ where “We've got our own kind down here... and you do try to hang on to it.”¹⁶⁸ Eels, pie and mash had increasingly become a comforting link to a mythologised East End past.

¹⁶⁶ <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/elections-and-referendums/past-elections-and-referendums/eu-referendum/results-and-turnout-eu-referendum/eu-referendum-results-region-london>

¹⁶⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36617396>

¹⁶⁸ Brian (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 14 May 2022.

5.2 “Nothing tastes as good as the past” (Serematakis: 1996: 1)

“Sometimes emotions are stirred into food and become what you feel.”¹⁶⁹

As the anthropologist Daniel Miller suggests in *The Comfort of Things* (2008) the objects that we value help form a bridge between ourselves and the people we love. Food is one such object and it is central to understanding how the eel, pie and mash shops and wider cockney culture are memorialised. For some this is simply a meal that reconnects them with their past, their family traditions and historic geographic location. For most people like Tommy B, “pie and mash was the food you went for because you couldn’t afford to go and have other stuff... it sort of encapsulates everything about the East End.”¹⁷⁰ For John Bradley it remains a central part of a cockney identity and “about the people that are here, you go to the shops and ... you can hear the [cockney] voices.”¹⁷¹ For others however it has, concomitant with the rise of identitarian politics, become a symbol of -

“... an ordered past in which they were exploited and pauperized, but nonetheless knew who they were [rather than] to a chronically chaotic present in which even those limited certainties have been stripped away by the new corporate mandate of interminable, regressive change.” (Gilroy, 2005: 109).

Pie and mash for some I contend, conveys well the linkage of the personal to the political (Radstone, 2010). Its humbleness evokes the melancholy of a romanticised poverty and the rituals that surround it speak to the soothing but unreachable routines of mid-century working class life. It’s eating is a comfort for an imagined past that can never be recaptured. This absence is the cockney saudade.

Indeed, food, and the eating of it, is rarely just about the food itself. What we eat, how we eat it and crucially how we remember it is, as Lupton (1996:6) proposes, “... mediated through social relations ... [and] a thick layer of meaning is accreted around every food substance, and a physiological dimension of food is inextricably

¹⁶⁹ Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight’s Children*. Mehta, Deepa. 20th Century Studios, 2012.

¹⁷⁰ Tommy B. Interview by author 25 March 2022.

¹⁷¹ John Bradley. Interview by author 25 May 2022.

intertwined with the symbolic.” These cultural ‘meanings’, these ‘interpretations’ of the truths of the exterior world, are however primarily experienced as involuntary and largely invisible sensory perceptions through the biological body.

For C. Nadia Serematakis (1996: 5-6) this is a reciprocal and dialogical process between the individual’s “inner states... [and] the socio-material field outside of the body... [where] sensory interiors and exteriors constantly pass into each other in the creation of extra-personal significance.” What she calls “social aesthetics” are “embedded in, and inherited from, an autonomous network of object relations and prior sensory exchanges” which are beyond language and crucially fluid so that sensory memory is not “mere repetition but [a] transformation which brings the past into the present as a natal event.” This exchange with what Rhys Taylor (2017: 4) calls “wider cultural significations” likely results in the ‘performance’ of gestures and embodied acts which are “elicited by externality and history as much as ... from within.” Serematakis (1996: 9) further offers that each sense perception is rendered as a “re-perception” - the result of the activity between “co-implicated sensory spheres” and material objects which further places memory within time. The prosaic eating of a plate of eels, pie and mash is in this way an extraordinarily powerful sensory mnemonic experience for the cockney because it contains a multitude of sensory meanings overlaid in a matrix of culturally and temporally mediated transactions that is crucially (if subtly) flexible and changing.

Memory is the landscape of the sensory cultural transmission of food between the personal and the political. The plotting of the co-ordinates of its flexible conductance will enable us to chart both how it is memorialised and subsequently why. I identify three central sites on which this transmission takes place. The first is childhood.

As Maureen Mahoney and Barbara Yngvesson (in Lupton, 1996: 58) suggest, the child engages in a process of creating meaning with its primary caregivers. This predates language and rests on the bond between (usually) mother and child whereby intimacy triggers emotions via sensory touch, smell and sound. Here, it becomes clear that food memory is more often than not principally located within gender. Lupton (1996: 39) notes that it is the woman’s primary (expected and traditionally socially normative) role in the nuclear family to provide some sort of

emotional stability for the group and acculturate children into appropriate behaviour including the conventions of their eating habits. More, women are largely responsible for feeding and nourishing infants and in this way throw a kind of “*cordon sanitaire*” around the infant mediating what is allowed into (and policing what comes out of) the child’s body (Murcott in Lupton, 1996: 40). As Holtzman (2006) attests, the collective memories that pass through these arenas are inevitably “quintessentially gendered” and cockney culture is, as both Young and Willmot (1957) and Cohen (2013) suggest, matrifocal and matrilinear.

Within this panorama, the family kitchen is a central location for nurturing, and according to Carol Counihan (2013) a place where memories are stored. However, the externality of the East End street also provided an arena for the development of the child and the concomitant historical absence of cooking facilities also likely meant that the eel, pie and mash shop became in some senses an expedient and proxy ‘home from home’ further solidifying significant memorialisations. Even in the contemporary period this ‘homely food’ is brought into the house as a substitute for home cooking.

It was like one of those foods when your nan says ‘I can't be bothered cooking’ ... me Great Nan ... I used to take her pie and mash on a Saturday morning... I was only like five or six ... they give me the pie an’ the mash and the eels (from the shop) sent me round her house. We used to have like, half a lager and lime together and I was only little, so I was out me nut... and we used to watch the films on Saturday afternoons...”¹⁷²

The space of the pie shop remains subject to similar restrictions as the domestic home: a rule-based hierarchy of manners often ‘overseen’ by a (usually) male figure that sets a ‘tone’ for service, language and indeed atmosphere. Both casual and formal, the shops are a microcosm of a domesticity where men are almost always the central artisanal figure and women take on a largely service role.¹⁷³ It is in this

¹⁷² Johnny Griffiths. Interview by author, 5 December 2021.

¹⁷³ Of all the contemporary pie shops, I can think of no woman cooking, and the only female owned shop is Harrington’s in Tooting. The Cooke’s shop in Hoxton Market does employ a female cook but she is largely supervised by the owner, Joe Cooke.

way that Sarah Pink (2015: 44) concludes that "... experiences of place - and its social, physical and intangible components - are inextricable from the invocation and re-investment of memories." People expect the shops to be gendered in this 'traditional' way. "... normally when you go in it's like 'hello darling, all right?'... they're like that with everyone and they've got time for people and that adds to the atmosphere ..."¹⁷⁴

Within this context it is almost a rite of passage for a cockney child to be weaned in a pie shop by his or her mother on a combination of either blended pie and liquor or simply liquor and mashed potato. As Nicola Ford recollects, "... my mum couldn't wait to spoon feed it to my babies - literally - I remember her pureeing [it]... the pie and mash and feeding it literally ... [it] put the smile on her face."¹⁷⁵ Johnny Griffiths concurs that "Me nan says it was the first thing you cut your teeth on, a bit of pie - like a pork bone."¹⁷⁶ Rita Arment similarly recalls the pie shops of the 1940s and 1950s which "in those days had a 'baby bowl' - that was 4d - mash with liquor over it and babies seemed to love it."¹⁷⁷

Lupton (1996: 6) links the memorialised bond between mother and child as a symbiosis of sensual pleasure from infancy because of the close human contact with the food provider; the maternal link of bodily security a seedbed of memory. "[T]he bodily warmth, the touch of the other's flesh, their smell, the sounds they make - and the emotions and sensations aroused by this experience." Some mothers chew pies and spoon tiny pieces of it to their infants whilst others will test the heat of the dish with their own tongues before giving it to their babies. Visser (2015: 312) has suggested that "already chewed food, mixed with saliva is polluted... [and] is an anathema in polite society." However, Serematakis' (1994: 24) account of her own grandmother's feeding ritual is instructive.

¹⁷⁴ Adam Boutall. Interview by author October 19, 2021.

¹⁷⁵ Nicola Ford. Interview by author, 6 June 2022.

¹⁷⁶ Johnny Griffiths. Interview by author, 5 December 2021.

¹⁷⁷ Rita Arment. Interview by author, 20 November 2020.

Grandma used to mash with her fingers carrot, potato, macaroni and feel it with her lips and even her tongue and then give it to the child... When the food was hard, such as a bread crust, the old women would soften it with their saliva.

The sharing of food and saliva can, in this way stow within the child a “sensory acculturation and the materialization of historical consciousness” (Serematakis, 1996: 37).

The Taiwanese film *Eat, drink, man, woman* (in Lupton, 1996: 49) features a character who suggests “my memory is my nose” linking the olfactory sense to the eliciting of memory. Sutton (2005: 304) has it for the Greeks of Kalymnos that even “[A] flowerpot of basil can symbolise the soul of a people better than a drama of Aeschylus.” For Londoners, the smell of eels, pie and mash or indeed the odours of the shops themselves can bring to the fore a cacophony of memorialisation. As Rhian Atkin (2020: 83) suggests of the Portuguese *refogando*, its meaning “is contained in its smells and the memories that smell evokes.” For Rita Arment, the “lovely warm smell” reminded her of walking into her husband-to-be’s pie shop in 1957.¹⁷⁸ For Anthony Bradley, “the smell of the meat pies ... and the stale penny cakes we used to buy afterwards” every Saturday growing up on the Hackney Road is a direct path to his childhood and his late older brother.¹⁷⁹ The food is a memory pathway that cuts backwards in time and can recreate past experiences and resonate with different levels of consciousness.

However, not all children were socialised into eel, pie and mash through weaning and their senses appear to have compensated with memorialisations from different memory periods. Anthony Bradley who has eaten the food all his life was sent off every Saturday morning in the late 1960s with his brother to a (long gone) pie and mash shop on the Hackney Road. He recalls that his mother “never had it ... no idea why ... she was born in Bethnal Green ... I don’t remember me Dad eating it either. I dunno why us kids started eating it because normally you eat what your parents give you...”¹⁸⁰ His memory script involves the food *in spite* of weaning experiences.

¹⁷⁸ Rita Arment. Interview by author, 20 November 2020.

¹⁷⁹ Anthony John Bradley. Interview by author, 25 May 2022.

¹⁸⁰ Anthony John Bradley. Interview by author, 25 May 2022.

Eileen Errol went to school in Leytonstone in the early 1960s but lived in Hainaught and started eating pie and mash in her teens with friends. Hers was a classic act of rebellion against her family's ideals. "... [We] moved to Hainaught because my Mum said that she heard that people (in Dagenham) kept coal in the bath".¹⁸¹ As Lupton (1996) reports, this classically disaffected behaviour may occur when a child's feelings, in the context of eating, are embodied. This appears, according to Julia Brannen *et al* (1994), to be a more prevalent behaviour amongst young women than men as they may have fewer arenas in which to exhibit frustration. Indeed, even now Errol says she cannot mention pie and mash to her sister who sees it in very negative terms. "My sister is like Hyacinth Bucket (a working class snob who featured in a BBC TV sitcom). They've gone up in the world and she would *die* if I ever mentioned pie and mash [and] how lovely it is... they're a bit fine dining... they've worked very hard..."¹⁸² Ken, an ex-docker born in 1938, came from a family who were "a little unusual in the East End as they had an upstairs bathroom." He ran away from his parents and married at 19. His wife's family were 'on the stones' (casual dockworkers) and because dock work was almost entirely hereditary, he entered the profession with their help. He also encountered eels, pie and mash from his wife's family which became a "life-long habit".¹⁸³

These memorialisations based within sensory artefacts give an intriguing insight in the micro-class divisions within London's proletariat throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. More, they situate the dish within previous memories of the very poor and of a casual, largely unskilled working class. These memorialisation are themselves a likely reverberation of early Victoriana with regard to notions of propriety, manners and who valorised the food as both fuel and comfort.

Eels, pie and mash are also memorialised and remembered through the everyday rhythm and ritual performances of working class life. Paul Connerton (1989: 4, 25) implies an *incorporating memory* within ritualised ceremonies where a kind of 'sediment' is generated via what he refers to as "habit memory". These ritual performances are psychologically encoded and can be both verbal, visual or beyond

¹⁸¹ Eileen Errol. Interview by author, 22 October 2022.

¹⁸² Eileen Errol. Interview by author, 22 October 2022.

¹⁸³ Ken, (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 20 May 2022.

language but leave behind traces that are perceptible to the senses. In the pie shops, one might mention the accretion of meaning around *evolving* human interactions, performative gestures or slang but also the worn floors, the chipped tiles and the dented utensils. In the newer shops (for example) in Essex, the physical environments wait expectantly for memories to accrue in the materiality of new tiling, pristine kitchens and spills and scuffs on the unspoiled floors where “prescribed bodily behaviours” and the “choreography [of] an identifiable range of repertoires” automatically implies continuity with the past” (Connerton, 1989: 44, 74).

The challenge for these contemporary shops, as what one might euphemistically be called ‘traditional’ is articulated by Connerton (1989: 51) in his idea of “historical position”. Here, ritualised behaviour is not necessarily understood in isolation but in affinity to past events and “thus [crucially] susceptible to a change in their meaning”. Indeed, although Sutton (2001: 19) is critical of Connerton and his “fairly inflexible” approach where these “limited gestures” have to be repeated exactly “like a spell”, this is entirely apposite to the process of ossifying “formalised” ritual meanings into the new generation of eel, pie and mash shops away from their historical geographic and class roots.

Luce Giard (1998: 183) suggests that eating as an everyday practice “solidifies particular modes of relations between the person and the world that form the foundations of landmarks in space-time.” Indeed, although the ways people behave in the newer shops are a “cognitive memory of a communal lexicon” that lexicon is within a subtly changed material and temporal environment.¹⁸⁴ Largely gone are the childhood memories of mothers coming together with their children after a lengthy march around almost disappeared hyper-local street markets enmeshed in a matrix of known, formal and informal obligations. Increasingly (for example) Essex eel, pie and mash shops are sites for more general meetings and partially sketchy remembrances of how a previous generation might have acted or ordered or eaten. They form and will continue to form in their more recent guises, future memorialisations in the “constructions of [newer] worlds” (Sutton, 2001). They are the site of overlapping temporalities creating hybrid memory.

¹⁸⁴ Connerton, 1989: 88.

Lastly, we might gauge how memorialisations of the eel, pie and mash shops are formed through this temporal focus analogously to how Serematakis (1996) describes the role of coffee as a *sintrofia* (a friendly companion). She narrates how the taking of a Greek villager's coffee is essentially a pause in the day and how it "generates a moment of meta-commentary in which the entire stenography of present and past social landscapes are arrayed..." (1996: 13). Eels, pie and mash and the spaces that serve them also have narratives that are "frequently non-synchronous with the immediate continuum of socially constructed material presence and value" (Serematakis, 1996: 12). The shops in this way become a similar temporary portal (Serematakis would describe them as "islands of historicity... in stillness") that can act as an interruption and an interval in the everyday through which the cockney can breathe within his or her own evolving culture. Like the villagers' coffee sips, the pie shops and their food in this way might be seen as a temporary intermission on a neoliberal street "where micro-practices leak through the crevices and cracks of official cultures and memories"(1996: 13).

Increasingly however as the shops, both traditional and contemporary, are by demography, age and fashion themselves slowly divorced from long-established patterns of work, leisure and usage they are increasingly used for non- and neo-traditional purposes but still act as an (imperfect) aide mémoire to a partially invented historical past.¹⁸⁵ It is within this space that the cockney, like the Greek villager, may experience the mixing of temporalities, where the present and past meet in experiential, performative and sensory dialogue. The food of the pie shop is like the partaking of this Greek moment in that as a 'friendly companion' it generates, in its consumption, a conversation and commentary on for example, the weather, the family, how the local football team are faring and often, via social media and reminiscence, 'ways of doing things'; how London 'used to be'. Within this interlude and within the recent past, an extraordinary gustatory nostalgia has evolved around the eel, pie and mash shops. As Hasia Diner (2009: 366) has suggested, "as hungry people found food within their reach, they partook of it in ways which resonated with

¹⁸⁵ Some shops become bars at night and the Cooke's shop in Chelmsford regularly becomes a comedy venue. Older, more traditional shops are frequently used as backdrops in films or editorial photoshoots.

their earlier deprivations. How they remembered those hungers allows us to see how they once lived them, and how they then understood themselves in their new home without them.”

It is to those formulations and crucially nostalgic re-constructions of the eel, pie and mash shops in a critical political sense that I now turn.

5.3 Don't mention the War...

“Memory is ... a complex cultural and historical phenomenon constantly subject to revision, amplification and ‘forgetting. Memory is, therefore, a construction.”

(Bromley, 1998: 1)

There are now only a handful of eel, pie and mash shops that remain within the traditional cockney areas of inner London, but pie and mash is currently thriving with many new shops opening in the zones of white working class diaspora (especially) in Essex and the Medway towns. As these exodic memoryscapes, themselves the result of previous palimpsestic remembrances, travel beyond their original locations they merge with older solidarities and memorialisations brought with earlier decampments.

The worn wooden benches of London's oldest remaining shop, Manze's on Tower Bridge Road might evoke the memory of mid-Victorian class comradeship, itself buried beneath a trace of Victorian music hall cheerfulness. More likely, the memory of a meal savoured in gratitude after an air raid all-clear might still be experienced within the touch of the shops loose brickwork.

As Aleida Assman (2010: 97) suggests, each generation stands on the shoulders of its predecessors whose “... knowledge they can reuse and reinterpret.” Yet these new incarnations of the traditional shops and the culture that they signal to are contested and reveal fault lines that disclose less about the historical past and much more about the contemporary cockney identity.

In spats fought largely within closed networks on social media, seemingly trivial but essential debates centre around location, the rituals and intricacies of how and what the shops serve and what those memories mean. The central question for this dichotomy is whether the new shops are an extension of the original establishments, a simulacra or part of a new culture? This is really a struggle over whose memories will define the future of the shops and how the cockney as both a character and an idea will maintain. More, they signal to a larger contested narrative of white working 'classness' that perceives itself to be in existential crisis.

Joe Cooke's eel, pie and mash shop in Hoxton market is, as he unswervingly puts it, "absolutely traditional" and he sees himself "as very much a sort of a caretaker of a dynasty, or a culture and a tradition... that is a big part of the history of London and of the East End."¹⁸⁶ Although the actual shop was refashioned from a Victorian bank in the 1980s the styling and the menu are exactly as his great grandfather would recognise. Cooke's panorama of wooden benches and marble tables is as Bromley (1988: 4) suggests, "a coded sentimentality [that has a] "stabilizing and conciliating function." As Cooke sees it, it is impossible for eel, pie and mash shops to be anywhere else than the East End of London because they are so intimately tied to that city's past and cartography. As Phil Baker (2012: 279) suggests, "The feeling of place is inseparable from the meaning of place, often within personal cartographies that have their own landmarks."

For Johnny Malone however, an Essex native who has just opened a pie and mash shop in Southend, this isn't strictly true. Malone used to be a bricklayer but a shoulder injury at work meant that he was looking for something new to do. He had "sometimes" eaten pie and mash and admired the "... humbleness of it... it's a simple food that fed a lot of people back in the day, when it was tough, for not a lot of money."¹⁸⁷ His knowledge of the culture came to him largely from "the memories of me great nan and grandad... they were original Londoners...from Hackney." He admits that for him, "there's a few [personal] memories of it [but] what I got from my great Nan was a glimpse ... there'd be people out in the streets playing a piano ... it

¹⁸⁶ Joe Cooke owner of F. Cooke Pie Shop, Hoxton. Interview by author, 16 September 2021.

¹⁸⁷ Johnny Malone owner of Brickie's Pie Shop, Southend. Interview by author, 15 June 2022.

was a different world to what we live in now.”¹⁸⁸ Malone caters to working class people, many who have emigrated from London or who have visited in a traditional ritual to the seaside on holiday. He says that his shop is full of the stories of these people reminiscing about their own pasts and their favourite London pie shops – “...someone came in yesterday with a story and that’s what I love about it... With some of these Eastenders... you’ve still got a nan that’s telling a story.”

Jan Assman’s (2010) two-fold concept of memory is useful here. He defines a ‘cultural’ memory of rites and texts crystalizing collective experience that reacts to, and dances with, a ‘communicative’ memory, limited to a more recent generational past, encapsulating the informal transference of autobiography. Yet between these two is what Vansina (in Erll, 2011: 28) has called a “floating gap” (originally theorised through oral remembrances) that moves with the passage of time and between generations. For the pie shops, the contestations around what they are and will be is contained within this gap: an interregnum where the stories of Malone’s customers crystallise and become accepted and foundational to the modern cockney community. Indeed, although memories appear to change by ‘consensus and canon-building’ it’s more likely that they change by moulding along social fractures engendered by this volatile gap (Olick, 2003). The fissures are in part the work of hegemonic memory groups invading and capturing the memory landscape by selectively narrativizing and reconstructing their past (Bell in Bond, Craps and Vermeulen, 2016: 3). Because the cockney identity, especially its manifestation within the eel, pie and mash shops is largely absent from mainstream cultural texts it has been relatively straightforward as much as through a process of omission and exclusion to reify certain aspects of the culture and denigrate others. Sometimes these changes to ‘common sense’ are part of internal community machinations and sometimes they are responses to external pressures and ‘programming’. Either way, historically these ‘social fractures’, like the cockney character, have emerged parallel with, and reactive to, the passage of modernity itself (Legg, 2005).

The contemporary transmission of the cockney identity and the concomitant history of the eel, pie and mash shops are in a large degree, captured by these social

¹⁸⁸ Johnny Malone owner of Brickie’s Pie Shop, Southend. Interview by author, 15 June 2022.

fractures. Today, remembrances of the shops are, within living memory, significantly constructed via the memorialisations of a post-war generation that recall as children the legacy of wartime privation, mass colonial immigration and the turn towards post-Fordism. Fundamentally, this thesis argues that it is this generation's sketchy memorialisations and political framings of the Second World War - of which they played no significant part - that holds the key to much of the structure of contemporary politics and by extension, the identity of the cockney and the eel, pie and mash shop.

The seeds of this re-memorialising of the Second World War were sown a generation or more ago. Apposite to Hall's (1973) notion of encoding/decoding (especially in terms of the cockney identity construction in music hall), Bromley (1988: 17) suggests that the Thatcher government "selectively plundered" the conflict to lever a "romantic nationalism" based upon a "selective revival of particular symbols... constructed specifically from 'stories' of war and the interwar period." As Wright (2009: 41) added several years later, war had been declared again, but this time against the post-war settlement. Paul Gilroy (2004: 96-97) points out that the reappearance of the War, the Blitz and rationing were all "obsessive repetitions... anxious and melancholic" - part of a "need to get back to the place or moment before the country lost its moral and cultural bearings".

For obvious reasons, these wartime valorisations were especially resonant to a cockney audience soaked for several generations in a military nostalgia of the dying embers of an Imperial state - these notions seamlessly complementary to the background noise of war films, TV situation comedies and children's comics during the *Trente Glorieuses* and of a generation 'playing soldiers' in the schoolyards of a 1970s East End and new town Essex. These constructions around the Second World War (and later the Falklands) and its colonisation within popular memory had, to echo Gramsci, become something that had 'always' been there. The flag became adjuvant to working class support for a Conservative government that lauded the proletarian entrepreneurship of the cockney whilst simultaneously selling-off the council housing that supported the solidarities of the white working class in London. A decade later, Blue Labour attempted to use the flag in an appeal to memory whilst seeking white working class votes by using the Blitz to beguile the 'forgotten tribe' of

white cockneys (Collins, 2004) whose NHS and Welfare State was being 'swamped' by immigrants.¹⁸⁹

Yet pie shop customers would recall in bitter terms the moment when the formerly heroic cheerful Tommy had become an impediment to 'progress' when "white working class communities had become an embarrassment to New Labour" (Beider, 2015: 18). As Andreas Huyssen (2003: 3) says of this period, "... the 1990s seemed to be haunted by a trauma as dark as the underside of neoliberal triumphalism." Once awakened, this military zombie of English identity within cultural memory has refused to die. Its recent resurrection in contemporary reactionary politics that surround Brexit where the war and contestations of empire are central have become as Peter Mitchell (2021: 66) suggests, a "metonymic stand-in for whiteness, patriarchy and a generalised national chauvinism."

The memoryscapes that coalesce within both the London and Essex pie shops are numerous and I refer to them as polyphonic. I suggest that the pie shops in both locations hold simultaneous memories that are distinct but synchronous: all playing - like the cockney barrel organ - at the same time. These are the partial reminiscences of a marooned, largely elderly precariat who still inhabit the dwindling stock of social housing in the fading penumbras of traditional cockney areas of London. They are also the exodic transmitted and transmuted memories of their contemporaries and scions in the pioneering townscapes of Essex and beyond. Within these voices are captured innumerable and incalculable modifications; other palimpsestic memoirs of individualised personal memory epochs largely valorising a lost landscape of a post-war period of gain and stability. They are legion but not simply a "matter of personal recall" (Bromley, 1988: 4). They all however point to a predominantly white, monocultural and inevitably 'better' past and share a 'geography of belonging' (Hodgkin and Radstone, 2003: 169) with a melancholic and often furious sense of loss.

¹⁸⁹ The term 'swamping' in relation to immigration was first used by the Far Right in the 1970s then repeated by Margaret Thatcher, first in a Scottish television interview and then on *World in Action* in 1979. Thatcher, Margaret. 27 January 1978. *World in Action*. Granada Television. <https://www.margareththatcher.org/document/103485>

That sense of loss was apparent to Pierre Nora (1989: 7) who has suggested that we now speak of memory so much because “there is so little of it left.” For Nora, we no longer live within a previous (utopian) era of *milieux de mémoire* (‘environments of memory’) and within modernity, its attendant democracy, mass society and more recently, globalisation, that there now remain only, “... *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory.” He postulates these symbolic sites, these *mnemotechnics*, capture in a shorthand, necessary ideas and memories. For Nora these sites can be “geographical locations, buildings, monuments and works of art as well as historical persons, memorial days, philosophical and scientific texts, or symbolic actions” (Erl, 2011: 3). Here, “memory crystallises and secretes itself” (Nora, 1989: 7). They could be a plate of warm eels in liquor, the tang of white pepper on a pie all condensed in the steam of a pie shop window.

The traditional eel, pie and mash shops in London can themselves be seen as *lieux de memoire* but crucially in a dual sense. For the very few historical ones that endure, they encapsulate a physicality. They are both a sanctuary and a place of excursion that is only reinforced by their sensoriality; their ability through gustation, to imprint upon the bodies and senses of those that eat there. Additionally, they encapsulate a dimension where, through the rituals contained within them and the slang spoken around them, they exhibit what Nora (1989: 19) refers to as a “symbolic aura”. In this way, the shops, as structures of feeling are an articulation of a ‘classness’. They contain symbolisms that break “a temporal continuity” by reaching backwards and forwards within memorialisations to both the past and the present (Erl, 2011: 24). These structures are unstable yet “collectively constructed and reconstructed in the present rather than resurrected from the past... the product of mediation, textualization and acts of communication” (Rigney 2008: 13-14).

Because the pie shops are de-facto working class arenas and because for very specific historic reasons there is scant scriptural memorialisations around them, the memories evoked by them I suspect are more able to be moulded to the present notions of what the past was. In this way certain memorialisations become more consequential for specific groups. Indeed, Ann Rigney (2008: 346) implies that Nora’s *lieux de memoire* are part of a mnemonic process where memory sites are

being constantly reinvested with memory and become a “self-perpetuating vortex of symbolic investment.”

In recent years these symbolic investments have been calcified in a very specific way through innumerable biographies that have sought to chart and celebrate the difficulties of London’s post war generations. Located in the laudable New Left tradition of ‘history from below’, titles like Gilda O’Neil’s *My East End: Memories of Life in Cockney London* (1999), Sally Worboyes’ *East End Girl: Growing Up the Hard Way* (2006) and Melanie McGrath’s *Pie and Mash down the Roman Road* (2018) have narrated a specific sentimentality, largely without wider contexts, that have tried to entrench an orthodoxy of a particular East End that speaks to conformity and the change between the individual, the emergent neoliberal state, manual labour and the challenges of a working class divided by precarity. This has much to do with a “post-war reconfiguration of the built environment that ruptured everyday patterns of life” (Waters, 1999) and can be seen as an attempt to “...slow down information processing, to resist the dissolution of time in the synchronicity of the archive... [and] ... to claim some anchoring space in a world of puzzling and often threatening heterogeneity, non-synchronicity and information overload (Huysen, 1995: 7).

More prosaically though, they can be seen as part of an overtly political reconstruction of ‘ordinariness’ since the mid-1970s came to view the social memory of the ‘other’ in terms of the ‘undeserving’ poor. Crucially as Ben Jones (2012: 124) suggests however, these historical accounts, “were the work of men and women whose own mobility rendered problematic their relationship with the communities they had left behind.” This as much as anything reveals the contestations between working class memory groups within the eel, pie and mash shops not only between London and Essex but between an inter-class division of those who have ‘made it’ and those who have not. More however they have become part of an archive of conservative emotions and patriotic signifiers. Raphael Samuel (2012: 163) conceded as much when he suggested that the project of history ‘from below’ might have actually spurred on the ‘whimsy’ of austerity.

The memorialisations that enmesh the eel, pie and mash shops have sought to mediate and set the agenda for future acts of remembrance within society (Erlil and

Rigney, 2009: 3). This is part of an active process of recollection and retrieval that is largely dependent on the aims of the dominant, hegemonic memory group.

Crucially this might mean that other less influential memory groups, those that for example remember eating with knives (as opposed to spoons) or more presciently those that have more varied multicultural memories of the shops might learn to identify, as Halbwachs (1997: 35-37) has suggested, with the memories of others if that is expedient. These days it is a brave soul that might question the online bullying that surrounds contestations of say, South London's best shop or whether the liquor served was how an emigre to Essex might remember it from his childhood ("I wouldn't serve that to my dog"... "only with a fork and spoon"... "not proper"... "you're not a real cockney").¹⁹⁰ As Robert, a fifth generation Cooke and the owner of the recently opened F. Cooke in Chelmsford, Essex explains if "someone was to come up and say in person 'you've got to turn your pie over' [to eat it]... they'd probably get a slap in the face... my family's been going one hundred years and my granddad never taught me that... it's ignorance... He's probably not from the East End, his Dad probably took him to West Ham, and he's probably been to Maureen's once, right?"¹⁹¹

In this way Rigney (2008: 346) indicates that that once a site has emerged as a focus for remembrance it pulls in a great deal of allied memories. Yet this may still not be enough to heal the rupture between that past and the present and into this void rushes the spirit of nostalgia.

5.4 We've had our jellied eels and our glass of beer

"We escape the trauma of history we happen to be living through by entering the mythic time of the history we didn't." (Mitchell, 2021: 23)

¹⁹⁰ This reproduces the bitter sense that many messages within several Facebook groups evidence around contemporary experience.

¹⁹¹ Maureen's pie shop now associated with West Ham football fans after the demise of Nathan's that was close to the old Upton Park ground.

In the late seventeenth century, a Swiss physician sought to classify and medicalise an affliction that had struck down, amongst others, Swiss mercenaries fighting far from home. Johannes Hofer joined two Greek words, *nostos* (to return home) and *algai* (a painful condition) to give a name to a longing for home that no longer (or perhaps had never) existed (Davis, 1979: 414)

Svetlana Boym (2001) suggests that this 'medical' condition of nostalgia was linked to a changing conception of time itself. Those afflicted by this nostalgia were caught between a largely personal, local conception of time that obeyed the rhythms of the natural world and an imposition of a universal capitalist time that signalled to a teleology of progress. Within modernity, the 'past' became for the first time a quantifiable notion that was "unrepeatable and irreversible" (Boym, 2001: 13). Nostalgia was a mental pause or even retreat from the acceleration of this new temporality.

By the close of the eighteenth century the notion of nostalgia had been overlaid by Romanticism. Here, the emotion of the individual and a cultural longing for nature was set against the dawning of the rapacious machine age. By the middle of the following century, the bourgeoisie had colonised and relocated the centre of this yearning from the individual to the nation and in doing so codified appropriate emotional responses to the extraordinary temporal changes that capitalism had attended. It achieved this partly by parasitically assimilating the pre-industrial *weltanschauung* of the peasantry (and its partial adoption by the landed elites) into an expedient ideology of *real politik* thus colonising and regulating the past as heritage (Boym, 2001: 14). In this way, Trollope ([1875] 1992: 64) could have Mr Cadbury lament that "... we belonged to a newer and worse sort of world." Tennyson however could engage simultaneously in a melancholic nostalgia within a fantastical, folkloric British history and concurrently valorise the achievements of a ravenous, brutal and mechanised Empire.

As the century progressed, one section of the ascendent bourgeois (as one half of the schism within British liberalism) came to view this nostalgia as an impediment to progress, part of a wider degeneracy associated with "defeatism and anti-modernity" (Pickering and Keightley, 2006: 920). The other, what might be called the 'peace,

economy and reform' section of Gladstonian liberalism appeared more sympathetic to the plight of the toiling masses. The character of the largely music-hall constructed cockney identity was partly captured within the divide of this framing. Its historical precursor, the violent abyss figure of middle class alarm, both of the atomised criminal and swarming mob, was reimagined as a cheerful and resilient casualty of inevitable class structure, the collateral damage of the machine age. This notion of nostalgia, coetaneous with modernity and now largely adjacent to the idea of nation was also crucial to how the cockney viewed itself and continues to do so.

Here was a community of largely self-employed, proletarian entrepreneurs striving to scrape a living against a backdrop of brutal poverty and destitution. Inevitably inward-looking, the cockney community had their own largely obscure, selectively hidden customs and traditions but were partially accommodated within capital as reward for their fealty. The archetypal late Victorian cockney was therefore a figure of both pity and (self) respect but also a creation transmuted into a patriotic servant of Empire. This was how the malnourished slum-coster could simultaneously be roused to fight the Boer with a rendition of "Goodbye Dolly Gray" (1897) and weep at the sentimental truth of their own inter-war destitution, "Underneath the Arches" (1932), without necessarily connecting the political linkage behind both that concealed, to paraphrase Fisher (2009), 'the horizons of the possible'.

Loss was always a central motif of the cockney. From the mid-nineteenth century clearing of the streets to *fin de siècle* waves of precarity and the 'moonlight flit' to the destructions of the Blitz to *Steptoe and Son*, the cockney was always a cultural foci for both spatial and temporal deficit. The fragmentary telos of modernity left few spaces for dealing with this loss but nostalgia like a remedial salve, was there to offer comfort. Nostalgia, not always the contemporary saccharine meme could also be an interruption to the present where "memories of past belonging can be used to create a sense of belonging *in* the present if not *to* the present" (Pickering and Knightley, 2006: 921). It could also be called upon in a curative sense to "... provide what the present lacks" (Bal, 1999: 72). It could be found in the singing around the pub piano, the cheer of the football crowd and in the warmth of the pie shop. It can still be found for Mark Wincott who uses the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops

when he's feeling fragile for "... a bit of banter ... talking shit for an hour with other people." ¹⁹²

Cockney nostalgia is realised well within Stuart Albert's (in May, 2017: 402) notion of a 'temporal comparison process' which moves back and forth through time to create "a culturally appropriate sense of a coherent self." In this way, the cockney might find consolation in multiple, palimpsestic nostalgic temporalities: the Victorian father-figure, the wartime Tommy or the sharp-suited Mod. Here, as Stuart Tannock (1995: 456) suggests, nostalgia functions as a search for continuity.

Nostalgia could also map a cockney cartography of the city in a particular and secure way. This was the metropolis invisible to most but layered with glimmers of personal landmarks in a similar way that Georges Perec's 'Places' describe locations in Paris associated with a former girlfriend thus imbued with hidden meaning. These, like the sites of closed pie shops, gentrified pubs and now privately owned council flats, "turn[s] the city into a personalised memorial" nostalgically commemorating what Perec refers to as "dead places that ought to survive" (Bellos in Baker, 2012: 277).

Yet nostalgia is also manipulative, reinforcing the romantic assumption that the cockney's lot was inevitably to suffer. This was the cockney fatalism of the Blitz or the low horizons that some still valorise as part of their heritage. As David H. suggests, "We know what we like, we know what we're used to ... there's not normally anything wrong with tradition, it's when they try to change it..."¹⁹³ In this way the cockney remains simultaneously nostalgic but also trapped by the forces of a nostalgia which had historically viewed it as either a Mrs Mop or a Kray twin cliché. These were the days when you could leave your door open or control "the bad behaviour of children simply through knowing who they were and where they came from" (Watson and Wells, 2005: 26). Yet these were also the days when people often kept their cultural and political preferences hidden for fear of ridicule or ostracism.

¹⁹² Mark Wincott. Interview by author 16 May 2022.

¹⁹³ David H. Interview by author 14 April 2022.

This community nostalgia is shaped by what Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer (2002: 256) call 'postmemory', that is a nostalgia-mediated link to, in Stefan Zweig's (1942) phrase, a lost "world of yesterday" largely transmitted from their parents. Although their work concerns memory traces and nostalgia within the Jewish diaspora after the Holocaust their note that children of exiles and refugees "have very peculiar relationships" to the places from which their families were removed is entirely apposite to the exodic parental transmission (culturally and sensorially) of the landscape of the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops.

In that sense the present-day cockney has been historically marooned between their traditional London and diasporic identities because modernity leaves little room for how the past may "*actively* [my italics] engage with the present and future" (Pickering and Keightley, 2006: 920).

Boym theorises and distinguishes two types of nostalgic tendencies. Firstly, a *restorative* nostalgia which emphasises *nostos* and "recreates the past as a value for the present" (Boym, 2001: 49) and secondly, a *reflective* version which abides in the longing of *algia*, lingering over "... ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time" (Boym, 2001: 41). Whilst the latter points to whimsy within individual (and cultural) memory, the former signals to political action. The latter is painfully captured by Collins (2017: 7) who tells of journeying back to the Southwark streets where he grew up and now walks like an 'ex-pat' to seek out "familiar relics on return trips... to remind ourselves we once existed on streets we now walk as ghosts."

Collins' traditional white working class cockney London has not declined as such, but it has migrated. South London now extends to the Kent coast and The East End stretches far into the bucolic countryside of Essex and sometimes to the flatlands of Norfolk. This displacement has created a real sense of what Tuan (1974) referred to as a rich 'topophilia'; a strong love of place that is imbued with and crucially, reinscribes a cultural identity. Cohen's (2014) interrogation of this cockney diaspora evidenced a dual class trajectory; the 'upward' a 'self-made' entrepreneur who has 'escaped' from the working class by his own volition and the 'downward', exhibiting

what a 'poor whites' syndrome' both valorising with the East End with its former glories.

These diasporic nostalgias are now largely recited in both physical and psychic pilgrimages to sites of former East End life largely buried within the landscape of the neoliberal city which John Clarke (1976) presciently referred to as a "magical recovery of community." The most significant pilgrimage is via that other great consolation of Victorian proletarian life, football. Here, fans travel back into former class territories and visit places affiliated with their club, be that pubs or cafes or eel, pie and mash shops. This is, as (Fawbert, 2011: 181) suggests is community persisting as "communion" through performative re-enactments of cultural tropes like pie and mash before the game.

Ronald Ranta and Yonatan Mendel (2014) submit a group identity may be constructed both around the foods of a particular diet and "the manners and methods, in which [that] food is prepared, commodified and consumed..." The eating of eels, pie and mash as a pre-match ritual has become performative cultural re-enactment of a selective memory-scape based largely within the post-war era, both an historic nod to Bourdieu's 'food of necessity' and, especially with jellied eels, as a 'food of ordeal'. Millwall fans generally congregate at Manze's on Tower Bridge Road and, as did their forefathers, still serenade their team onto the pitch with, "We've had our jellied eels and our glass of beer..." Eels, pie and mash here are revealed as what might be described as a 'local patriotism' (Tuan, 1974: 101) with a national 'referent'. They are of 'Enger-land' but they remain specifically of 'London' - although not necessarily the London of gentrification nor the tastes of multiculturalism in the same way that Catherine Palmer (1988) suggests food cultures can also articulate the boundaries of groups in opposition to the nation in competition to the dominant group. Here, the cockney is cast as a sort of Ulster Unionist in that they on the whole *desire* to be part of the national narrative, continue to evidence their uniqueness and historic loyalty to the nation but remain largely irrelevant to elite culture and the approbation and recognition that may bring.

This trend could be initially evidenced in the violence of West Ham hooligans known as "The Pie and Mash Firm" in the 1990s amidst and against the first flourishings of

the multicultural, managerial, 'audit society' politics of the first Blair government (Power, 1998). Their ironic calling cards advertised their meted-out violence to rival fans as 'liquoring'.¹⁹⁴ This pie and mash iconography built on earlier recruiting by the National Front in the 1970s and the British National Party in the 1980s on the terraces of football grounds across the country. This was evidenced as "... a deep racist sentiment... partly borne from a sense of grievance and perceived betrayal of post-war local authority promises, particularly with regard to housing policies" (Fawbert, 2011: 181).

For some, whiteness had become a badge of a true cockney and "conferred some sort of guarantee and entitlement" (Ware, 2008). Recently fascist groupuscules like the so-called 'Pie and Mash Squad' claim the meal and its surrounding culture as an appellation of whiteness.¹⁹⁵ Birthed from an earlier incarnation of violent football supporters known as Casuals United, they arose as a response to perceived Muslim 'extremists'. More prosaically, 'pie and mash' is a well-known phrase in so-called cockney rhyming slang for 'fash' - fascism. Whilst the vast majority of those that eat and work in the pie and mash shops are certainly *not* racists, it is undeniable that the shops themselves have been associated with and sometimes symbolically arrogated by those who are.

In this way, cockney memory has situated eel, pie and mash within the frame of what DeSoucey (2010: 433) termed, 'gastronationalism'. This was originally theorised as state-level lobbying against a globalising food policy but has also come to signify a grassroots opposition to the forces of gentrification identified by their victims as being "associated with foreigners or out of touch liberal elites who not only do not understand, share or respect local culture and traditions" (Ranta, 2018).

Mennell (1985) suggests that 'national cuisines' coincided with the formation of nation states in the late fifteenth century and the key ingredients of the foods that the eel, pie and mash shops serve have both a national and international perspective. The importance of British beef allegedly goes back to at least the sixteenth century

¹⁹⁴ These calling cards are essentially business cards left with or on the body of a beaten victim. See - <https://www.instagram.com/p/CPJJmwvDezm/?hl=en>

¹⁹⁵ See - <https://www.searchlightmagazine.com/2017/06/a-second-warning-for-antifascists-thousands-on-the-streets-of-london-as-far-right-reorganises/>

and the beef in pies was and remains a nostalgic motif: a connection with the *terroir* of British soil (Rogers, 2003). Menno Spierling (2007: 35) suggests that beef was about “Protestant honesty and simplicity” yet it was also tied to “war, sacrifice and liberty.” These significations became entangled with bourgeois concerns of freedom and in this way, beef could be interpreted by all classes as a coded if ‘banal’ nationalism (Billig, 1995).

This has become so ingrained that, as Jon Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss (2008: 540) contend, “... most of the time, the nation is not something ordinary people talk *about*; rather, it's something they talk *with*.” For the customers of the eel, pie and mash shops it's something that they talk *through*.

The shops were always a foci for displays of cockney loyalty with images of royalty, but this trend became increasingly evident through the years of the Cameron government's policy of austerity with the increasing ‘mundane’ patriotic flowerings of the Union flag and allied symbols of national patriotism (‘Help for Heroes’ badges and poppy collection boxes). As Joanna Tidy (2015: 224) has suggested, this tendency rehabilitated the British military through a “nostalgia that encompassed war, domesticity ... through the commodified discourse ... for all things vintage”.

Indeed, the shops and cockney itself have since this period become situated within a more undisguised narrative of right-wing populism: the food valourised on social media as simultaneously British and London-specific. Online advertising for takeaway delivery from the eel and pie shops with events like St Georges Day and the Queen's Jubilee link opportunities to perform the ‘local’ nation.

5.5 The pie shop archipelago

“Fantasies of the past determined by the needs of the present have a direct impact on the realities of the future. (Boym, 2001; xvi)

As a continuing response to the 2008 financial crisis, the coalition governments of 2010-2015 implemented severe economic austerity policies that had a devastating

effect on public services and the standard of living for most working people (Lupton and Burchardt, 2016).

Owen Hatherley (2016) characterised the attendant cultural response to this as an ‘austerity nostalgia’ which sought to reclaim post-war privation as an aesthetic liniment to the neoliberal economic assault. This was a partial repetition of the “coded sentimentalities” (Bromley, 1988: 4) of the Second World War used by the Thatcher administrations to anchor the country to an alternative historical reality where the struggles of class, whiteness and empire had never developed. Yet the memories valorised were not simply of the Blitz nor the misty nostalgias of the post-war baby-boomers but those of their parents or even their grandparents. This surreal reconstruction of the hardship of those years was made to ‘haunt’ the present, deployed as a non-synchronous temporality obscuring a modernity in what Fisher (2014) had referred to as the “return as rupture”. Television shows like *Downton Abbey* and *Call the Midwife* extended the Thatcherite siren-call of *Brideshead Revisited* in celebrating even more distant eras where the working classes knew their place.

These yearnings were in a sense a more successful replay of the battles between *The Movement* and *The Angry Young Men* generations within British’s pre-and post-war culture. This was a conservative revenge for working class gains during the *Trente Glorieuses* and was, for the cockney, a character desperately unsure of its role within modernity, akin to a “nostalgia for the state of being repressed” (Gilroy 2004: 96-97). The paternal, pubic-spirited authoritarianism of ‘we’re all in it together’, was entirely attractive to the stoic cockney as a historically utile conduit of capital.¹⁹⁶ Adaptive slogans such as “keep calm and eat pie and mash” increasingly appeared to chime with a re-remembered cockney ‘common sense’ that valorised its own precarious historical frugality and drew a direct (but entirely inappropriate) economic line between ‘prudent’ domestic budgeting as a patriotic act and national spending.¹⁹⁷ Online advertising for takeaway deliveries coinciding with events like St Georges Day linked opportunities to perform the ‘local’ nation.

¹⁹⁶ Cameron, David. “Full text of David Cameron’s speech”. *The Guardian*. 8 October 2009.

¹⁹⁷<https://twitter.com/GoddardsPies/status/1240566210724540416?s=20&t=2bLFygfYhQ0gG372FLP> Sg.

In this reading the eel, pie and mash shops could be seen as reassuringly traditional, cheap and simultaneously patriotic - revived palaces of identitarian comfort and consolation for cockneys steadily relocating to Essex or the Medway towns - an archipelago of East End encampments on the capital's borderlands.

The regressive aesthetic was further simultaneous with a genre of reality television shows like *Benefits Street* that continued to demonise precarious sections of the working class with an increasing moral priority that welfare should be the responsibility of the self-sufficient individual or family, not the community. These notions taken together began to form what Mike Savage, *et al* (2010: 612) had presciently recorded as "... a remaking of British national cultural preferences."

Continuing austerity might also have been seen within the continual necessity of cost-cutting, an enduring narrative of loss. This was a loss of hope, a feeling that had been growing for decades that the political establishment had converged ideologically and no longer spoke to ordinary peoples' experience. This was a vicious circle where "...disenchanted voters become even more cynical about politics and... ever more reliant on markets, debt and the audit to undergird social life" (Davies 2020: 17). Into that void started to drip "volatile forms of political identification" (Flemmen, Magne and Savage, 2017: S235). The form of this was a populist 'common sense' and an insular conservatism predicated on ethnic identity and race.

Historically, as Ruth Levitas (1986) had suggested, the right, unable to access Powellite repatriation had accepted assimilation through the idea of unchanging Englishness. In the 'Seventies this was an imperfect but largely 'bottom-up' process for example, political 'blackness' and grassroots Trades Union activity with social solidarities taking deep roots within popular youth culture. As an interviewee in his 70s who moved from Deptford to Essex recalled about West Indians, "... you got used to 'em because they're with you and I've grown up with 'em... If they treat me alright, I'll treat them alright".¹⁹⁸ Those social structures were broken by the politics of

¹⁹⁸ Name withheld on request. Interview by author 15 May 2022.

the right in the 1980s, replaced by a different kind of top-down multiculturalism more concerned with 'managing' communities rather than shared political struggle (Hall in Proctor, 2000). In the London exit polls for the European elections in 2004, UKIP won two and a half million votes on a platform that Britain was 'full' and 24 per cent of respondents said they might vote for the BNP (John and Margetts, 2009).

After the 2011 (London) riots, the Conservative Prime Minister, David Cameron claimed that multiculturalism as a state policy had "failed".¹⁹⁹ The following year, Theresa May, the Conservative Home Secretary told a newspaper that she wanted to create a "really hostile environment" for irregular migrants.²⁰⁰ This policy, championed by an increasingly emboldened right wing populist press, essentially deputised immigration control "by erecting barriers to healthcare and undermining equality and social cohesion through encouraging xenophobia and racism" (Griffiths and Yeo, 2021; 538). This shifted the conservative discourse of 'race as culture' to 'race as cultural identity' and increasingly fixed all Muslims as the new 'enemy within' (Kundani, 2012). By 2016, nearly four out of ten voters would name immigration as one of the key issues facing Britain (Blinder and Richards, 2016).

Against the global backdrop of the 'War on Terror', *The New East End* (2011), a book based on the classic yet problematic *Family and Kinship in East London* [1957] was published by a New Labour Think Tank. It took the simplistic view that the white working class was being 'bred' out of their traditional home by Bangladeshi Muslims. It was a view that was widely accepted. According to John G. who now eats his pie and mash in Essex, "... they took Bethnal Green and Whitechapel off us... we was the last line."²⁰¹ David H. similarly suggested that he moved to Essex during this period "... because of the blacks... [they] was all moving in and fucking taking over... They were a noisy lot... they smelt and whatever... that's why we wanted to get out."²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ "State Multiculturalism has failed" *BBC TV News*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12371994>

²⁰⁰ Kirkup, James and Winnett, Robert. "Theresa May interview: 'We're going to give illegal migrants a really hostile reception.'" *The Telegraph*, 25 May 2012.

²⁰¹ John G. Interview by author, 5 December 2021.

²⁰² David H. Interview by author, 14 April 2022.

This policy tack sought to tap into a growing populist right conservatism that had allowed Collins (2004) to talk of a ‘forgotten white tribe’ still largely defined by accent, taste and tradition. Whilst the spatial and temporal confusion of the white East Ender, pushed and squeezed by the forces of late capitalism, may have been understandable, it ignored the colonial legacy of migration and the everyday convivialities (Gilroy, 2004) that continual immigration had brought to London (which included the Irish to whom many cockneys trace lineage). It also ignored large-scale, white middle class gentrification of the area, partly the result of Eastenders selling their council homes to move to London’s borders. More, it re-imposed a hierarchy of belonging and the contestable notion of ‘tolerance’ (Wemyss, 2006) that could be withdrawn at any time by the white working class that remained.

Crucially the process started to reinforce a homophily: a connection to cultures that look like ‘us’ and turned a national gaze from Europe to an Anglophone version across the Atlantic (Savage, Wright and Gayo-Cal, 2010: 612). When Teresa May in 2016 spoke about powerful “citizens of nowhere ...in thrall to international elites... who take on cheap labour from overseas...” she conflated conspiracy and immigration and showed that the New Right had understood and used working class frustration.²⁰³

The mood also played into a growing English obsession with Europe posited in a metaphoric phagophobia (fear of swallowing) that surrounded British food identity. Spierling (2007: 44) charts how the EU had allegedly been ‘chipping away’ at British food and recounts regular scare stories in the popular press about Brussels bureaucrats attacking ‘traditional’ British ‘fry-up’ breakfasts with regulations, so “...the Englishman is no longer eating but being eaten (Spierling in Wilson, 2007: 44).” In this way the nostalgic cockney was used as a bulwark against European bureaucracy but also to make sense of white loss and “phantasms of home” (Boym, 2001: 13).

However, it needs to be stated that some of the East End, specifically Bethnal Green as well as Shoreditch and Stepney, had historically been the centre of “racial

²⁰³ <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/full-text-theresa-may-s-conference-speech>

exclusionism” and a “laager” mentality in the form of earlier antisemitism directed towards “alien costermongers” (Husbands: 1982). From the British Brothers League in 1901 to the National Front in the 1970s, the area uncontestedly demonstrated a lineage of far-right vigilantism because it always had been a site of ‘super-diversity’.²⁰⁴ These areas were generally the most deprived in East London and for workers the most precarious with any additional labour at the behest of a changing capital, undercutting wages. They were also areas with large unofficial economies and coster social structures that were relatively weak in the traditional architecture of political, though crucially not cultural, solidarities.

As James Malcolm (2014: 654) suggests the area had become a site of memory “as ‘practice’ - as opposed to memory as fact or essence - history” ignoring the process of colonial whiteness and the fictions of autochthony that blended the Blitz and morality. These palimpsestic nostalgias for a ‘golden age’ traced over each other forming a diasporic memory that continues to link the East End to Essex in a self-perpetuating closed conversation of ‘how it really was’. One of the contemporary sites of those conversations are the new eel, pie and mash shops relocated to the capital’s edges. Here some, but certainly not all, residents talk of how their ‘old’ East End has been ruined by European regulations or how “all the original butchers shops, oil shops, pie and mash shops all got pushed out because of the Asians.”²⁰⁵

By the twenty-tens several simultaneous national processes also converged within the cockney landscape. Firstly, the changing age demographics that were starting to emerge across Britain began to de-link those that were born before the 1970s who grew up with an absence of tertiary education from those who grew up later and who were “dramatically more highly qualified and ethnically diverse” (Sobolewska and Ford, 2020: 22). A further separation was evidenced by a post-war generation with pensions and property who eulogised their own meritocratic rise at a time when the attempts to link economic inequality to neoliberal ‘striving’ had started to degenerate.

²⁰⁴ The BBL had 45000 members stretching from Hackney, Bethnal Green, Shoreditch, Stepney and significantly, Roydon in Essex. For figures see - Husbands, Christopher T. "East End Racism 1900-1980 Geographical Continuities in Vigilantist and Extreme Right-wing Political Behaviour." *The London Journal* 8, 1, 1982: 7.

For ‘super-diversity’ see - Vertovec, 2019: 125-139.

²⁰⁵ Ken (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 20 May 2022.

Against these seemingly intractable differences, one of the few frames of reference for many of the older white working class was a nostalgic return to the securities of the Empire (Satnam and McGeever, 2018). This was now additionally aimed against the free flow of migrant labour from Eastern Europe, allegedly ‘swamping’ and abusing the NHS and Welfare State. This narrative was the result of what might be called identity competition and as Gilroy (2020) would suggest, this particularly post-empire English anxiety stemmed from a realisation that they no longer knew, “... culturally speaking who they are.”²⁰⁶ Brexit, the political machinations to ‘remove’ Britain from globalised influence and re-establish a world that looked very much like the mythologised memories of the generations of the 1950s, became the context of all of these issues. The landscape of this for the cockney was Essex.

For a section of the populist Right, desperate for its vote, Essex became a symbol of an allegedly ‘left behind’ proletariat and indeed every area in Essex voted ‘leave’ and sixty-two per cent of the county backed Brexit.²⁰⁷ Yet, the reality of a singular Essex working class is more complicated. The Essex cockney diaspora is actually evidenced by a dual class trajectory. The ‘downward’ as Cohen (2008) suggests, exhibits the ‘poor whites syndrome’ negatively symbolised by the stereotype of the ‘chav’ and ‘the Essex girl’. The ‘upward’ is the ‘self-made’, self-employed entrepreneur who has ‘escaped’ from the working class by ‘hard work’.

However, for the Essex cockney, these classifications were a contradiction. In May 2019 The Campaign to End Child Poverty calculated that in ten Essex towns almost half of children lived in poverty and in 2020, Basildon was the joint fifth most unequal town in the UK.²⁰⁸ ‘Working class’ was simultaneously a memorialised badge of honour even for the new wealthy whose East London palimpsestic memories gave their own lives and rituals (like eels, pie and mash) validation yet additionally for those ‘who had made it’ (and even some who hadn’t), a mark of shame associated

²⁰⁶ Wade, Francis, “Whiteness just ain’t worth what it used to be,” *The Nation*, 28 October 2020, <https://www.thenation.com/article/culture/paul-gilroy-interview/>

²⁰⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36617396>

²⁰⁸ [https://www.basildon.gov.uk/media/10297/Basildon-Council-Draft-Economic-Growth-Plan-BEGP-2020-24/pdf/Basildon_Council_-_Draft_Economic_Growth_Plan_\(BEGP\)___2020-24.pdf?m=637395816147700000](https://www.basildon.gov.uk/media/10297/Basildon-Council-Draft-Economic-Growth-Plan-BEGP-2020-24/pdf/Basildon_Council_-_Draft_Economic_Growth_Plan_(BEGP)___2020-24.pdf?m=637395816147700000)

with cultural atrophy and welfare. As Gareth Millington (2016: 273) notes, Essex was historically London's "dark place" where the media's fear of an unrestrained, brutish capitalism could be observed and satirised. Here were Simon Heffer's 'Essex Man' caricature of the neo-Neanderthal City boy and Marks and Gran's simpleton consumers, Sharon and Tracey.²⁰⁹ In that sense, Brexit's 'Basildon Man' was simply the latest iteration of that as a ventriloquising of the middle classes' darkest fears. Constant signalling over decades and the hegemonic cultural enveloping of Essex eventually made this myth, compounded by the growing urban deprivation of the New Towns, into reality for many Essex people themselves. This was an acceptance of Brexit within the framing that the cockney had been abandoned by the 'educated elites' and might as well vote in spite; an echo of David Low's 'Churchillian' "Very Well, alone" cartoon. As 'Brian' reported, "We never thought we'd get ... out for all the posh bastards and all the government... but the working man came through."²¹⁰

The myth-that-became-reality was also signalled by the way in which class had been re-interpreted during the 80s and 90s across a post-Fordist, increasingly 'de-aligned' landscape. This led to a growing self-ascription of class (Savage, 2015) within an increasing framing of emotion and morality crucially "marked by memory, place and experience for each generation in a particular moment" (Biressi and Nunn, 2013:16). The Essex cockney largely valorised his 'working classness' within a culture that was defined to a large extent by a whiteness predicated on the created nostalgias of the monoracial East End. During the Brexit campaign, which contrary to assumptions, was not largely a working class revolt (Dorling, 2016), the media used the Essex cockney as "the mechanism by which a defence of nation could be spoken" (Biressi and Nunn, 2013: 148). This was a valorisation of Brexit by the Essex cockney as a popular revolt against 'multiculturalism'.

Here, in the narrative of a popular uprising, 'the people' were "a monoracial singularity" (Begum, Mondon and Winter, 2021: 223). In fact, Essex although still largely white, it is increasingly home to ethnic populations migrating from London.

²⁰⁹ Heffer, Simon. *Sunday Telegraph*. Heffer, Simon. "Maggie's Mauler: profile of Essex Man". *Sunday Telegraph*, 7 October 1990.

Marks, Laurence and Maurice Gran. *Birds of a Feather*. BBC TV, 1989-1998.

²¹⁰ Brian (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 14 May 2022.

Yet as Stephanie Lawler (2005: 430) has suggested, the working class has become “*emblematically* white even if this is contrary to its lived complexity.” In this reading non-white members of the working class are valorised by the “liberal, cosmopolitan elite (Hobolt, 2016) revealing a “deep sense of a loss of prestige” (Virdee and McGeever, 2018: 1811) amongst the *indigene*. This increasingly underpins claims of white victimhood (Begum, Mondon and Winter, 2021) evidenced by ‘Tony’ from Romford who “has worked my whole life, so if anybody tells me I’m privileged, I’ll just spit in their eye because it’s...woke nonsense.”²¹¹ As ‘Ken’ attests of Wickford where he has lived for twenty years since moving from the East End, “We’ve got our own kind down here... We’re probably trying to recreate what we had. Without all the blacks and all the others spoiling it.”²¹²

The borders between the East End and Essex are fluid: many people who now live in Essex commute into the capital to work and may have relatives who still live in their areas of origin. Some towns like Basildon though are, as Mark Wincott who still lives in Poplar observes, “...third generation Essex... pie and mash is a comfort for them [and] the only time they have it is when they go [to] West Ham.”²¹³ This is cockney identity based on a “simultaneous presence and absence” (Watt, Millington and Huq, 2014: 127). The diaspora cockney, I assert, is created through a kind of ‘call and response’ (Gilroy, 1993) where identity can be lost and found again and eel, pie and mash forms part of what calls *adhaan*-like from that lost re-imagined land.

These however are not totalising narratives: most white people in the East End or Essex are certainly not racists but the politically expedient narratives created around them fix them in ways that they are defined by their ‘lack’ (McKenzie, 2015). Most, like Jean in her 70s in her Bethnal Green flat *do* bemoan that “everything down Brick Lane is all Bengali” because it is historically a repository of poor immigrant communities that is culturally different to hers. But of her Bengali neighbours, she says, “You know, they’re really nice... when it was Ramadan, they was always

²¹¹ ‘Tony’(real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 25 May 2022.

²¹² ‘Ken’ (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 20 May 2022.

²¹³ Mark Wincott. Interview by author 16 May 2022.

sending food in and everything”.²¹⁴This is the real ‘conviviality’ of modern London in which different metropolitan groups might dwell in diverse contexts (Gilroy, 2004).

This emergent contemporary conviviality is however increasingly and inevitably modifying the language of cockney itself. According to Paul Kerswill and Eivind Torgesen (in Hickey, 2017), until the late nineteenth century, most migration had been from the south of England and linguistic changes resulting from contact were difficult to find. According to Eva Sivertson (1960), even mass Jewish immigration around the turn of the century did not much disrupt the cockney dialect, merely adding some additional Yiddish words. Yet, post-war immigration, largely from former British colonies like Jamaica, meant that by the 1980s, a discernibly new street sound was evidenced and “young Afro-Caribbeans [like the artist Smiley Culture] could clearly code switch between patois and local English. The local English itself ... [was] ... very much of its time, a mainstream *variety* [my italics] of cockney” (Sebba in Cheshire 2011: 160).

Linguistic adaption however has accelerated enormously in the intervening thirty years. Traditional cockney areas for example, Hackney, largely as the result of immigration from the wider Developing World, is now home to speakers of at least eighty-nine different languages.²¹⁵ In areas like this where there is a large linguistic pool to draw from language changes and mutates constantly.

Sali Tagliamonte and Alexandra D’Arcy (in Cheshire, 2011) suggest that it is the late adolescent age group that selects and edits language in a largely informal way according to their friendship groups often “using forms resulting from their imperfect learning of the target language.” Certainly, the resulting linguistic patchwork owes much to black youth culture evidenced through commercially successful genres of rap and hip-hop and is referred to by sociolinguists as Multicultural London English (MLE).²¹⁶ As Jenny Cheshire *et al* (2011: 164) have it, “the vernacular baseline has changed from one which was largely cockney in the 1980s to a variant of MLE today.” Indeed, Paul Kerswill (2013: 133) suggests that London children do not

²¹⁴ Jean Sanchez. Interview by author, 17 May 2022.

²¹⁵ <https://hackney.gov.uk/knowning-our-communities>

²¹⁶ See - Fox, 2015.

“straightforwardly acquire the localised ‘cockney’ vernacular, even if their parents might be speakers.”

Recent research (Cole, 2021) into phonetic variation in the Essex town of Debden, site of the original relocations from Bethnal Green, has indicated that cockney, as a speech pattern, has become less popular among the children of the Thatcher generation. According to her study, older Debden residents still largely ‘speak’ and identify as cockney whereas younger people see the identity as geographically rooted in *East* London. Crucially, they consider their accent to be ‘Essex’. The author suggests that this is potentially because of cockney’s association with “low social status” and that ‘improper’ speech has been seen as an impediment to “social evaluation[s] and... greater social mobility” (Cole, 2020: 259-260). This would indeed be congruent to an increased valorisation of a specific modern Essex character that takes its cue largely from celebrity and consumerism. My own interviews, specific to eel and pie shops across both London and wider parts of Essex would seem to indicate a more mixed picture yet undoubtedly, there is a conflict around the notion of what cockney, both as a linguistic form and an identity, currently signifies; what it was and what it will become.

The axis of that is certainly age and amongst younger people, a partial turn from whiteness and a partial re-identification, after the 2008 financial crash and widespread gentrification, with the idea of class.²¹⁷ Indeed, in a recent video for his latest single, *Blessings*, the cockney rapper Tommy B, 25, is seen performing in the newly opened F. Cooke’s pie and mash shop in Chelmsford, Essex. In it, he woos a mixed-race girl with a cockney peppered by (largely) Caribbean patois inflections common to contemporary, *Grime* music. He is also seen (ironically) at the wheel of the iconic three-wheeled van from *Only Fools and Horses* accompanied by a stereotypical ‘Essex girl’. For him, as a young, modern cockney, age, class and race are linked.

²¹⁷ For a discussion of the re-evaluation of class in contemporary politics amongst the young see - Milburn, 2019.

I think that our generation is totally different. If one of my pals is being racist, I'm like, that's just backwards... it's outdated, it's expired... for me I realise that I have much more in common with a black boy that's come from fuck all than with fucking 'Sebastian' who is white and has grown up with a great life. Same thing with the Eastern Europeans or the Asians... and they're all working class people.²¹⁸

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to show how the personal, sensory memorialisations of the cockney have become synchronous with larger cultural and political ones. Always meaningful as *de facto* working class spaces of pride and community, their role in the past few decades has changed concomitant with the cockney's problematic procession into modernity.

Through its historic demonisation by New Labour and growing rage at its long, slow cultural disintegration the traditional cockney, for so long the loyal hostage-servant of the elites, has come to represent what Gilroy (2005: 132) noted at the tail-end of Empire were the "widening fissures in British society".

The eel, pie and mash shops have become both a sanctuary and anchorage for their culture and a key signifier for memories deeply entrenched in the East End subconscious. These spaces for the ritual invocation of working classness are uniquely powerful because they rely on personal sensory memorialisation of a food based on comfort which holds within it the cockney's origin story.

The shops have become a palimpsestic enticement for multiple and myriad memories of London working class life whose contestations into a living, performed script change and settle according to the needs of the contemporary memory epoch.

Currently, this landscape is largely dominated by the memorialisations of a post-war generation whose cultural compass is fixed to a nostalgic embellishment of wartime

²¹⁸ Tommy B. Interview by author, 25 March 2022.

austerity concomitant with a hegemonic signalling of a particular kind of monocultural conservatism. Some of these memorialisation are fabled within the mythscape of a multi-era cockney from the registers of a 'jellied eel London' (Sinclair, 2004). They are rosy depictions of poverty from unreliable autobiography and the confluence of "glimmers" of working class authenticity (Beswick, 2020) found in kitchen-sink dramas and gangster films.

These problematic recollections have been re-created throughout the cockney diaspora in pie shop simulacra's that are, in effect, *lieux de memoire* (Nora, 1989). Here a new cockney is being birthed, fed from memories from simultaneous temporalities with contestations around multiculturalism and age within the neoliberal city.

6. Conclusion

“Nothing becomes romanticised so much as memories, both individual and collective, about food and drink” (Mathias, 1967: 17)

6.1 Overview

This thesis has for the first time explored and examined the unwritten history of London’s iconic but fast-disappearing eel, pie and mash shops and additionally interrogated their cultural conduit, the changing and concomitant notion of the cockney identity. In doing so I have addressed an absence in research around these spaces and the communities that use them who, in turn, have been largely forgotten or ignored but whose contested memories and identity I argue have great contemporary political and cultural resonance in an age of populism and Brexit.

My work has excavated a tracing around these absences in historical literature, synthesising existing scholarship and applying new research to extend their relevancy. I have utilised memory theory, sensory ethnography and semi-structured interviews to explore the shops and those who use them as temporal anchorages within the neoliberal city and the Essex hinterlands. This thesis has contextualised the shops’ development, not within any contemporary family dynasty as is commonly held, but as part of a much earlier historical process centred around the greater mobility of labour during early modernity, concurrent with the ideological and cultural accession of a bourgeoisie whose rise was a synchronous dance with an emergent London proletariat.

6.2 Summary by chapter

My first chapter proves that these enterprises were part of an earlier, established trade than previously recorded. I link for the first time within them a simultaneity to suggest that they were synchronous to both the dying breath of an older, popular

street culture, of which the roving pieman was part, and to the withdrawal of the middle classes from areas that came to be dominated by the urban poor.

The exact fare and presentation of these early shops remains somewhat unclear, and I argue that they became increasingly defined by the class-demotion of their clientele that mirrored the changing cartography of the city. By the mid-nineteenth century the pie shops were no longer places that gentlemen might frequent. Rather, depending on their hyper locality, the shops were feeding tradesmen, the petit bourgeois and some of London's market-adjacent poor. By the turn of the twentieth century the now pie and mash shops have become a cultural cornerstone of those who almost exclusively identify themselves as working class.

In describing this process, I have employed the biological notion of a taxon to illustrate their evolution in tandem with other lower class eating places as increasing responses to hunger, precarity and the changing work-discipline of industrial capitalism (Thompson, 1967).

I argue a new London working class culture, defended within dual notions of freedom and respectability and centred largely around unofficial markets and desperate resistances to poverty, came into conflict with bourgeois attempts to physically and ideologically control the capital's streets. It was these populations, contributing to the emergence of a distinct and unique London character that became integral to the customer base of the emergent eel and pie shops. By the early twentieth century the (now) eel, pie and mash shops had become numerous but, I suggest, were confined within largely matrilineal, hyper-local social solidarities based around micro-class divisions of work and codes of propriety that remained largely impenetrable to outsiders.

My second chapter defines the eel and pie shops through the contested evolution of the character that became known as cockney. I trace its pre-modern roots to suggest that it became a metaphor for the interplay between the powerful and the powerless.

During early Victorian modernity, I argue the performativity of the cockney was both an escapist pantomime that simultaneously aped, celebrated and satirised the

appearance of the elites and a dramatic identity informed by street commerce (Jankiewicz, 2014). This identity I suggest was a consolidation of an older, carnivalesque street culture and a new London-specific working class personality, re-inscribed as both comic and criminal within the moral framework of bourgeois morality. I relate the fascination and fear of this character within the twin nodes of Victorian liberalism that sought to meld the potentially revolutionary cockney of the 'abyss' into a figure of imperial incorporation and suggest additionally that the eel and pie shops became central to a hyper-local and largely shielded culture of working class consolation (Steadman Jones, 1974). I utilise Hall's (1973) work on hegemonic messaging to clarify the creation of a particular type of 'ordinariness' through a bourgeois theatrical ventriloquising of the coster community and this I argue continues to be periodically valorised according to its usefulness to capital at times of political stress.

My third chapter continues to chart the trajectory of the cockney and the culture of eel and pie shops beyond the rubble of the Blitz but returns to the era of New Imperialism to contextualise the cockney identity within the notion of whiteness and empire. I argue that the reframing of the nation as a racial singularity (and the eventual franchise extension) marked a fundamental shift by the elites from overt repression to a more consensual vision of hegemony. Further, I suggest this signalled to subsequent 'entitlements' of East London's white population (especially) around the gains of the Welfare State and a national economy. I argue that these entitlements are memorialised in the contemporary imagination of a largely mono-racial, hyperlocalism to which the eel, pie and mash shops are, to a large extent a spiritual refuge.

I link the destruction of traditional cockney territoriality by zonal redevelopment, gentrification and exodus to the allied decline of social structures simultaneous to the identity's contested relationship with modernity. I further argue that housing and its allocation was central to the *ressentiment* towards mass immigration and the hastening of the transmission (and simulacra) of the cockney identity outward towards (especially) Essex and its 'dual class trajectories' (Watt, Millington and Huq, 2014). The delineations of these I suggest are central to cockney's internal, inner-

world contradictions and negotiations between its working class and petty bourgeois nodes.

Rather than the suggestion that the cockney disappeared in the post war period (Stedman Jones, 1989), I argue that the identity simultaneously continued its role as a nostalgic conduit to capital but evolved multiple valences that spoke to an increasing emphasis on popular culture, age, choice and individuality (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2018) further complicating its continued existence as a palimpsestic construction.

My fourth chapter examines the sights, sounds and smells of a contemporary eel, pie and mash shop utilising a sensory ethnography.

I clarify the shops as a unique site of hyperlocal, working class territoriality that utilises ritual as a zone of resistance to the modern neo-liberal city. These rituals I suggest have, through the senses, become mythologised and coded and part of the 'true archives' (De Certeau, 1998) of the remnants of a working class city. They link hospitality, conviviality and memory which have been inscribed within and upon and the bodies of the customers (Connerton, 1989).

I argue that the formulation of the food served in the shops is unique and antithetical to the 'rules' (Douglas, 1975) of a British working class meal and that the eel is now largely the object of demographic, age and class-based notions of disgust relevant to the changing notions of cockney which sees its limited consumption as a 'food of ordeal'.

My thesis suggests that the shops are arenas of a specific and historic working class respectability and a temporary refuge from dominant forms of cultural production. I argue that the shops contain and generate their own notions of taste and are a negotiation with the hegemonic culture. I offer that the shops are a unique insight into the changing notions of taste, class and inter-class contestation within the convivialities of a closed, almost secretive heritage of proletarian culture.

My final chapter interrogates the complex memories that populate the shops and the communities that use them.

I suggest that these memorialisations are myriad inscriptions that partly derive from the historic specificity of London and potentially include early capitalist notions of conviviality as well as the faint cultural mnemonics of nineteenth century working class privation, defeat and accommodation which led to them as zones of consolation. I argue that the shops and their memorialisations are additionally complicated within the simultaneous remembrances of a separate owner and customer class which meld around a notion of an entrepreneurial proletarianism. This includes a largely white precariat who valorise their historic social solidarities within a hyper-local cartography against a backdrop of immigration, globalisation and the forces of gentrification. In addition, these accompany the re-imagined, performative and simulacra-like memorialisations of the so-called cockney diaspora (largely) within Essex. I refer to these multiple, simultaneous and competing memories as polyphonic. The memory scripts that are performed within the eel, pie and mash shops, allied to the palimpsestic cockney identity and its cultural and geographic dislocation, are overwhelmingly nostalgic and melancholic. I argue that these narratives and reconstructions of the past are and remain concomitant to the needs of capital.

Currently, I suggest, these scripts fall between a cultural and communicative memory (Assmann, 2010) of a post-war generation that dimly recall as children the legacy of wartime privation and mass colonial immigration. It is, I argue, this generation's sketchy memorialisations and political framings of the Second World War, that now sit with a melancholia around the loss of the fantasy of a British omnipotence crystallised as a post-colonial nostalgia. Here, I offer, a bitter confusion at the ending of the *Trente Glorieuses* (and the part enabling of a neoliberal embrace via Thatcherism) and a monocultural conservatism reified as a 'common sense', hold the key to deciphering much of the structure of contemporary 'populist' politics, the contestations of Brexit and the so-called 'culture wars'.

6.3 The unseen

“There are certain areas of London that I suspect retain their integrity and beauty only by becoming invisible” (Moorcock, 2000: 180).

Underlying this thesis has been the question of why these spaces and the culture contained within them been rendered near historically invisible. I have in the introduction, suggested that part of that unseeness is the result of both the class positioning of those who have tried to tell the story of London’s working class but also a defensive habitus which surround the shops, the result of historic cultural repression. Elsewhere, I have also pointed to what I suggest is a lack of exchange value in the shops and their fare for a gentrifying bourgeois audience which contrasts to the treatment of spaces like public houses (so-called gastro-pubs), the upmarket selling of dishes like fish and chips and also the ‘traditional’ comfort food and décor of re-imagined ‘working man’s’ cafés. All of these have been concomitant with either renewed historical interest or re-mapping of these enterprises to suit more middle class tastes. The eel, pie and mash shops, often linked with insular communities associated with unfashionable attitudes to cultural change and historically demonised in mainstream culture have, however, remained unassailable and untranslatable outside of their class habitat.

This unseeness may also have its partial roots in the evolution of the cockney communities themselves. The shops and their food, long associated with proletarianism, parents and pastness, increasingly sat uncomfortably with an upwardly mobile, aspirational generation ironically birthed within the working class modernity of the ‘fifties, ‘sixties and ‘seventies who became (partly) valorised by the neoliberal retrenchment from the Thatcher project onwards. In that sense, the shops retain something of the comic, performative origins of the Victorian cockney often reproduced in mainstream culture as an object of anachronistic derision. I argue that for many to whom the shops were an inevitable class heritage, these factors combined to form a kind of complex embarrassment.

More, the shops and the food were historically contained within a distinct collective habitus formed through historical work forms and associated patterns of community

life that have been largely destroyed. The melancholic valorising of this is a central contradiction at the heart of the cockney identity.

In recent years, largely synchronous with the privations of austerity, the notion of class has strongly reasserted itself within Britain. This has been additionally concomitant to a 'populist' political reaction against both a breakdown of a two-party class-aligned political system and a managerial-professional class largely associated with 'progressive' values centred around the EU and 'centrist' politics.

For many, the pie and mash shops that held traditional class allegiances have become somewhat of a symbol for opposition to this hegemony and have been increasingly celebrated, via selective memorialisation, especially on social media, as arenas of reasserted, traditional 'working classness'. Whilst the ascriptions, subtleties and confusions around those who claim to be (historically) working class are beyond the scope of this work, it is incontestable that as the handful of London's traditional pie and mash shops fade and close, the numbers relocating or indeed appearing for the first time in Essex and other places of London diaspora as simulacra, are multiplying.

6.4 The palaces of comfort and consolation

This thesis has argued that the eel, pie and mash shops are a crucial but historically unexamined arena of London working class life.

These spaces I have argued, remain an unmitigated, unpretentious, authentic loci of a culture born of the need for sustenance and conviviality; the food served within, a code for a complex but contested ordinariness.

Central to these spaces is the allied but equally contested identity of the cockney recollected through what I have referred to as polyphonic memorialisations. These I suggest are not merely palimpsestic in a linear sense but rather the result of multiple junctures of memory and identity traces that may be usefully illustrated by Michel Serres' (1995: 60) concept of the handkerchief. This speaks analogously to an image of 'pleated time' - a multi-temporality of history where an ironed handkerchief, once

flat (representing definite and stable historical co-ordinates) is crumpled rendering historically distant points "... close, or even superimposed". In this way cockney, by the mid-twentieth century, consisted of (amongst many others) mediaeval notions of urbanity, eighteenth century assumptions around developing petit-bourgeois ascendancy, nineteenth century Irish immigrant entrepreneurial anti-authoritarianism and late Victorian propaganda around race and empire.

The contemporary cockney, no longer defined by a traditional territoriality, race or even necessarily dialect is, I offer, a reservoir of identities. These might be mixed and matched according to personal need, historic cultural obligation or contemporary political requirements.

The polestar of this identity, especially for the diasporic cockney, remains a recently reinvigorated cultural symbol: the final taxon of a nineteenth century feeding station, frozen in time, hidden in plain sight and largely forgotten. A space inscribed by responses to hunger, conviviality and early working class notions of respectability forged in a culture of consolation.

In this way, cockney is now I propose more akin to a structure of feeling, an affective but contested landscape of emotion and evolving cultural signifiers caught between past certainties of a largely monoracial, national identity and the challenges of a globalised world.

This is a complex identity, perilously mapped. It is culturally working class but increasingly held in tension with an aspirational, interstitial and precarious petty bourgeoisie respondent to the nostalgic populism of a reimagined post-war landscape.

Cockney is an identity haunted by a melancholy and phantasms of a time which has passed, its eel, pie and mash shops are as Cynthia Cruz (2021: 58) suggests, "filled with the aura of what previously defined them".

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Appendix

Fig.1. Shepherd, Frederick Napoleon. "View of building in Fleet Street, with Blanchard's premises and figures on pavement".

Fig.2. Olive Malvery serving in a cheap coffee house, early 1900s.

Fig. 3. Kennington, Eric. "The coster mongers" 1914.

Interviews

Name	Location	Position	Date of Interview	Location of Interview
Arment, Rita	London	Pie shop owner	20/11/2019	virtual
Arment, Roy	London	Pie shop owner	16/11/2019	virtual
B, Tommy	London	Customer	25/03/2022	virtual
Boutall, Adam	London	Customer	19/10/2021	virtual
Bradley, John	Essex	Customer	25/06/2022	virtual
Burrows, Tim	Essex	Author/Customer	15/06/2022	in person
Brian (alias)	Essex	Customer	22/06/2022	virtual
Camp, Greg	Essex	Pie shop owner	10/05/2021	virtual
Clunn, Chris	Wales	Customer	17/02/2022	in person
Cole, Amanda	Essex	Academic	05/04/2022	virtual
Cooke, Chris	Warks.	Pie shop owner	17/11/2020	in person
Cooke, Joe	London	Pie shop owner	01/03/2020	in person
Cooke, Kim	London	Pie shop owner	07/03/2020	in person
Cooke, Robert	Essex	Pie shop owner	10/09/2021	virtual
Errol, Eileen	Essex	Customer	22/10/2021	in person
Ford, Nicola	Essex	Pie shop worker	12/06/2022	virtual
Furnham, David	Sussex	Director	21/02/2022	virtual
H, David (alias)	Essex	Customer	14/04/2022	virtual
Kelly, Paul	Essex	Pie shop owner	15/12/2020	in person
Ken (alias)	Essex	Customer	22/06/2022	virtual
Malone, Johnny	Essex	Pie shop owner	15/06/2022	In person
O'Carroll, Steven	Essex	Customer	22/06/2022	virtual
Poole, Graham	London	Pie shop owner	16/09/2021	In person
Sanchez, Jean	London	Customer	25/10/2022	virtual
Sanchez, Johnny	Kent	Customer	01/11/2022	virtual
Wincott, Mark	London	Pie shop owner	05/11/2022	virtual

The Palaces of Comfort and Consolation -

The Pie and Mash shop as a performative space of a contested
London working class memory.

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to interrogate and clarify the history and culture of London's traditional but fading and largely forgotten eel, pie and mash shops. In doing so the work examines their cultural conduit, the adjacent and evolving identity of the cockney whose contested memoryscapes have, I suggest, great contemporary political and cultural relevance in an age of populism and Brexit.

The work excavates a tracing around the shops' absences in historical literature. It situates their establishment within the dying breath of an older, popular street culture and the birth of a new London working class, centred around unofficial street markets and in a synchronous dance with the ideological accession of the bourgeoisie.

The thesis employs the biological notion of a *taxon* to illustrate the shops' evolution largely defined by the class-demotion of their clientele that mirrored the changing cartography of the city. By the late nineteenth century, this work argues, the eel and pie shops had become a pillar of a respectable London working class culture whose hyper-local solidarities revolved around micro-class divisions of work and negotiated bourgeois codes of propriety as part of a 'culture of consolation' that has remained largely impenetrable to outsiders.

The study explores this concomitant cockney identity which became, partly through bourgeois theatrical ventriloquising, a figure of imperial incorporation. This eventually came to represent a particular type of 'ordinariness', subsequently reconfigured around the gains of a Welfare State and a national economy that continues to be periodically valorised according its usefulness to capital at times of political stress.

Utilising sensory ethnography and memory studies the work explores the landscape and territoriality of the contemporary eel, pie and mash shop. It interrogates the rituals and complex, often competing and polyphonic memory inscriptions which memorialise a largely post-colonial nostalgic melancholia around the loss of fantasy

of a British omnipotence. The thesis argues that the shops and their simulacra-like reincarnations amongst the cockney diaspora in the Essex new towns offer an insight into the changing notions of taste and class within the convivialities of a unique but broadly closed heritage of proletarian culture as a zone of resistance in the neoliberal city.

Contents

Contents	iii
Acknowledgements	vi
Author Declaration	vii
Definitions	viii
Methodology	x
Introduction	1
Overview	1
1.1 A walk down the Broadway	2
1.2 (uncharted) History from below	4
1.3 Co-ordinates	8
1.3.1 History	8
1.3.2 Identity	10
1.3.3 Food Culture	13
1.3.4 Memory	15
1.4 Chapters	17
Chapter 1. Origins	22
Introduction	22
1.1 Monstrous Wen	24
1.2 “What has become of the pieman?”	26
1.3 Through a plate glass window of respectability	33
1.4 Food as cipher	41
1.5 Hunger and the ‘Great Unwashed’	44
1.6 Eating out and translatable spaces	49

1.7 Defeat and the culture of consolation	54
1.8 Cat's meat and glue for the gravy	56
1.9 Modernity, space and identity	59
Conclusion	62
Chapter 2. The Theatre of the Cockney	65
Introduction	65
2.1 The cockney in history	67
2.2 Dickens and the descent of the cockney	73
2.3 The Music Hall as distorting mirror	76
2.4 The coster confusion	79
2.5 The character refined	82
2.6 The character reflected back	84
2.7 The Pearlies	87
2.8 Modernity, ordinariness and the first decline of the cockney	90
2.9 The cockney keeps calm and carries on	97
2.10 Disillusionment and the spoils of war	100
Conclusion	105
Chapter 3 The Defensive Trench of Empire	108
Introduction	108
3.1 The 'whitening' of the London working classes	110
3.2 From the terrace to the tower block	119
3.3 The kids are alright	129
3.4 The unmodern	138
Conclusion	146
Chapter 4 Tastes and Space of Resistance	149
Introduction	149
4.1 Resistances from a stubborn past	150
4.2 No mate, this is a pie shop...	156
4.3 Too heavy to steal	162
4.4 The lower classes smell	164
4.5 The eel and the East Ender	169

4.6 A Regime of Disgust	174
4.7 A Working Class Taste and Space	178
Conclusion	184
Chapter 5 The Cockney Saudade	187
Introduction	187
5.1 “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are”	189
5.2 “Nothing tastes as good as the past”	202
5.3 Don’t mention the War...	210
5.4 We’ve had our jellied eels and our glass of beer	217
5.5 The pie shop archipelago	224
Conclusion	235
Conclusion	237
6.1 Overview	237
6.2 Summary by chapter	237
6.3 The unseen	242
6.4 The palaces of comfort and consolation	243
Bibliography	246
Appendix	309

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I hereby declare that all of the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Stuart Freedman, 11 April, 2023

Definitions

This thesis contains some problematic terms which I will briefly define.

White Working Class

I use this particular descriptor because I can find no suitable alternative. This simple designation in physical terms on the one hand refers to the historical constituency of the eel and pie shops that I write about. On the other however, I realise that it has become a very loaded term. It is increasingly a code for a 'forgotten white tribe' (Collins, 2014) that concentrates on race rather than class position and plays to the latest narrative that multiculturalism has 'failed'. More it seeks to erase those members of the British working class that are non-white, falsely pitting them against those who are. This ignores the overwhelming evidence that inequality is a complex matrix of simultaneous social, economic and structural disadvantages and that ultimately, as my thesis recounts, the British working class were 'made' white to reframe the nation as a racial singularity (Bonnett, 1998, Virdee, 2014). In all of this is the resurgent nostalgia for empire and at its heart the fear of miscegenation and loss of identity.

Bourgeois/Middle Class

I use these terms interchangeably throughout the thesis and follow Raymond Williams' (1983: 45-49) difficulty in employing the notion of 'bourgeois' in a British context of 'upper', 'middle' and 'working class'. However, my usage coincides with his in pointing to the idea that bourgeois is a cultural distillation of an ideological hegemonic ruling class that came to dominate Britain in the nineteenth century.

Popular Modernity

This derives from Mark Fisher's (2014: 23) work on culture. It refers to a dialectic that sits between the current and the experimental. Although Fisher usually employed

this critically in terms of popular music, I use it more widely to capture the cultural moment from the 1960s until its defeat by the forces of neoliberalism in the 1980s, that saw elements of the British working class emboldened by post-war educational gains to make culture and to valorise that culture as 'ordinary'.

Saudade

This Portuguese word signals to a nostalgic longing for something that is lost. I use it to partly describe the contemporary memory script of the cockney, always I suggest a nostalgic creature in its late nineteenth century music hall iteration. There seems to be no English word that captures this kind of longing, but many other cultures have this concept, notably the Welsh with their notion of *hiraeth*.

Methodology

Given the almost complete absence of historical and sociological work concerned with London's fading eel, pie and mash shops, I decided early on to employ what might be called a panoptical approach. This was an attempt to address the subject matter from several simultaneous disciplinary angles in order to identify and clarify the significance of the shops, both in terms of their origins but also their contemporary meanings. My compass points were largely but not exclusively historical, sociological and (sensorially) ethnographic utilising extensive field work and a core of semi-structured interviews from different shops and customer communities that reflected the geographic spread of the enterprises.

The first objective in my research plan was to excavate the historical processes that led to the emergence of the shops and placing them in wider cultural and social contexts. I used existing scholarship (Thompson, 2013 *et al*) to trace the process of change in class structure, emanating from transitions in clientage, to delineate an interstitial class of London traders revealed in the role of pastry cooks that catered to a changing city.

I used numerous contemporary accounts of the city from this period (Heine in Stigand, 1875; Pückler-Muskau, 1832; Smith, 1857; Sala, 1859 *et al*) and contemporary scholarship (Bailey, 1997; Spang, 2001; Mennell, 2003; Tames, 2003; Winter, 2013; Assael, 2018) to contextualise and chart the evolving culture of the city.

However, at the same time I wanted to address the accepted and conventional narrative of the beginnings of the shops in the popular imagination. All of the meagre, contemporary, 'populist' writings on the shops (Clunn, 1995; Smith, 1995; Hawkins, 2002) seemed to (incorrectly) suggest that a venture owned by Henry Blanchard at 101 Union Street in Southwark and opened in 1844 was the primogenitor of all the current enterprises in an unbroken gustatory tradition.

My primary source work utilised *Kelly's Post Office Directories* and *Pigot's Trades Directories* at the London Metropolitan Archives which merely ascertained that this was indeed the first shop 'recorded' as an eel and pie house. The vagaries of the listings of eating places in the directories have been well documented (Assael, 2018) and indeed an image in the London Metropolitan Archives main print collection (see Fig.1 in appendix) clearly showed a Blanchard's pie house in the more salubrious location of Fleet Street in a watercolour that dated from 1835.

I made extensive use of the British Newspaper Archive at the British Library to examine newspaper texts and crucially, advertisements that predated the Kelly's entry by several years. I used these figures to suggest the rents referred to, suggested a capital investment achievable only by a strata of the lower middle classes. I utilised this resource to exhaustively chart mentions of pie shops and their concomitant identity within emergent cockney culture until the early twenty-first century.

I further used census material (both via London Metropolitan Archives and Ancestry online) to excavate Henry Blanchard's family records and additionally retrieved similar records for the Cooke, Antinks and Manzi families via resources from British History Online, part of the Institute of Historical Research at the University of London. Booth's Poverty maps were accessed via the LSE digital library.

In terms of food history and adulteration I researched, via the British Library, contemporary journals (amongst many others, *The Caterer and Hotel Proprietor's Gazette*, *The Hotel Review and Catering & Food Trades Gazette*, *The Coffee Tavern Gazette*, *The Journal of Food Thrift* and *The Anti-Adulteration Review, Food and Sanitation*). I utilised several modern PhDs (via the LSE, the University of East London and Essex Libraries) to chart the city's gustatory and linguistic histories and interrogated the Bishopsgate Institute and The Hackney Archives for fragmentary references to the shops.

I utilised period literature (especially Dickens) and modern scholarship (Stedman Jones, 1971, 1974 and 1989) to chart the city's changing identities, interrogating the historical cockney as well as its relationship to the music hall.

I focussed especially on two periods of literature: that of the Cockney Novelists and the post-war London novel to chart a cockney modernity as well as the more recent writing of Sinclair and Moorcock. I drew on a wide variety of filmic cultural products (from cockney 'kitchen sink' dramas to documentary) for which I extensively utilised the British Film Institute Library. For artworks, I utilised London Picture Archive, the London Metropolitan Archives and the Réunion des Musées Nationaux (Paris).

My experiences during the course of this research were crystallised within a sensory ethnography contained within the F. Cooke shop on Hoxton Street over numerous and extended visits. The work has been additionally informed by my own personal memorialisations around the culture from which I come and my own past memorialisations of several (now largely closed) shops. Additionally, I drew on one my own previous books about the shops (*The Englishman and the Eel*, 2017).

I have extensively used social media, especially Facebook (especially groups that centre around London memory communities including Bethnal Green and pie and mash), Twitter and Instagram to interrogate contemporary memorialisations of the culture that surrounds the shops and the evolving identity of cockney.

Finally, the cornerstone of this thesis has been interrogations of personal history and memoryscapes that capture real, working class voices for the first time in relation to the shops and their culture. I conducted field visits and semi-structured interviews with more than thirty contemporary eel, pie and mash shops and their owners who generously shared genealogies, reminiscences and historical artefacts from their pasts. I interviewed dozens of customers from a diverse age range and from both London and Essex. From this I drew from a core of twenty six comprehensive interviews.

I additionally interviewed the photographer Chris Clunn and the film maker David Furnham.

Because of Covid-19 many of these interviews were conducted using internet telephony.

Introduction

Overview

Militant nostalgia is on the rise across Britain.

For London's traditional working class communities this trend is synchronous with the closing of the city's once populous eel, pie and mash shops.

These spaces, largely forgotten and often seen by outsiders as anachronous, are however vital repositories of largely undocumented but increasingly contested communal memories whose physical buildings, food and rituals speak of identity and authenticity.

In this thesis, I examine and attempt to clarify the largely unwritten history of these, London's first working class restaurants. I attempt to situate the shops as temporary private spaces within the neoliberal city and examine them as sensory repositories of historical and contemporary significance, contextualising them within ideas of food culture, gastro-nationalism and a post-colonial melancholic haunting.

In doing so I examine the communities that use the shops (and eel eating) as theatres, temporal anchorages and totems of authenticity in a constructed, performative but increasingly retrograde ritual culture, largely closed to outsiders.

In this way I interrogate an evolving working class London identity and examine the changing notion of the idea of 'Cockney'.

1.1 A walk down the Broadway

In January 2020 the Cooke's eel, pie and mash shop in Broadway Market closed its doors for the last time.

Opened in 1900 by Robert Cooke, it had been one of East London's most iconic pie shops. Double-fronted in glass and marble (renewed after the Second World War due to the Luftwaffe's close attentions) its interior tiling was a delicate yellow picked out with sky blue detailing. Up until its closure its floors had always been freshly covered in sawdust, its large distinctive mirrors regularly polished and behind the long marble serving counter on the right, a poster still advertised the John H. Stracey fight at the Royal Albert Hall in 1972. The shop retained a gas mantle on its wall. Now shuttered and empty, it looked sad and desolate surrounded by fashionable coffee shops, artisanal bakeries and an organic supermarket. Cooke's was a place out of time.

Standing outside the shop on that freezing morning brought me back to my own Hackney past of the 1970s, where the streets were still navigated by corrugated iron hoardings, rough pubs and the fading technicolours of greasy spoon 'caffs'. In those days, I'd sometimes walk past the shop after school. I remember it as always busy. Steamed windows. Warmth. My family weren't customers but over the years with friends, I'd visited this and the Cooke's family's other shop in Dalston - a grand, cavernous cathedral of a working class eatery opened in 1910. The spaces of these shops felt Victorian. Safe but staid and strict; a place where everybody knew the rules and each other.

The Broadway and London Fields, the area that it served, was at this time an almost forgotten part of the capital. Once a thriving working class street market it was now a shadow of its former self. Most of the shops were closed and boarded and only a handful of stalls sold fresh vegetables or tinned food at reduced prices. Vandalised cars littered the streets. Its desolation seemed to represent a wider landscape of urban working class London at the time. Cockney London. Jelled eel London (Sinclair, 2004: 95).

Squeezed between the enduring semi-criminal poverty of Bethnal Green and the unreachable wealth of the City, Hackney had been the site first of steady Jewish migration out of the Whitechapel *shtetl* and then wholesale Caribbean settling from the 1960s onwards. During the 1970s Hackney was a culturally contested zone full of vandalised Brutalist tower blocks but also decaying Victorian terraces. A space caught between the National Front and the Angry Brigade.

David Furnham's neglected documentary film, *Noted Eel and Pie Houses* (1975), captures the devastation of the market during this period. The Broadway, desolate, broken, but clinging to life. Yet inside the Cooke's shop, it's lively and full of people chatting and eating: the space a portal to a previous generation, its memories and its rituals and customs.

The large light industrial base of the city and its concomitant working class population of the inner city areas had, by the early 1970s, been mostly lost and along with it the certainties of the post-war paradigm of job security and the promise of decent housing for all. In 1972 The Housing Finance Act introduced by Heath's Conservative government replaced the requirement for councils to charge tenants 'fair rents' with those of 'reasonable' rents linked to the private sector (McCulloch, 1982). Pandering to the "myth of the over-subsidised council tenant" (Sklair, 1975) this legislation required local authorities to make a profit from their properties and reduced government subsidies. In practice it meant that poor inner-London boroughs like Hackney could no longer afford the considerable upkeep of its (largely ancient and substandard) housing stock and this fell into further disrepair. Hackney, like much of inner London, was a post-industrial zone divided between blue collar workers, a precarious self-employed workforce with a "relaxed attitude to convention and legality" (Medhurst, 2023: 181) and an increasing proportion of its labour force "working in financial and business services" (Hammett, 2004: 2).

In this interstitial period between the end of what became known as the *trente glorieuses* and the neoliberal ascendancy, Hackney had become an arena for earnest, middle class gentrifiers (Raban, 1974) and the squatting movement (Proll, 2010). The Broadway and its surrounding streets became home to some of these newcomers, legal or otherwise. Locals looked on aghast at some members of this

strange tribe walking around barefoot through the market. Beads. Tie-dye. Odd-shaped French cars. Co-ops and vegetarian food. These squatters, these 'do-gooders', wanted to live amongst the working classes as an act of solidarity rejecting "consumerism... the suburb or luxury flat" (White, 2008: 65).

As part of a 'long march through the institutions' (Dutschke) some of these newcomers became teachers, some social workers, others, artists. They brought with them notions of a different kind of community and one not solely built around the iconography and memories of Empire and the last war that still loomed large in popular culture.

The presence of these newcomers and their new convivialities (Gilroy, 2004) as part of an emergent culture were simultaneous (Koselleck, 2004) to the temporalities of a residual, older proletarian culture and were a portent of the changes and challenges that Hackney and indeed much of working class London would evidence in the coming years. Their residence coincided with a longer-term process that came to be known (colloquially but problematically) as 'white flight' and between the censuses of 1971 and 1981 nearly 10% of the total population of Greater London had decamped to the Essex new towns or the Kent coast (Champion and Congdon, 1987, Medhurst, 2023: 160). Those that hadn't or couldn't move away made the dwindling number of pie and mash shops like Cooke's increasingly defensive spaces that would eventually become code for a certain type of working class Londoner: white, generally poor, and increasingly out of time with the coming neoliberal order and its modernity.

1.2 (uncharted) History from below

I came to this thesis because London's eel, pie and mash shops are seemingly invisible. Until very recently the shops seemed to have disappeared almost entirely from London's cultural texture and its high streets. Forgotten, ignored or avoided. Mentioned only when one of their dwindling number permanently closed; a local newspaper would invariably write an article bemoaning the loss of another part of London's great 'heritage' and repeat the same half-truths and hearsay about the shops' opaque origins and fare.

Yet this *unseenness* is not new. These working class spaces once ubiquitous at the *fin de siècle* and the start of the twentieth century, like the culture they contained, were, my research evidences, hardly ever cited, explored or critically examined. Virtually unknown outside of the capital, they were part of a *common* knowledge of working class Londoners, but they were only ever fleetingly seen or referred to tangentially in cultural texts. Although there have been several notable documentary pieces like Norman Cohen's psychedelic *The London That Nobody Knows* (1967), and Furnham's already mentioned *Noted Eel and Pie Houses* (1975) that feature them, all centre on the shops' *pastness*, always asynchronous with the present.

During my research, I have been unable to locate more than a handful of references to the shops in post-war literature or on film. Only Franc Rodham's *Quadrophenia* (1979) lingers at any length in the (inevitably now closed) A. Cooke's shop in Shepherd's Bush. The scene regards the pie shop where Jimmy meets his 'greaser' friend Kevin as an ordinary, unremarkable space within a contemporary working class temporality as part of a 1960s popular modernity. This treatment contrasts to myriad proletarian spaces reclaimed as 'cross-class' like cafés, fish and chip shops, public houses or bingo halls. These are sites of 'pleasure and leisure' (Langhamer, 2007) retrieved and celebrated by bourgeois interest and academia in the name of 'resurrectionism', 'retro-chic' (Samuel, [1996] 2012) or simply 'heritage' (Wright [1985] 2009). Even football, that most working class of London's sporting life, became the site of widespread bourgeois cultural colonisation in the 1990s.

A central question that this work addresses, then, is why have London's eel pie and mash shops remained largely unexplored? The thesis suggests several intersecting conclusions that stem directly from issues of hegemony and Bourdieusian class 'distinction'. However, one enveloping explanation lies at least partly within historiography: the way that the lives of those that are owners and customers of the shops have been recounted (or ignored). And crucially, by whom.

Until perhaps the second half of the twentieth century in Britain, history and its telling was charged with the description of great men, monarchs and governments oblivious to the encounters of Marx, Durkheim or Weber. Although Lucien Febvre, the founder of the French *Annales* School along with Marc Bloch, used the notion of 'history from

below' in the 1930s it wasn't until the Communist Party Historians Group of amongst others, Eric Hobsbawm, Edward Thompson, Christopher Hill and Raphael Samuel sought to uncover the revolutionary tradition of a 'people's history' in post-war London that British historiography turned to examine in detail the lives of the ordinary and the everyday. Enjoined by the Society for the Study of Labour History (1960) and then The History Workshop later in that decade, the British working class entered contemporary historiography through what became known as 'social history' at roughly the same time that its post-war victories and popular modernity began to be undone by the forces of late capital.

From the 1970s onwards, in line with wider questions about the changing social landscape, postmodern and post-structural concerns, and the identity of oppressed groups especially in terms of race and ethnicity, historians increasingly wrote about the British working class not as 'revolutionary agents' but as objects of study on their own terms. Many were seemingly disappointed that the British proletariat had not fulfilled its radical role. Class, as Ellen Meiksins-Wood (1986) suggested, became 'de-centred'.

Although the 'cultural turn' in history opened the door to some working class historians, the pie shops appear to have remained liminal spaces. Seemingly untranslatable, they have I suggest been guarded by a "dense, inward-looking" (Stedman Jones, 1974: 499) defensive habitus born of an historical cultural repression. However, these are zones that through their insularity and partly perhaps because of London's specific artisanal working class heritage, have in some measure, resisted the delegitimising attempts of bourgeois culture.

Neither Gareth Stedman Jones nor Raphael Samuel, whose historical investigations into East End life are central to my work, include any systematic interrogation of these spaces that were a *loci* for the communities that used them.¹

¹ There are several brief but inconsequential mentions of eel stalls in Samuel [1981] 2016.

The pie and mash shops were, and in some senses remain, markers of an historically significant but closed territoriality and culture that at one time thrived in hyper-local street markets and loyal, tight-knit (but now largely romantically mythologised) communities. The shops, encased in neighbourhood ritual and lore, made more mysterious I suggest through the process of wholesale demographic change, have become additionally concealed in plain sight. They are however I propose, a partial gateway, somewhat obscured by contested memorialisation, that allow us to view a largely lost and marginalised culture and, in that way, pose significant questions around class and identity.

This work is the first rigorous academic research into the history, culture and significance of London's eel, pie and mash shops and seeks to explain and contextualise the popular conjecture, assumptions and myths that surround them. The thesis seeks to provide a comprehensive history of the spaces, the food served, and the etiquette and rituals held within. It additionally attempts to sketch the contours of that music hall caricature of the London working classes, the cockney that is so central to the story of the shops.

The thesis further seeks to examine both the contemporary and historical eel, pie and mash shops at the turn of the twenty-first century and in doing so to discover not only their uncertain origins but also their recently renewed political, social and cultural significance. It does so through the interrogation of dozens of shops between London and Essex and by way of their spaces, their sights and their smells. It does so by archival research and numerous semi-structured interviews with patrons and customers that interrogate memory as well as a sensory ethnography informed by my own past.

The approach of this thesis is then an intersection of the personal and the political. My own upbringing and now interstitial class position offers, I believe, a unique insight into the textures of the pie and mash shops and the changing culture that envelops them.

1.3 Co-ordinates

This thesis charts the eel, pie and mash shops around four compass points. I utilise the locations of history, identity, food culture and memory in a panoptical approach to excavate the subject.

1.3.1 History

Because of the paucity of historical literature around the eel, pie and mash shops and the working class culture which they contain, it was necessary to find co-ordinates that would lead me into their absence. In this way I have synthesised existing scholarship, with my original research to extend our understanding of the circumstances of their origins.

My work is bounded by a largely Marxian analysis and delimited by the broad contours of the Nairn Anderson thesis (1962). This argument, honed throughout the 1960s and 1970s offers that British capitalism's development was rendered incomplete by its precocity and the continuing presence at its core of elements of the *ancien regime*.

Rather than initially link the emergence of the shops to the efforts of one particular nineteenth century family in isolation as custom has it, I place their evolution concomitant with a much earlier contestation within England's proto-industrial landscape. In this I largely use E.P. Thompson's scaffolding which charts the contestations of cultures between those of the elites and the poor that emerged during the eighteenth century. Here, economic rationalisations engendered by a rising mercantile middle order challenged the paternalist bonds of the 'old corruption'. Wage labour became freer, more mobile and "concentric rings of clientship" (Thompson [1980] 1991: 39) began to break away from the orbit of the great houses. Significant amongst these for this thesis were pastry cooks many of whom in time would themselves become small masters in London's pie trade. This in itself, although beyond the immediate bounds of this study, is a noteworthy and

under researched arena of the capital's food history that was simultaneous with the growth of the city and increasing urbanity.

I link this development to the new and self-conscious urban identity (Olsen, 1976) that was beginning to emerge in the dying days of Georgian London. This identity was concomitant with the accession, ideologically and culturally, of a middle class whose rise I chart as a synchronous dance with an emergent London proletariat. It is the latter's demonisation that I suggest is a significant factor in the defensive culture of the contemporary eel and pie shops. In this I use Pierce Egan's writings to explore the ending an older popular culture that was a dwindling asymmetry (Burke, 1978) between the elites and the poor.

Henry Mayhew's mid-century navigation of the capital's fluid, poverty-stricken street communities records the final traces of this culture amongst the penniless roving street pie man whose livelihood had by now been decimated against a backdrop of unemployment and continuing (mostly Irish) immigration. I link the pie man's changing customer base with an emergent bourgeois culture of *laissez faire* that equated poverty and morality but also with rigid attitudes to outdoor eating.

In that vein, the thesis links for the first time, work on the contestations around the early Victorian street that I contend encouraged the emergence of settled pie shops. This complicated process connects Stedman Jones' (1971) work on casual labour, James Winter's (2013) work on street culture with recent scholarship (Kelley, 2019) on London's traditional markets around the idea of modernity and nascent consumerism. I suggest that the process of the 'clearing' of London's streets and the subsequent attempts to force the city's myriad trades to 'move inside' was a simultaneous moral crusade against the 'old, popular culture' (Golby and Purdue, 1984) and a negotiation around a new rational planning directive that had its roots in a Lockean ideology based on cementing property rights for rentiers. I offer that this 'internal' urban enclosure was linked to, and was the culmination of, a process started much earlier in the English countryside. Further, my thesis proposes via Stedman Jones ([1971] 2014) that these attempts to control the crowd (Rudé, 1964) evidenced a developing working class culture influenced by those forced to leave the street trades (Jankiewicz, 2012) and exhibited, emergent class solidarities (Brodie,

2001). These populations would I conclude, form the customer base of the new eel and pie shops that were suffering a problematic class descent as the bourgeoisie retreated from the city's centre.

My thesis reconfigures the history of the eel and pie shops and proves that the accepted notion of the first recorded pie shop is erroneous. My research, by interrogation of sources, establishes a much earlier date to these enterprises and refutes the earliest formulation of the shops' fare held within the traditional lore of one the oldest pie shop families. Further, this work casts doubt upon the accepted notion that the shops exhibited an unbroken gustatory tradition and suggests that this is an echo of the invented conventions (Hobsbawn and Ranger, [1983] 2017) of the *fin de siècle*.

My thesis further significantly utilises the biological notion of a *taxon* to describe the myriad of London eating places, that would eventually contribute to the final, classic late nineteenth century eel, pie and mash shop. I employ Rebecca Spang's (2001) work on the restaurant and utilise Brenda Assael's (2018) writing on London's culinary specificity to examine eating for the city's working classes based initially around the new temporalities of capitalism. Eventually I advance that this emergent proletarian culture became based around street market hyper-locality, and synchronous with entertainment and the opportunity to demonstrate and perform respectability. This aligns with David Harvey's (2004) notion of "pacification by spectacle" and Stedman Jones' (1974, 1982) notion of consolation within the 're-making' of the working classes.

1.3.2 Identity

Underpinning much of this thesis was a realisation that an excavation of the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops would be incomplete without examination of the historical identity of the cockney. This figure was simultaneous to the development of the shops and ultimately formative in their 'classic' late Victorian incarnation. It is a version of this cockney that is valorised within the contemporary spaces of the shops.

Because it became increasingly clear that the cockney of the pie shop was a constructed creature born of a palimpsestic identity coterminous with London's urbanity, I sought firstly to historically contextualise its origins within early emergent tensions between forces of capital in towns and older feudal forms of rural power. In this way I again use Thompson's ([1980] 1991) wider framework of eighteenth century class negotiations between the 'patrician and the plebian' and, along with the cockney's particular and direct spatiality traced the evolution of its specific 'cant'. Stedman Jones' (1989) delineation of this emergent identity of modernity as an interstitial (specifically London) class of trade and commerce was central. Cockney at this point I argue was a lived and geographic pivot that evidenced the coexistent struggle between the bourgeoisie and those beneath them: between those with authority and those without. I use Gregory Dart's (2012) work to audit the literary cockney of the late Georgian period and Charles Dickens' reportage (and fiction) to clarify the cockney's subsequent class demotion. This was parallel to the simultaneous rise of the lower middle class consumerist dandy of the 1867 franchise extension and the youthful 'counter-jumper' - at this time some of the likely eel and pie shops customers.

My thesis examines the demonisation of the informal street economy in this period as part of a complex cultural shift in which the landscape of the costermonger, who would inherit the sinking cockney moniker, became subversive and largely tarred with the notion of the residuum.

In doing so I explore the dual bourgeois fascination and revulsion for a London proletariat more and more defined by a cartography that circumscribed a zone of exclusion - the 'abyss' of the East End. This was increasingly delineated by a moral formulation surrounding the subversive (cultural and political) potential of dirt and disease.

My narrative argues the cockney was ingested into a national project during the New Imperialism to constrain potentially explosive domestic social forces and this was done largely through coding transmitted by behavioural forms of popular song in the music hall (Scott, 2002), public houses and the eel and pie shops that draws upon Stedman Jones' 'culture of consolation' (1974). To examine the process, I utilise

Hall's (1973) work on the dissemination of hegemonic messaging as a guide to the 'encoding' of patriotism in the creation of a sanitised, sentimental cockney plastered on top of previous layered incarnations.

This thesis argues that the cockney henceforth became periodically useful to its hegemonic creators as a motif and a warning siren that a certain type of Englishness was under threat. Crucially I suggest that the co-option of the cockney's alleged stoicism in the face of the Blitz is the basis for a contemporary memoryscape and the haunting of the present day austerity nostalgia.

Once I have established the historical co-ordinates of the cockney identity, my thesis returns to the late nineteenth century to contextualise the 'whitening' of the Victorian working class (Bonnett, 1998) as a defensive trench of empire (Cohen, Qureshi and Toon, 1994, Schwarz, 1996) which underscores the character from this point forward. I locate the contemporary identity within the contentious frame of a new ethnic group (Jones, 2011).

I argue that the cockney did not die during the immediate post-war period with the Mrs Mop character as Stedman Jones (1986) suggests but was responsive to and simultaneous with an ongoing popular modernity and national economy birthed within the Welfare State. In this I suggest that the cockney, rather than simply fade away, continued its role as a nostalgic conduit to capital but evolved multiple valences that spoke to an increasing emphasis on popular culture, age, choice and especially individuality consistent with an historical 'proletarian entrepreneurialism' (Hobbs, 1998). In this, and synchronous with multiculturalism and an 'ordinary cosmopolitanism' (Gilroy, 2000), a new parallel multi-racial cockney has emerged around a 'structure of feeling' (Williams, 1961) that is a looser group identification of numerous cultural signifiers.

Finally, I argue that the contemporary reimagining of the cockney via a decamped East End in Essex has narrated the 'slow cancelation of the future' (Beradi, 2011) that is the neoliberal ascendancy through forces of the popular Right by appealing to race and their alleged cultural abandonment. The contemporary reimagining of the

eel and pie shops as a totem of a lost, white working class London is, I argue, anchored within this nostalgic haunting.

1.3.3 Food Culture

Although this thesis has food at its core it is not about food *per se*. Rather it quantifies food both as a signpost to a historically specific working class culture and cuisine and as an element that is “central to a sense of identity” (Fischler, 1988).

That said, historical surveys of London’s food within the period of study have been invaluable. Heal (1990) contextualises food and the rituals that surrounded it in early modern England and I have drawn heavily on Henry Mayhew (1851), George Dodd (1856) and George Sala’s (1859) work from the mid nineteenth century. In addition to primary magazine and newspaper sources, George Sim’s reportage (1889, 1902) was excellent background.

The unpublished work of D.J. Oddy (1970) and Katy Pettit’s (2009) thesis was crucial in mapping the working class diet and food landscape in the late nineteenth century as was Maud Pember Reeves’ (1913) early feminist work amongst the Lambeth poor. Olive Malvery’s *fin de siècle* journalism (1906, 1908) that contains her memoirs of working in an (unnamed) eel and pie shop were priceless finds that incidentally interrogated the cuisine and interior spaces of working class eateries. John Burnett’s work (1979, 2004) has been essential in delineating the hierarchies and type of eating places that Londoners used as have Stephen Mennell (1995) and Richard Tames (2003). James Vernon’s (2007) work on hunger was significant as was Lesa Scholl (2017) on Gaskell’s writing.

Scholarship around the specific constituent parts of the fare of the pie shop was less common but Peter Gurney’s (2009) work on potato consumption during the Famine of the 1840s was particularly useful. Additionally, Janet Clarkson’s (2009) very general history of the pie was helpful but Tom Fort’s (2002) work on the eel was essential in general, especially on its historic links to the diet of Londoners.

There is a certain amount of scholarship on what might be called the foods of multiculturalism and in this Panikos Panayi (2008) on foods of origins was useful as was Tony Kushner (2003) on the food of Jew and gentile in the East End. These however, like much from the academy, barely mention eels, pie and mash and so, this thesis is an attempt to address to that absence.

I chose to examine the lived textures of the contemporary pie shops for the uninitiated through a series of semi-structured interviews and a sensory ethnography. This methodology allowed me to relate intimate aural, olfactory and visual sensory experiences and correlate them to historical and cultural coordinates. My starting point was the anthropological vocabulary of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955) and Mary Douglas (1975) that described the classifications of food, much of whose 'rules' the pie shop meal ironically 'breaks'.

I used the sociology of Erving Goffman (1949), Ray Oldenburg (1999) and Anna Marie Steigemann (2017) to define these largely unexplored spaces within the performative register of retail and the restaurant but my main co-ordinate was the work of Michel DeCerteau (1988) in relating the obscure rhythms, rituals and rules of the shops.

In terms of sensory ethnography, a major coordinate was Sarah Pink's (2015) anthology of the discipline as was the work of Alex Rhys-Taylor (2017, 2020) that utilised Teichmüller's notion of the 'democracy of the senses'. I used the sense of smell to map a working class aroma and in doing so excavated several early to mid-twentieth century novels that described *taxons* of proletarian eating places and their dubious perfume. I use the sense of taste to examine the notion of disgust and the gustatory de-centering of the eel via Douglas (1966) and Deborah Lupton, (1996)

I use Daniel Miller's (2008) formulation that food is an object-bridge between ourselves and the people we love. In that way I use food as a link between personal and political identities (Radstone, 2010).

Pierre Bourdieu (1986, 2011) and his notion of classed taste and *distinction* was a crucial signpost in determining a working class taste and space. This I explored

largely through the work of Beverley Skeggs (2004, 2016) to loosely outline a working class arena that is the pie and mash shop. Here, class is defined through fluid and symbolic matrices that negotiate the limits of bourgeois meaning and accountability in the form of microresistances in manners and humour, limited in its field of exchange value.

Finally, I use the field of memory to interrogate the food of the pie shops utilising it chronologically in conjunction with New Labour's hysteria around working class eating and corporality during the early Blair years. This I cite as a trigger for political and cultural anger. In this I utilise the food-memory coordinates of Sutton (2001, 2005) but especially the work of Nadia C. Serematakis (1996) on sensory interiority and the dialogical and reciprocal processes of the socio-material field outside of the body. I interrogate childhood food memories in conjunction with matriliney to show why a simple dish like pie and mash has such a profound sensual pleasure and link this with Paul Connerton's (1989) work on the bodily inscription of memory. Lastly, I utilise ideas of gastronationalism (DeSoucey, 2010) to link the *terroir* of pie and mash to what Yi-Fu Tuan (1974) refers to as 'local patriotism'.

1.3.4 Memory

Central to this thesis, in the relative absence of historical and cultural texts, is how the eel pie and mash shops have been memorialised, for what purpose and by whom.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, at the foundation of this theorising is Peter Bromley's (1998) notion that memory is an historical construction, subject to constant revision. This is echoed by Aleida Assmann's (2010: 97) conception that each generation stands on the shoulders of its predecessors whose "... knowledge they can reuse and reinterpret".

I categorise the myriad memoryscapes that coalesce within both the remaining few traditional eel and pie shops in London and their newer counterparts in Essex as polyphonic. I suggest that the shops in divergent locations hold simultaneous

memories that are distinct but synchronous and carry memories of several groups which use them as temporal anchorages (Huysen, 1995) within late capital.

I utilise Jan Assmann's idea of a 'cultural' memory of rites and rituals enshrined in performance within the eel and pie shops along with the idea of a 'communicative' memory, one that is based on the temporal dimensions of lived experience. I suggest that for the shops, the contestations around what they are and subsequently will be, are held between these two points in a 'floating gap' (Vansina, 1985) that moves with the passage of time and additionally between generations. Change within memorialisations is likely evidenced by the outlines of fissures within this gap (Olick, 2003). Appropriate to the contemporary contestations around the identities held within the shops, Duncan Bell's (2003) theorising around hegemonic memory groups invading and capturing the memory landscape by re-narrativizing the past has been particularly useful.

The shops act to stabilise a 'geography of belonging' (Hodgkin and Radstone, 2003) to a largely white, monocultural and inevitably 'better' past and combine with this a notable sense of loss. It is this deficit that was apparent to Pierre Nora (1989) in his notion of *lieux de mémoire*. In the absence of *milieux de mémoire* within modernity these are symbolic sites that are apposite simultaneously to the fading pie shops of cockney London and their simulacra created in the New Towns of Essex and beyond. They capture in shorthand places where "memory crystallises and secretes itself". Crucially as Astrid Erll (2011) offers, these sites can reach forward and backwards to the past and present in memorialisations which are the result of collective reconstructions in the here-and-now (Rigney, 2008). These reconstructions I contend are further evidenced in the spate of problematic and romantic 'recollections' from a post-war generation in autobiography and memoir that signal to palimpsestic, personal memory epochs largely valorising a lost landscape of Empire, post-war gain and national sovereignty. These are partly I believe as Andreas Huysen (1995) suggests, an attempt to "claim some space" within a confusing and increasingly accelerated temporality of modernity.

The shops and the territories that they once represented are in this way arenas of cultural defensive against globalisation, gentrification and historically, multicultural.

They act as sites of memory “as practice - as opposed to memory as fact or essence - history” (Malcolm, 2014). They become self-perpetuating vortices of “symbolic investment” (Rigney, 2008) inscribing and re-inscribing memories that pertain to a political reconstruction of ‘ordinariness’ revealing the contestations between working class memory groups divided between a precariat and those who partially benefitted from the Thatcherite project. However, the shops as sites of memory are unable to heal a rupture between the past and the present and into this void rushes the spirit of nostalgia. This, as Stuart Tannock (1995) suggests, acts as a search for continuity.

I use Svetlana Boym’s (2001) notions of both a restorative nostalgia that seeks recreation of the past within the present and a reflective nostalgia which whimsically lingers over the patina of the time to reflect on the cockney identity within the shops. Here I focus on the cockney diaspora which valorises hyper locality and the “magical recovery of community” (Clarke, 1976) evidenced through pilgrimage to the shops (Fawbert, 2011) linked to the other great working class consolation, football. These sporting allegiances largely mirror the hyper locality of the historical pie and mash shops delineating food-culture boundaries in opposition to the dominant hegemony (Palmer, 1988).

I suggest that these have become arenas of a gastronationalism (DeSoucey, 2010) allied to the reinvigoration of a populist, political ‘common sense’ Right which in some cases uses pie and mash as a symbol of a ‘forgotten white tribe’ (Collins, 2004). I link these memory concretions to a growing public distrust of a political class recruited increasingly from a professional, managerial background, an ‘austerity nostalgia’ (Hatherley, 2016), a partial re-racialisation (Schwarz, 1996) of British politics, the so-called ‘culture wars’ and Brexit.

1.4 Chapters

My first chapter addresses the absence of a satisfactory history of the enterprises that would become the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops.

I contextualise the shops' distant origins within the class exodus of small masters, especially bakers and pastry cooks who served the great houses, to the expanding and new urbanity of Georgian London. Here, some as roving pie men and others as settled shopkeepers participated in the last throes of an 'old' popular culture - the asymmetry of the 'great' and 'little' traditions of the elites and the common people.

I trace the shops' development adjacent to the ideological and political ascent of the urban bourgeoisie and the concomitant contestations over the capital's physical streets and markets. Here, London's working classes acceded to some elements of the new hegemony whilst creating a nascent culture based partly on earlier proto-industrial customs and responses to the new temporal discipline of capital.

I argue that the new pie shops adapted to the middle classes withdrawal from the city's centre by negotiating with modernity and consumerism and eventually becoming eating places for the city's 'respectable' poor within a penumbra of informal markets. These areas were dominated by the costermonger communities whose identity would become intertwined with and essential to the cockney culture that the shops would represent by the start of the twentieth century.

My second chapter recognises the centrality of this identity, eventually adjacent to the eel and pie shops, tracing its historical progression from early modernity to the Blitz. In this I argue that cockney became integral in not only defining the spatiality of a new kind of Londoner but one that exemplified an interstitial class tension largely as a label delineating those without authority. I argue that this was initially between older rural power and emergent urban capitalist forces but eventually delineated a grouping of the petit bourgeoisie in relation to the elites.

Largely through the works of Dickens, I trace the class demotion of the term cockney that came to define a section of the urban poor and in doing so chart its reproduction as a ventriloquised reflection of proletarian culture within the music hall by bourgeois performers. Here, the working class cockney was reified simultaneously as a figure both of good humour, honesty and criminality: between the respectable poor and the worthless 'other'.

The music hall I assert, as an effective hegemonic device (in tandem with popular fiction in late Victoriana) inculcated within London's working classes, bourgeois notions of racial and national superiority. The increasingly palimpsestic cockney identity was further conscripted into the imperial state through franchise extension and, along with popular song, public houses and the eel and pie shops formed a culture of 'consolation' that would become part of the English 'ordinary culture'.

My third chapter contextualises the cockney identity within the notions of whiteness and empire. I excavate how the middle classes classified the 'dark and dirt' of the London poor as part of a moral coding and extended the designation of whiteness to inhibit potentially explosive social forces so as to reframe the nation as a racial singularity. In this way, I argue that henceforth the cockney was periodically used by capital as a largely reactionary and patriotic force and that the eel and pie shops became a loci for this culture. I suggest that the Blitz cockney as a motif became central to the subsequent memoryscape and further into the twentieth century I trace how this was channelled, initially as opposition to American consumerism and an expanding EEC and then, in defence of its post-war welfarist gains, how the cockney was used to bolster the internal colonial frontier.

In the second half of the chapter, I explore the destruction of traditional cockney territoriality and trace, largely through a changing age demographic how the cockney, rather than dying out, developed multiple internal valances around the expanding horizons of choice and individuality via an expanding popular modernity. In this way I argue that by the 1970s the cockney began to simultaneously embody a vigorous low-cultured populism and an upwardly mobile conservative element receptive to and used by an emergent neoliberal right. An increasing internal instability within the identity allied to spatial and demographic uncertainties led to an exodus to the Essex and Kent hinterlands. Here, a simulacra culture had been incubating and it is within this culture that the pie and mash shops would evidence a new political and cultural significance.

My fourth chapter investigates a significant London pie shop primarily using a 'sensory ethnography' to chart the sights, smells, sounds and rituals found within. In this way I interrogate the coded sedimentation of gestures and largely unspoken

rules that link hospitality, conviviality and memory within and upon the bodies of the owners and customers. I explore the cuisine in reference to other British working class foods using archival reportage and contemporary theory. I place the ingredients of the meal within historical and cultural contexts and examine them especially within the parameters of distinction and contemporary notions of disgust.

In the second part of the chapter, I situate the shops and their fare within a nostalgically memorialised habitus of a changed London working class identity. I examine the culture of a performative working class respectability and the particular 'classness' of the shops. I argue that this reflects both a subtle deviation from the refinements of bourgeois dining as microresistances to neoliberal modernity but also inter-class contestations. I suggest that the pie shops might uniquely evidence inter-class differences and how a contemporary London working class might view itself. In this way I challenge the argument that class tastes have wholly declined with modernity.

My final chapter addresses the central role of memory within the shops and the cockney culture they contain. I argue that the memories inscribed upon the contemporary, palimpsestic cockney identity are largely tangled and hybridised, linked to historical hyper-locality and past class solidarities. I refer to these, the results of social dislocation and inter-class competition, as polyphonic. I argue that although cockney memories were largely mediated by each generation apposite to the contemporary hegemony, this process began to break down during the 1990s under a New Labour government that embraced globalisation and accelerated concomitant neoliberal reforms. I argue that the contemporary memory scripts of cockney, performed and reinscribed by a post-war generation, are a melancholia for the gains of the post-war period, an empire nostalgia and the loss of the fantasy of a British omnipotence. These nostalgias I argue are performed through a 'local' patriotism of which the pie and mash shops are a key symbol. I trace the course of this political/personal memorialisation to the under-theorised arena of food and the demonisation of working class corporeality assailed by a culture of distinction within an aspirational managerialism in the context of 'cartel' parties and concomitant to a Third Way and the End of History. Finally, I explore these largely constructed nostalgias adjacent to a 'geography of belonging', the reinvigorated politics of

whiteness and the 'new' cultural minority, the white working class in context of 'class non-voting', 'post-factual' politics, populism and the campaign for Brexit.

1. Origins

Introduction

In this chapter, I will chart and analyse the birth of London's iconic eel, pie and mash shops (as they would become) by placing their development firmly within London's emergent identity during its extraordinary nineteenth century expansion and in relation to its nascent, distinct but compromised working class culture.

Because of the relative paucity of primary material surrounding the evolution of the shops, I attempt to trace the contours of this absence so as to define the cultural, and political space into which they appeared.

The maturation of the shops was entirely concomitant with larger societal changes and was simultaneous to the negotiations with, and then attacks upon, remnants of what has been called the 'old' popular culture (Golby and Purdue, 1984) by an urban bourgeois hegemony. I use Mayhew's roving pieman to illustrate this initial contestation. The pieman's livelihood was just about contemporaneous with the dying breath of what Peter Burke (1978: 28) has called the asymmetry of the 'great' and 'little' traditions of the elites and the common people. Here the former often partook in the performity of the latter but not vice-versa. The pieman's decline mirrored a gradual withdrawal of the urban middle classes from areas delineated by the lives of the new industrial poor.

A major site of this contestation was the physical and ideological control of the capital's streets (Bailey, 1978). The 'clearing' of these streets and the subsequent (physical and metaphorical) 'coming inside' of London's working classes were framed by the elites in terms of modernity, morality and political necessity. They were I suggest, simultaneous to the demonisation (and simultaneous) valorisation of an increasingly impoverished coster class by the twin nodes of Victorian liberalism, itself part of a longer effort to 'civilise the crowd' (Golby and Purdue, 1984).

These efforts I argue were partly successful negotiations with an emergent proletariat that acceded to some elements of hegemonic control whilst creating their own culture on the remnants of a largely pre- and early- industrial way of life. This was based on notions of access to natural rights, conviviality, hospitality and communality, that had been broken by 'time, work-discipline and Industrial Capitalism' (Thompson, 1967). This new culture, held within dual notions of freedom and respectability, centred largely around unofficial markets (Kelley, 2019) and desperate resistances to economic hardship. These populations became integral to the customer base of the emergent eel pie shops.

My thesis suggest that the original owners of the early nineteenth century pie shops were largely the product of the breaking of the concentric rings of "economic clientship" (Thompson, [1980] 1991) that had radiated out from the great houses during the previous century. The evolving genius of the early pie shops was I argue by mid-century, a recognition and response to a new class of customer that synthesised an entrepreneurial reimagining of the capital's changing consumer culture against a backdrop of shortage and deprivation. This was coterminous during the next decades with the growth of places to eat outside the home for all Londoners, both out of necessity and choice.

I chart the shops' development throughout the nineteenth century as a taxonic evolution that encompassed different food choices, décor and service, part of a systematic commercialisation of the catering business (Tames, 2003) within an eventual accommodation of a partially successful *embourgeoisement* of nascent working class cultures. The evolution of the culture of the eel pie shops this thesis argues was synchronous with the class descent of its client base finally coming to rest in the notion of the 'respectable' working classes. In doing so, the shops eventually created a unique but defensive counter-public constructed around the evolution of a conservative working class community, taste and consciousness.

The evolution of the pie shops into the twentieth century mark an emergent definition and cartography of the social fabric of the capital informed by the forces of modernity and divergent class cultures.

1.1 Monstrous Wen²

In 1827 Heinrich Heine, the German writer and critic, wrote of his sojourn in London. “Everywhere wealth and quality stare at you... [but] ...poverty, pushed away in remote alleys and dark, damp passages, dwells there with its rags and tears” (Stigand, 1875, 1: 290).

Visitors remarked on London’s seemingly limitless docks, the bustle of its people, but also its dinginess, its fogs and its gloom. The German nobleman Hermann Ludwig Heinrich von Pückler-Muskau (in Fox, 1992: 13) found in 1826 that the “...whole City, ha(s) a repulsive sinister aspect, which almost reminds one of the restless and comfortless throng of the spirits of the damned.” He wrote to his wife the following year complaining that fog covered everything, and it was necessary to breakfast with lit candles.

London, now the world’s largest city, was a hard-edged place of commerce. It contrasted in stark terms with the culture of ‘Pantomime and Pageantry’ of the Regency then coronation of George IV (Cumming, 1992). Here was the very caricature of a profligate peacock of the *ancien regime* increasingly out of time with an emergent industrial, entrepreneurial capitalist age. In the first decades of the century, the city was still a mosaic of what had been and what was yet to come; a mixture of Tudor, Stuart and Georgian buildings, rambling dark alleyways and terrible slums competing with speculators’ haphazard attempts at a patchwork of solutions to overcrowding and squalor. It was noisy, with a “universal hubbub; a sort of uniform grinding and shaking, like that experienced in a great mill with fifty pairs of stones...” (Gray, 2015: 322). It was dark, without proper sewerage and its streets were dangerous.

London was an intriguing jumble of the refined and the inelegant, perfectly illustrated in the aging Gillray’s imaging of the bawdiness of the street and Pückler-Muskau’s disdain for the “coarseness and brutality” of the English theatre audience (Pückler-Muskau, 1832, 3: 126).

² Thomas Carlyle to Alexander Carlyle; 14 December 1824; DOI 10.1215/lt-18241214-TC-AC-01.

The 1820s in particular had seen the birth of a new and distinctive London character partly centred around George IV's 'picturesque' reordering of streets but also a literary landscape that "promoted a self-conscious urban identity" (Olsen, 1976: 38). These were the years of patriotic 'euphoria' between Waterloo and the Reform Bill (Olson, 1976). These were also the years when the West End was transformed: the Regent's and St James' Parks were created and monuments such as Trafalgar Square and the Hyde Park arch *et al* were established. The poor were removed but they were not yet objects of hysterical Victorian fear or sickly pity. In this fluid, transitional period, London was still a place where the wealthy might conspicuously attend working class dives in the East End. In Pierce Egan's monthly *Life in London*, Jerry the country gent is accompanied by his sophisticated cousin Tom around the poorer districts of London 'to see a bit of life'. They go to the working class *All-Max* in the East End and report that:

Every cove that put in an appearance was quite welcome, colour or country considered no obstacle ... The group was motley indeed - Lascars, blacks, jack-tars, coal-heavers, dustmen, women of colour, old and young, and a sprinkling of the remnants of once fine girls, and all jiggling together (Egan [1821] 2019: 263).³

They see ageing prostitutes and poor children in gin shops; they enter bawdy coffee houses before retiring to the more class-suitable Almacks. Crucially, they move freely between both worlds before the carefully delineated moral and cultural margins of a later Victoriana.

This kind of urban chronicle, still largely within an eighteenth century literary tradition, finds home in the burgeoning number of satirical magazines and scandal journals that begin to appear, whose readership were an audience of "... apprentices, shop assistants, clerks and other young men who were coming of age in the first Victorian

³ This appears to be one of the earliest uses of 'East End' - contrary to both Peter Ackroyd and W.J. Fishman, who place the place the term much later in the 1880s. See - Newland, 2008: 47.

decade of manifest political and social changes to ride them to new social identities” (Gray, 1982 in Nord, 1995: 30).

It is men like these, of similar class and background that will discover themselves in the mirror of the new publications. They identified with a London life that was alive to the modern and full of opportunity: a formulation of a new strata of the self-made who were both participants in, and beneficiaries of, a reconfigured coal and steam driven metropolis. This class, spectators to the privilege of the wealthy *by proxy*, was beginning to develop its own consciousness and gaining at least a partially invested possession of London’s streets. It is these men, part of the lower-middle classes and the upper working classes with access to employment and at least some meagre capital, who will be the customers and indeed owners of the eel and pie shops as the century progresses.

1.2 “What has become of the pieman?” (Smith, 1857: 201)

The Victorian painter and author J.D. Harding (1851,1:129) had suggested that “The Only true Republic / Is a crowded city street.” This space had always been a sphere for working class life, an open-air theatre of necessity for sustenance, romance and trade, but increasingly by the early Victorian period the street was becoming a contested arena of class privilege and preferential access. The emergent hegemony of the ‘industrious’ middle classes saddled work and productivity to an increasingly Christian probity and the street became a moral battleground. Prefigured by Wordsworth in his *Prelude* and Blake’s *London*, the city’s streets had started to be linked to a defiled physical and moral pollution: a loss of innocence, the horror of female sexuality, prostitution and venereal disease. This linked bourgeois men and proletarian women in an unspoken, secretive, hypocritical and decidedly unequal dance, the very word modified by the contamination of ‘street-walker’ and the notion of ‘woman of the street’ (Nord, 1995).

The Regency thoroughfare had been none too carefully calibrated between pedestrians and traffic, but by the 1830s convention seems to have it that the less salubrious pedestrians like beggars, prostitutes and touts would be literally ‘in the gutter’ whilst on the threshold of that murky realm - between the gutter and the

pavement - would be the 'almost respectable'. These would be the travelling self-employed, the so-called 'penny capitalists', the men selling from carts: the costermongers.

The 1832 Reform Bill had led to increased middle class influence over local government spending. By the 1840s a more utilitarian polity born of a dislike of the chaos and ostentation of the Regency city, a bourgeois fear of disease, the threat of Chartism and eventually Evangelicalism (Green, 1982: 143), sought to implement bylaws which guaranteed pavements as spaces for 'respectable' pedestrians. Symptomatic of divergent class cultures, those in the 'in-between world' were viewed simultaneously as dangerous yet useful; enviably free yet chained to their poverty.

Henry Mayhew's documentation of the emergent, fluid culture of the "urban nomads" who inhabited this realm foreshadows Booth's cartography by decades and his concentration on morality through fascination and fear in pseudo-racial terms is instructive. He carefully characterises the differences between "... the vagabond and the citizen... the nomadic and the civilised..." (Mayhew, 1851: 1). For him, the streets are populated by "wandering tribes" who prey on England's "settled tribes" and are far from the light of civilisation. The worst are distinguished by group physiognomy evidenced by "high cheekbones and protruding jaws", "a slang language" and "lax ideas of property" with an eagerness to "rebel at authority". For Mayhew and his class, despite some evident sympathy for their conditions, these working people are uncivilised and carry no "positive cultural connotations" (Stedman Jones, 1974: 463). The 'street folk', those who roam to sell their wares in this inter-zone and who have these traits in an exaggerated form are almost a "distinct race" in themselves that Mayhew suggests are potentially of "Irish extraction" (Mayhew, 1851: 2). The street is a dangerous arena and is a site ripe for control.

Among these tribes are the wandering piemen. Mayhew does us an enormous service by describing their number, trade and equipment. He calls them "one of the most ancient of street callings of London" (Mayhew, 1851: 195). We learn that they usually make the pies themselves in various guises of meat, eel and fruit and that they work the streets and public houses from mid-afternoon until late at night. Significantly, they are mostly unemployed bakers and they "number about forty in

summer and twice that number in winter” (Mayhew, 1851: 195). They are in steep decline, emblematic of the wider cultural and physical distances between the city’s middle classes and those they employ. After the Great Reform Bill and the New Poor Law (1834), the bourgeoisie increasingly started to abandon the city, its industrial areas and with it their street eating habits. The new Metropolitan Police now patrolled London and a recent class of aspirational, professional clerks increasingly availed themselves of more settled, interior eating places.

By the 1850s the piemen are little more than adjuncts of street gambling: they allow punters to toss a coin to see if they can win a pie or pay a penny forfeit and this seems almost their sole route to income.⁴ Mayhew reports a poor pieman relaying to him that, “Gentlemen ‘out on the spree’ at the late public houses will frequently toss when they don’t want the pies, and when they win, they will amuse themselves by throwing the pies at one another, or at me” (Mayhew, 1851: 196).

One of Mayhew’s interviewees reports an eight-and-a-half-hour day tramping the streets for “1s. 6d., ... and out of that I have to pay 1d for charcoal” (Mayhew, 1851: 196). It’s a far cry from the character portrayed in Hogarth’s 1750 print “March to Finchley” as recounted by *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* (3,15 August, 1851) almost exactly a century later. The writer of the piece describes how the historical pieman was:

... a prominent character in the highways and byways of London. He was generally a merry dog... (who) stands in the very centre of the crowd, grinning with delight at the adroitness of one robbery, while he is himself the victim of another.”

By now, he is a figure of scorn, taunted wherever he goes by animal noises repeating an old but entirely significant trope that his pie-fillings are likely to include old, rotten food - or cat (Mayhew, 1851: 196).

London, now a world city, was a magnet for immigration from Irish famine and from European revolutions. Street hawking was the only option for many of these new

⁴ Dickens regularly uses the tossing for a pie as part of street language - “‘Heads’ as the pieman says” - see Dickens [1836] 2020: 351 and again, Montague Tigg spins a coin “in the air after the manner of a pieman” - see Dickens [1842] 2014: 447.

arrivals, who swelled the ranks of the native urban poor even further during the periods of cyclical unemployment that dominated the British economy from 1843-1911. In this economic climate many piemen had fallen further down the social scale having “merged [with] a dealer in foreign nuts, fruits, and other edibles which barred the suspicion of sophistication” (*Harper’s New Magazine*, 3, 15 August, 1851).

By the mid-century, the itinerant pie-man’s days were largely done. As Meiksins Wood (2017: 67) has it, “... capitalist imperatives were imposed on traditional forms of work ... on artisans still engaged in pre-industrial production no less than on factory hands.” Those processes, that synchronously changed the nature of the street itself, meant that their business had been almost completely usurped by settled pie-shops. “These shops have now got mostly all the custom, as they make their pies much larger for the money than those sold on the streets” (Mayhew, 1851: 214).

The wandering pieman however was a dying subset of a much larger constituency of costermongers who, in turn, were part of a vast army of ‘casual’ labour. Their identity, location and trade would eventually become central to the establishment of the eel and pie shops.

The context of the costers was integral to understanding a London in transition and theirs, at this stage, was a “dwindling subsistence economy trapped within the expanding capitalist system” (Richards, 1990 in Jankiewicz, 2012: 394). Their precarity was structural (an advantage for capital as a residual, ever-present reserve army) and an “alien presence in the midst of mid-Victorian plenty” (Stedman Jones [1971] 2013: 14). Significantly for this thesis, bakers were also part of this precarious pool of labour and “surplus bakers could count on Friday night employment to meet the extra demand for bread” (Stedman Jones, [1971] 2013: 60).

During the first half of the Victorian century, the number of London’s street sellers rose faster than the general population of the city due to immigrants finding nothing other than casual work (Lummel, 2016: 33). Indeed, “[F]or most of the population flooding London streets, selling was a euphemism for begging” (Thomas, 1990: 41). Stephen Inwood (1998: 504 in Jankiewicz, 2012: 395) suggests that during this period perhaps a tenth of London’s labour was ‘casual’.

Some coster occupations were hereditary however, what Mayhew (1851: 3) calls “costermongers proper” and were further distinguished from both itinerant street sellers and the regular tradesmen by the fact that while the shopkeeper served even the humble bourgeois, the street seller almost exclusively provided regular services to the poor.

George Dodd (1856) reports that by the 1850s, largely the result of appalling hygiene and the disorder of busy streets, both the flower, fruit and vegetable market at Covent Garden and the fish market at Billingsgate were redeveloped (Smithfield’s cattle holding and abattoirs were transferred to Islington between the 1860s and 1880s). As the city expanded the poor found themselves located further from these markets which additionally had turned increasingly to the more profitable and efficient wholesale. The coster families had always bought their wares in bulk at these markets and had historically sold them on the move from barrows. Increasingly, they now came together in convenient locations to create local, unofficial markets. The London County Council (LCC) lists perhaps thirty such unofficial markets in the 1840s and Mayhew suggests thirty-seven in 1851 (Kelley, 2019: 1). By the later 1850s the LCC area has more than forty-two and sixty or more by the 1860s (Kelley, 2019: 24). These informal street markets were penumbras of expanding working class districts and the lists of street markets given by Mayhew would inevitably match the later “roll call of slum clearances” (Yelling, 2007: 120).

Vital to the poor, and in turn to the wealthy they served, they were further impediments to municipal attempts to modernise London’s food supplies with new market halls disrupting the “Liberal master-narrative of urban development” (Jones, 2016: 64). They remained a perceived threat to civic authority embodying a stubborn fragment of medieval carnival and performativity; their legal and spatial marginality entwined. As such they were the target of often brutal police enforcement actions (Jones, 2016). The Commissioner of Police, Richard Mayne (1796-1868) was accused of “waging a war on the costermongers” which possessed “all the malignancy of personal dislike” (*The Era*, 1 November 1863: 9). However, the necessity of some class interdependency and the belief in evangelism as a civilising influence likely meant that unlike the brutal, military demolitions of Hausmann’s

Paris, London's modernity was progressed largely "equivocal and piecemeal... based on a conjunction of the old and the new" (Nead, 2000: 6).

Even so, as the physical distance between the bourgeois and the poor increased concomitantly with fear and suspicion, so did the influence of arms-length benevolence with funding of missionary societies. This linked the enforced 'moving inside' (both physical and metaphorical) of the trades and life on London's streets with a simultaneous moral crusade against popular pastimes and amusements. By mid-century, gone were the tea gardens, cock fighting, apprentice rituals and street gambling of a previous age. The sanctions by the Common Council in the City, "under the prompting of its Methodist contingent" (Bailey, 2014: 32) against the famous Bartholomew Fair, dating from 1183, meant that it, along with other fairs closed by private bills, was dead by 1854.

This attempt to 'clear the streets' also constituted a culmination of a kind of internal, urban enclosure cementing property rights for rentiers on the basis of a Lockean ideological project started much earlier in the English countryside.⁵ The failure to 'improve' so-called 'wasted' land (or its commercial value) in this sense meant forfeiting the right to age-old liberties to live, graze, or as here, trade. Especially true of those that sold the watercress, chickweed, flowers or indeed sometimes eels that they sourced from age-old common land in London's greener extremities, these "challenges to their livelihood... [was also] a disruption of their social networks and a challenge to their dignity" (Jankiewicz, 2012: 404). Interestingly, the costermongers whose livelihoods were threatened were in many cases Irish immigrants, the victims of a related 'internal colonialism' practised by English landlords in Ireland.

The conventional view that street trading declined through this process is, however, untrue. The walking (or carrying) street traders like Mayhew's pea-soup seller and the hot-eel man, both of whose fare would, in one way or another be absorbed into the offerings of the nascent eel-pie shops, did eventually, by the later century largely

⁵ Locke follows the writings of Thomas More in his *Utopia* (1516) in expounding his theory of 'improvement' as the basis of property rights against communal, customary rights that interfered with capitalist accumulation. Locke's contention that if property (or land) was being used by 'indigenous' peoples, it could be legitimately colonially expropriated to 'improve' it is entirely concomitant with the reappropriation of market spaces by capital.

go the way of the roving pie seller.⁶ Street markets however, inevitably home to many eel and pie shops as their customer base became entirely working class, continued to grow into the twentieth century. Along with permanent shops these markets absorbed some of this former ambulatory retail business. In 1932, The London School of Economics' *New Survey of London Life and Labour* (an attempted 'update' to Mayhew) reported that stall numbers had grown by fifty percent since the turn of the century and Victoria Kelley (2019: 1, 6) suggests that markets had "reinvented themselves within a consumer modernity."

What appears to have occurred was a negotiation around what Kelley (2019) suggests was the notion of 'informality'. Although street selling remained a thorn in the side of the authorities and large sections of an outraged bourgeoisie, their utility was beyond doubt, and they were largely tolerated. I suggest that these negotiations were in no small part advanced by the costermongers themselves, initially aided (sometimes) by Mayhew's ventriloquising of their struggles (Herdman, 2021). Indeed, although beyond the scope of this study, costermongers, despite their later *fin de siècle* conservative associations appear in this period to have been active around wider issues of suffrage and Irish nationalism (Jankiewicz, 2012: 402). Certainly Marc Brodie (2001: 49) cites coster unions with governing committees that may have been absorbed within the New Unionism of the 1880s and suggests that they "quite consciously identified themselves and their causes with the working class... that was clearly recognised by politicians of the period, but which has been largely ignored since."

By sheer strength of numbers costermongers, as part of a developing working class culture, forced an accommodation with the forces of modernity and capitalism. This accommodation was not linear nor was it simply about how and where trade occurred but was more profound. Distinctive not only through their unique (and London-centric) economic formation but additionally subversive through what both Gertrude Himmelfarb (1995) and Stedman Jones ([1971] 2013) have suggested was a cultural and moral separateness, the costers, as part of a wider London working

⁶ John Thompson's camera captures much of the fading of these street trades in the late 1870s. See - Thomson and Smith [1877] 1994.

class, constituted a radical alternative to the strictures of bourgeois society “which probably owed something to the tradition of workers entering and leaving the street trades” (Jankiewicz, 2012: 405).

This culture perhaps additionally contained something of the solidarities and charity that Mayhew had noticed amongst the ‘Street Irish’ (Mayhew, 1851: 104) and also encapsulated the essence of the independence and individuality of what would become the late Victorian cockney. This complicated identity, a culture partly defined by precarity, nascent entrepreneurialism, early Victorian moral zoning and the largely failed hegemonic effort to create a working class in the image of the bourgeois, would be reconstituted as the customer base of the eel, pie and mash shops later in the century.

1.3 Through plate glass windows of respectability

Although *The Post Office Directory* appears to list the first Eel Pie House as a *shop* that belongs to Henry Blanchard at 101 Union Street in Southwark in 1844, it’s clear that there existed much older, taxonic institutions.⁷ In the mid-eighteenth century, eel pies were served in a public house (The Eel Pie House) on a small island south-west of Twickenham Ayt(e). Mentioned by Dickens, it became notorious for dog fights and duels.⁸ So popular did this become that the area subsequently became known as Eel-Pie Island. In addition, another public house, also known as The Eel Pie House, by the New River in Highbury (then) north of London, was cited by John Nelson in an 1811 book where:

So great is the resort of the lower order of people from the metropolis to the Eel Pie House, on Palm Sunday... that the host and servants are obliged to be on the alert at two o’clock in the morning to receive their numerous guests, who are none of the most gentle sort... (Nelson, 1811: 153).

In 1830, *The Morning Advertiser* (24 August 1830: 1) mentions another public house with the name Eel Pie House in an advertisement for coal barges. A pie shop in

⁷ Blanchard, Henry, *eel pie house*, 101 Union St. Boro’ High st. *Post Office London Directory for 1844*, Commercial Directory, *Post Office London Directory for 1844*: 574.

⁸ In the third Dickens novel, *Nicholas Nickleby*, (1838-9) Miss Morleena Kenwiggs goes to Eel Pie Island for a picnic.

Wardour Street that certainly sells eel pies is referred to in an article in *The Champion* in 1837 (16 April 1837: 24) whilst describing, with rather obvious glee, a fight between the shop owner and “four young shopmen” who are passing customers. The dialogue of the subsequent trial, reproduced as a patronising colloquialism, is instructive. One of the young defendants is quoted as saying “Heel-pies are only fit for snobs, give me a mince 'un.” The presiding magistrate gives an opportunity for the unnamed pie-shop owner to speak.

Heel pies, yer Lorship, as is chalked up a penny, is made of fish with their heads, and tails, and hinsides, and all in it, chopped up together. But sitch' pies as I sells aint only made with the werry best sand or silver eels, cleaned in three vorters...

The speech is cut short by the judge, but clearly the tradesman is making a distinction between cheap penny pies sold on the streets and his better fare. Also interesting is the idea of the pie as a food for the common man, whose voice is ventriloquised for comic effect. We might also note that the eel as an ingredient is held in traditionally higher esteem than simple fish and that is partly due to its heritage as a staple of Londoners diet for more than a thousand years (Fort, 2002).

In terms of these early taxonic pie shops, a painting by Frederick Napoleon Shepherd however conclusively proves that the listed Blanchard shop was not even the owner’s first. Painted in 1835, the image clearly shows a Blanchard’s eel-pie shop on the more central Fleet Street.⁹

We might conclude then that the pie *shop* was more common than the largely unreliable and erratic recordings of *The Post Office Directory*. We have, unfortunately, no documentary evidence of exactly how Blanchard sold his wares and whether for instance, he sold live eels as later pie shops would, or whether there were potatoes, soup or anything else on the menu. Blanchard’s is not then, despite commonly held views the progenitor of the contemporary eel, pie and mash shop, merely a distant ancestor.

⁹ Shepherd, Frederick Napoleon. “View of building in Fleet Street, with Blanchard's premises and figures on pavement”, Watercolour, 1835, London Metropolitan Archives, Main Print Collection, Cat., No., q4029905. See Fig. 1 in appendix.

The listing of a business by its trading name is, up until this point, usually (although not exclusively) reserved for public houses. Assuming that the directory relies on the owner to define their own business, it seems likely that Henry Blanchard, who makes a great and expanding success of his venture through the coming century, may be the entrepreneurial author of his own commercial debut.

The waters are further muddied by two advertisements in the *Morning Advertiser* in 1846:

To be let - an Eel Pie House - low rent made by lodgers. For cards of address apply to Mr Clayton, Hairdresser, 2, Borough Road, near St George's Circus (*Morning Advertiser*, 11 April 1846)

And:

To be Let an Eel Pie House, *established six years* [my italics], in a crowded thoroughfare, doing a snug business - rent 30/. - let off for 24/. For further particulars enquire Mr Wellard's, 8 St George's-place, Walworth road (*Morning Advertiser*, 24 October 1846)

My research indicates that these are the first mentions of eel pie houses in the press not specifically referring to ventures in public houses, and the ordinariness and casual mention of the description certainly indicates a type of shop that was reasonably common.

In the 1841 Census, a Henry Blanchard in Union Street (although the street number is illegible or missing) is listed as pastry cook.¹⁰ He is also listed in tandem with his new shop in the same way in *The Post Office Directory* of 1844.¹¹ The following year, a second Eel Pie House is recorded this time in Lisson Grove in west London. The owner is John Fletcher. There is a listing for a baker called John Fletcher in the

¹⁰ Blanchard, Henry, *1841 Census for England*, Surrey, St Saviour, District 16: 13.

¹¹ Blanchard, Henry, *Post Office London Directory for 1844*; Confectioners and Pastry Cooks: 1003.

1844 directory who is also working as a pastry cook in Soho.¹² We can't be entirely sure that, as it would seem, these are one and the same man but given perhaps the success of Blanchard's venture, Fletcher might have taken his future and his trade skills into his own hands.

That both of these men were pastry cooks is entirely significant. During the progress of the eighteenth century, the ideology of rationalism, individualism and the free market came into direct conflict with the profiteering, patrician state (the 'Old Corruption'). With the increasingly vital role of manufacturing, the unequal relationships between the elites and the commercial and professional sections of society who served them, started to break apart. In tandem, the scale of manufacture began to erode paternal control over the life of workers, challenging class relations and evidenced "the growth of a newly won psychology of the free labourer" (Thompson, [1980] 1991: 37-38).

The bonds between the gentry, small masters and labourers (emboldened by an advancing radical ideology) weakened significantly. Among the casualties of this breakage was a "further concentric ring of economic clientship" radiating out from the great houses" (Thompson, [1980] 1991: 39). These were workers like dressmakers, coach makers, innkeepers, vintners and pastry cooks. It was this class, profiting from "the sweat of their own brow" (Thompson, [1963] 2013: 710) that took their skills to London, to serve the needs of a growing metropolis commercially dominated by the bourgeoisie. They were joined by those that the gentry had come to see as both idle and disorderly and who had withdrawn from social control: clothing workers, urban artisans and labourers (Williams, 1969). Both groups brought with them at least some vestiges of customs and rituals of a proto-industrial culture.

It is my contention that both of these groups would form a commercial relationship in the city as respectively owner and customer of the emergent Eel Pie Houses. With this synthesis of groups, late eighteenth and early nineteenth century London begins to facilitate a cultural negotiation around its own earlier, urban culture. This was one

¹² Fletcher, John, *Baker*, 12 Nassau St, Soho. *Post Office London Directory for 1844*; Confectioners and Pastry Cooks: 682.

in which “people took their pleasures in great gulps and were addicted to excitement and spectacle” like riots and cruel animal sports (Golby, 1984, 65). It was a culture that the Victorian bourgeoisie, unlike their Regency cousins Tom and Jerry, increasingly feared and associated with a danger to the new embryonically hegemonic social order. The association of work with respectability and its converse, idleness and leisure with chaos, was linked “in a self-conscious cultivation of respectability on the part of those of all classes who wished to emphasise their social superiority” (Golby, 1984, 65).

The control of the London street and the subsequent rise of the eel pie shop must be seen in this light. According to Winter (2013: 4), “neither common law or statute bestowed the right to set up a stall or put down a basket on the public way... [and] vestries received explicit powers to remove barrows and stalls from street markets in the Regency period”. Subsequently, the 1839 Police Act gave the new Metropolitan force powers, open to the discretion of the officer, to confiscate goods, barrows or stalls if they impeded traffic on the pavement or road. What this meant in practice was that the sellers had to keep moving and not, apart from within the act of making a sale, put their baskets down. This process of ‘improving’ the city was not linear however and was conditional on compromises between local government, private interests and tradition (Nead, 2000:5). Indeed, further legislation in 1869, (formally, *The Metropolitan Streets Act, Amendment Act, 1867*) provoked an enormous backlash from the coster community who had by now formed what amounted to a union around their evolving identity and culture (Ellis, 1923: 284).¹³ At a time of an essential appeal to a ‘one nation Toryism’, Disraeli’s government subsequently manoeuvred to amend the act by exempting all costermongers (defining them as traditionally those that traded in foods including fish and fruit and goods manufactured at home that had been exempted from previous licensing), itinerants and hawkers (licensed traders who, crucially, had their own street cries).

The commercial opportunity of the ‘coming inside’ for those able to avail themselves of it would be considerable. It did however require capital and business acumen. If

¹³ For the *Metropolitan Streets Act, Amendment Act, 1867* - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/31-32/5/contents>.

we take Blanchard's as a starting point for what we know will be a successful empire and contrast it with Fletcher's (which will not) we can see immediately that their physical locations are different. We might conjecture whether at this stage his shop in a prime location like Fleet Street is his only premises, but he opens a new concern in a Union Street that already has five Coffee Rooms.¹⁴ In Lisson Grove near Fletcher's shop, we find only one Coffee Room but two Dining Rooms in close proximity.¹⁵ Modern retail parlance would call this 'clustering' - a geographic concentration of interconnected businesses whose aggregation is said to increase productivity.

Yet Blanchard's new shop is in a solidly working class district whilst Fletcher's location is more mixed. Southwark, historically outside the jurisdiction of the City of London, had been seen as an area of license, entertainment and criminality for hundreds of years. By the time Blanchard opens, it is a mix of artisans, warehouse workers servicing the river and the very poor with one of the worst slums in the capital, known as 'The Mint' (Yelling, 2007: 21). Blanchard's is also very close to a street market and this juncture of shopping, work and refreshment would become crucial in the shops' mid-century iteration, enticing as it did a clientele increasingly defined by speed, necessity and an emergent consumer culture.

We might deduce that eels and pie and the businesses that sell them are now more commonly associated with the working classes as a food of convenience housed in a shop that has all the hallmarks of bourgeois respectability.

Because of the inconsistencies of City Directories and their categorisation of eating establishments it's difficult to accurately pinpoint the number of these new ventures but it seems that from Blanchard's opening in 1844, there are almost twenty similar establishments by 1865 and they clearly mirror the decline in street sales.¹⁶ If

¹⁴ Census and listings in the Post Office journal reveal that the Blanchard family subsequently owned a string of eel and pie houses in South and central London.

See listings for Coffee Rooms in *Post Office London Directory for 1844: 1099-1100*.

¹⁵ Burcham, Robert, 5 Lisson grove north. *Post Office London Directory for 1844; Coffee Rooms; 1099*, Rutland, Chas, 4 Up. Lisson st. Lisson gro. *Post Office London Directory for 1844; Coffee Rooms: 1117 & Matthers, William, 41 Lisson gro. Post Office London Directory for 1844; Coffee Rooms: 1117*.

¹⁶ Confusingly, Kelly's Post Office Directories initially only carried the categories of 'Dining Rooms' to refer to places that people ate away from home, but by 1850 the category of 'Coffee Rooms' changes to include a subcategory 'and also Dining Rooms'. During this period, *Eel Pie Houses* remain unlisted

Blanchard and Fletcher were outliers, however, this change in eating patterns was exacerbated by increasing industrialisation. With the Great Exhibition of 1851, London especially would witness the birth of an age of commercial entertainment and consequentially “a significant trend towards the systematic commercialisation of the catering business” (Tames, 2003: 31).

Again, a lack of exact historical record means that it’s difficult to conclude what these enterprises might have looked like or how they operated but an account in Charles Manby Smith’s *Curiosities of London Life* (1857) describes one of these mid-century pie shops. They are found “...especially in the immediate neighbourhood of omnibus and cab stations, and very much in the thoroughfares and shortcuts most frequented by the middle and lower classes” (Smith, 1857: 203).

The appearance of propriety is essential:

...but though the window may be of plate-glass, behind which piles of the finest fruit, joints, and quarters of the best meat, a large dish of silver heels, and a portly china bowl charged with a liberal heap of minced-meat, with here and there are a few pies, lie temptingly arranged upon napkins of snowy whiteness, yet there is not a chair, stool, or seat of any kind to be found within. No dallying is looked for, nor would it probably be allowed.

Yet the shops are certainly gendered spaces and working women a likely draw:

The customer of the pie shop is a man (if he is not a boy) with whom the penny is a penny, and a pie is a pie...Look at him as he stands in the centre of the floor, Direct as grenadier, turning his busy mouthful upon the living tide that rushes along Holborn... The assistants are women ... three or four good looking lasses, the very incarnations of good temper and cleanly tidiness, who

as a category in their own right. The ‘restaurant’ is a class-loaded term in this period, and it is for this reason I believe that they deserve a taxonomic qualification of their own. My statistical research is based on counting individual entries, keyword listed by ‘eel and pie house’ in the business title although it is clear from cross referencing mentions in newspaper and magazine articles of the period, this is not necessarily accurate.

For similar establishments, see - London Metropolitan Archives; London, England; *London, England, City Directories, 1736-1943* [database on-line] Commercial Directory.

from morn to night was busy as bees in extricating the pies from their metallic moulds, as they are demanded by the customers... they are without exception plain and healthy looking ... (Smith, 1857: 204-205).

Indeed, these descriptions echo in some ways the modish role of barmaids in the city's new public houses and gin palaces that were taking over from traditional taverns. The pie shops of this era were, it appears, analogously gas-lit and mirrored. Peter Bailey (1997) suggests that these kind of illuminated spaces provided a theatrical atmosphere which eventually accommodated a flirtatious 'knowingness' especially with a counter that heightened the allure of the unobtainable. This emergent 'managed' early Victorian sexuality, whilst beyond the scope of this work, signals to a customer base that understood the illicit potency of the "maid-manservant relationship" (Bailey, 1997: 168).

The shops are however not yet recognisable as the contemporary or even later nineteenth century Eel and Pie shop. They have no seating; they are not spaces to linger, and food seems served not on a plate but by hand. They appear a synthesis of an eighteenth century enterprise with a location-specific modern customer base, where artisans and clerks might rub shoulders with cab drivers. The elites are nowhere to be seen nor perhaps at this stage are the amorphous London poor. These are likely petty bourgeois enterprises largely catering for their own interstitial class and the more prosperous of the working classes. George Dodd in his *Food of London* (1856: 520) concurs that "... pie shops are now numerous in London - not only in the humbler streets, but in the leading thoroughfares where a high rental must be paid." He continues that "the modern commercial system has been adopted to its fullest extent; yielding an almost infinitely small profit on each, and, therefore, a large scale and efficient management are requisite." It appears that at this stage the shops are still likely an echo of the earlier, more traditional pie shop but are increasingly bifurcated along lines of location and client base.

Burnett's (2004: 42) comment that at this point there were "also specialist hot eel, pie *and mash* [my italics] cookshops which were beginning to take over from the street traders" without primary evidence seems hopeful at best but the taxon of eating places to which I will subsequently turn is likely significant.

1.4 Food as cipher

Food, its type and, crucially, the *manner* of its consumption, would become increasingly relevant as a code for understanding how British (and specifically London) society was developing in this period. With an ascendant politically powerful middle class, the early century would see “an increasing convergence of outlook between the middle classes and the aristocracy” (Stedman Jones, 1974: 462). It was to France that these upper classes had historically looked to enhance their gastronomic culture. This was a departure from the traditional roast meats that had come to define the English upper class diet largely unchanged since the mediaeval period. The class adaption of such food was crucial to the emergent prototypes of the eel and pie shop and their genius would be to serve such basic food in familiar pairings (eels, pies and eventually potatoes) and in contemporary surroundings.

The historical pie was likely a way to cook meat without burning and some suggest that the pastry was only eaten by the poor after the master had consumed the innards.¹⁷ By the early Victorian period, however, it was clearly ubiquitous as a form of mobile meal, as was the potato, usually served baked from a street seller (useful to warm the hands on but, as Mayhew records, also in decline). The potato itself in this period accounted for a huge 212.7 kg per capita per annum and was an enormously cheap item on which to base a new commercial venture (Lummel, 2016). The eel, a historical staple, was still immensely popular. At this point they were brought to the Thames by Dutch merchants and in 1851 “an astonishing 9,797,760 eels were sold in Billingsgate market”. Mayhew (1851: 63) records them being sold hot in liquor, hawked on the streets by costers. This is likely the culinary pedigree of the contemporary dish of eels and liquor.

Spang (2001) claims that Paris was the birthplace of what we now know as the restaurant and the term, from the sixteenth century, initially referred to a restorative consommé. In 1765, a man named Boulanger was sued by the caterers’ guild after they claimed his shop, selling such ‘restaurants’, compromised their monopoly (the English guilds had lost their own control over the catering trade almost a century

¹⁷ This commonly held culinary belief is however disputed by - Clarkson, 2009.

earlier). This brought him notoriety and other enterprising Parisians soon opened their own similar establishments.

Spang (2001: 11) cites Roze de Chantoiseau, proprietor of the *Champ d'Oiseau*, as the first recognisably modern restaurateur in the 1770s. Conveniently he also published a business directory allowing him to promote his cooking in a way that appealed to the elites' preoccupation with health and the growing fashion for *cuisine*. Crucially Mennell (2003: 250) suggests that this process of elite dining out was also developing, by exchange in London. Indeed, inns and coffee houses had prefigured the role of the restaurant by at least a century or more and there had likely been free mixing in inns between intellectuals, merchants and landed gentry especially when winter sittings in parliament had necessitated 'eating out' away from country estates. When the Revolution began, "Paris already had a hundred restaurants" and in a bloodier echo of the breaking of the bonds between the English elites and the small masters, Paris had a surfeit of cooks previously employed by the now depleted aristocracy (Mariani, 1991: 25).

After 1789 the new Jacobin class echoed their earlier English cousins by using dining spaces as political and cultural arenas that eventually contributed to an aesthetic of wider public gastronomy. According to Jürgen Habermas ([1962] 1989), restaurants became, like music and art before them, part of a bourgeois discursive and linguistic sphere, a public arena open to all 'private', rational individuals to debate and discuss. Participation was based on literacy, opinion, subjectivity and experience, not by dint of social rank or hereditary status.

Mennell (2003: 247) echoes Habermas' ([1962] 1989) notion of the dissemination of elite culture to the 'reasoning' public by the figure of the gastronome, a cipher who by his writing, eventually democratized this notion of elite taste. Mennell further suggests that the gastronome's role as an arbiter of taste and fashion might be analogous to that of the flamboyant Regency dandy whose challenge to convention signifies a moment of social flux in which it may be possible to cross "social grades" (Mennell 2003: 251-252).

By 1825, Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin in his *Physiologie Du Goût* recorded that all of Europe has imitated Paris and "...you may see here and there, some foreigners, especially the English, who stuff themselves with double portions of meat... (1970: 231). Crucially, for the French bourgeoisie and their English class-cousins, the emergent institution of the restaurant represented a distinctive and unique Parisian cultural landmark in similar ways that their earlier incarnations had for the elites on their Grand Tour. As the century progressed Spang (2001: 86) suggests, that the restaurant began to represent "... the translation of an eighteenth century cult of sensibility into a nineteenth-century sense of taste: the mutation of one era's social value into another's cultural flourish."

By the mid-century, London's population expansion is mirrored by a large increase in places outside of the home that they can eat. Assael (2018: 17-18) quotes the problematic listings in *Kelly's Directory* to show that in 1840 there were 106 restaurants in London. This rises to 570 in 1870 and then to 1147 in 1890. A good deal of this growth is contiguous to areas of commerce, transport and community activity.

Whilst middle class dining remained a leisure performance translated from elite circles and contained the opportunity to redefine societal manners in their own image, much expands into the daily arena of work. Now, "the heterogeneities in nature of London's public eating" was synchronous with the demands of the working day (Assael, 2018: 15). London cooks no longer represent the prestige of their previous aristocratic masters but serve food to a wider, although class-segregated, eating *public*. Towards the 1870s as trade grew in both rapidity and volume, food became cheaper and there was a rise in both disposable income and immigrant labour to service the sector. The London restaurant eventually becomes a foci for notions of the modern: for advances in technology, hygiene, manners and the creation of an identity of certain types of Londoners defined through their class and thus gustatory cultures.

For the urban poor, much food is still taken outside but some cook shops, analogous perhaps in some limited ways to later working class *caffs* started to provide limited seating for their customers to eat adjacent to the shop (Assael, 2018: 41). By the

latter half of the century, the expansion of cheap working class restaurants signify a democratisation of eating in the public sphere and the extension of urban social interactions. Eating as theatre was now not solely confined to the bourgeoisie and Assael (2018: 97) cites James McKenzie who relates of his childhood in the 1870s a local eel shop with “‘lady servers, standing behind a counter [who] wore cleanwhite [sic] aprons’ serving stewed eels from steaming containers. whose outside stall attracted crowds watching the eels being killed.” Later in the century, with the rise of the consumer society, the customer could increasingly choose to identify with types of food that expressed their own tastes and those of their contemporaries. The eel and pie shops would become hyperlocal emblems of a distinctive and emergent working class culture no longer based solely around work but synchronous with entertainment and the opportunity not only to demonstrate but also to *perform* respectability.

1.5 Hunger and the ‘Great Unwashed’¹⁸

During the first half of the century the diet of the poor people in the towns was bad. The greater part of their nourishment came from bread, potatoes and strong tea (Drummond and Wilbraham, 1991: 329).

If the period between Waterloo and the First Reform Bill had been exultant for the wealthy, it was much less so for the poorer residents of London. As Himmelfarb (1985: 356) remarks, the shock of their discovery by Mayhew and his urban explorers “was actually a shock of recognition.” They could be ignored for long periods, demonised even (as they certainly were), but as Tom Nairn (1964) suggests, the issue and problem of the working classes was inextricably linked to that of the English bourgeoisie because they developed in a synchronous dance.

Industrialisation and the machine age had meant a different development of the labouring classes in London. Unlike the mill towns of the north, many workers in the capital retained a limited stake in how production occurred and were not just the

¹⁸ Usually attributed to Edmund Burke, the first published use was by Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1830. See - Bulwer-Lytton, 1833: 49.

unthinking automatons conjured by the word 'proletarian'. Although these men likely supported the "ideology of economic independence and sturdy individualism" (Thompson [1963] 2013: 710), delineations in earnings were large between a labour elite like compositors and tailors, relatively unaffected by recent industrialisation, and the those like the silk-workers of Spitalfields, part of the urban casualty-mass of the same process. These divisions were to some limited extent closed within the early decades of the century by the erosion of artisanal independence in the workplace yet, market precarity meant that even skilled workers might be subject to periods of "prosperity and poverty" Burnett (1979: 52). However, it was sharp and unexpected food-price spikes that were most disastrous.

In the early part of the century, especially after 1815 and the introduction of the Corn Laws, bread prices especially were subject to regular and acute price fluctuations. These 'laws' or, more accurately, tariff restrictions, were initially introduced in 1804 to impose a duty on imported grain to protect the interests of British agriculture, a sector dominated by the landed aristocracy. Solidified in the Importation Act of 1815, the Liverpool government sought to exclude foreign-grown corn until the domestic price of home-grown corn exceeded 80 shillings per quarter. This led to rioting almost immediately and the following year climatic change (likely prompted by the eruption of Mount Tombora) exacerbated shortages causing famine across Europe. Disturbances around food prices and (the lack of) democratic change ushered in an era of draconian state repression. As Perry Anderson (1964: 31) suggests, the new English manufacturing class "

rallied to the aristocracy... [The whole era of] wars against the French abroad and repression against the working class at home marked the years of its maturation. Two decades after the fall of Bastille, it celebrated its entry into history by cutting down working class demonstrators at Peterloo.

Although there is debate about exactly how the economic situation affected working class nutrition patterns, what seems clear is that workers' wages (and thus purchasing power in relation to food) stagnated simultaneously with a rapid expansion of per-capita gross domestic product during a period of technological upheaval (Allen, 2009).

The ability to purchase food to consume was one (very significant) thing but where to consume it was quite another. In a Britain where one-fifth of the population was now living in urban areas there was a unique necessity for the provision of food and drink to be available close to work and home. This fragmentation of the social fabric in terms of location and activity, in addition to the cost and ability to acquire fuel, required working people to seek sustenance in new ways. The lack of storage, refrigeration or indeed general space at home was exacerbated by temporal changes to work, especially shift patterns and early starts. This meant that most working class men relied on transient coffee and food stalls in the street for sustenance. In parallel, traditionally gendered rural skills such as around cooking, baking and brewing declined. This had much to do with women that had entered the workforce either in factories or domestic service having less time to practice them and the changing (and smaller) urban living spaces (Burnett, 1979: 4).

In urban areas, eating outside had largely been the prerogative of those who begged. Workers had to shop outside too and did so largely from tiny stalls that sold small amounts of staples very cheaply and often on credit. Working patterns also meant that much of the shopping was done on a Saturday night and especially at the very late close of business when perishable items would be discounted for a quick sale. The markets would be,

Hives of activity, noise and bedlam. The stalls would be lit with naphtha flame lamps... It was... midnight before the noise ceased and then the Council workmen stepped in to clear away the debris" (Southgate and Philpot, 1982: 83-84)

Food that was bought had to be cheap, tasty and easy to cook. In tea and white bread, there was an ironic inversion and likely social imitation of the food of the previous century's elites. In comparison to seasonal, rural eating scarcely a generation previously, the urban poor's diet was monotonous, relatively expensive and contained much less nutritional value. Urban bread was now almost entirely cosmetically white, the result of 'high milling' that removed nearly all of the bran. It was taken with tea that gave crucial warmth, converting a meagre meal into the

appearance of a hot dinner. Thomas Wright was a worker who 'tramped' (one of many thousands who had no option but to seek seasonal employment) and he records the necessity of purchasing breakfast at street stalls usually on the edges of town centres:

The gleam from the hot coffee stall comes like a guiding star ... here you get warmth to your hands on the outside of the cup, and for the inner man from the liquid, which you get piping hot... (Wright, 1868 in Burnett, 2016: 33)

George Sala (1859: 13) describes one such common rickety stall in Covent Garden Market as "something between a gypsy's tent and a watchman's box."

Urban food was about cost, speed and palatability. Mayhew (1851: 174) likely has it correct when he states that "men whose lives are alternations of starvation and surfeit love some easily swallowed and comfortable food better than most approved substantiality of the dinner table." At regular intervals throughout the century and coinciding with price fluctuations or bad harvests, soup kitchens became a feature of London life and well-to-do women ventured like explorers into the jungle of slums to dispense lectures on the benefits of cheap and nutritious food - failing of course to answer issues around fuel-poverty or sheer exhaustion.¹⁹ Burnett (2014: 29) suggests that soup became for the working class a symbol of pauperism, reawakening terrible memories of the workhouse.

Food price instability and ultimately famine meant that the 1840s were characterised by great hunger. It is in this period that the street pie men would see their livelihoods diminished where an opportunity arose to provide indoor meals based on cheap palatable and common ingredients. Concomitantly, it was also a period where the legend of Sweeney Todd (the 'demon barber' of Fleet Street whose customers ended their days as pie fillings) would be established.

¹⁹ See for example - 'Soup Kitchen in Leicester Square', *The Poor Man's Guardian*, 6, 11 December 1847.

By the late 1830s, because of falling incomes, potatoes were increasingly replacing wheat in working class diets and there are reports in the *Times* of farmers shooting people caught stealing them (Gurney, 2009). As well as becoming a key ingredient for what would later become the eel, pie and mash shops, the potato had its own symbolism in the debate around hunger and its articulation in the so-called 'Hungry Forties.'²⁰ Thompson (2013: 348) notes that around this time potatoes were seen as the food of the 'primitive' Irish peasantry ("Erin's root-fed hordes") contrasted with the food (wheat for bread) of the free-born Englishman contributing to a gastro-nationalistic moral panic.

In Victorian literature, hunger is portrayed both as a pervasive threat to order but also has a moral dimension. In the cultural texts of the period there was a "nervous interest in what, and how much, paupers ate" (Berry 1999: 48) but simultaneously a trope of self-control. In Christina Rossetti's *The Goblin Market*, Lizzie's refusal to eat the goblin's fruit is a spiritual act of denial concomitant with the period's valorisation of idealised womanhood. In contrast, John, a representative of the male working class in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* ([1848] 2018: 125) is dehumanised by starvation, reduced to a pre-civilized state, with "hunger in his shrunk, fierce, animal look". The breakdown of the family unit is shown through the impoverished, typhus-stricken Davenport's 'selfishness [which] he has never shown in health" when he "snatche[s]... with animal instinct" the jug of tea intended for his wife (Scholl, 2017: footnote 26). Dickens' Magwitch in *Great Expectations* will be forever grateful to Pip for feeding him at the opening of the tale and will become his invisible benefactor.

However, food representation changes in Victorian narrative by the 1860s when "taste begins to supersede hunger" (Scholl, 2016: 5). The eel pie shops, likely serving the petit bourgeois and respectable working classes in a simulacra of the emergent bourgeois restaurant, sit between these two poles.

²⁰ 'The Hungry Forties'. This term, it is now acknowledged, was a retrospective invention coined in the 1920s by free trade supporters as criticised in Chaloner, 1967.

1.6 Eating out and translatable spaces

As least as far back as the fifteenth century, England had a network of inns that meant travellers no longer had to rely on the hospitality of monasteries. “However, it would seem that availing oneself of a meal provided commercially was restricted to people journeying until sometime at the end of the eighteenth century (Warde and Martens, 2000: 22).” Prefiguring the bourgeois developments of the restaurant, cuisine and an associated societal change in Paris, Felicity Heal (1990) concludes, rather depressingly, that the early modern Englishman never appeared terribly hospitable to strangers. According to her, hospitality by the elites became performative and a way of estimating the recipient’s moral worth against a backdrop of an emergent market economy and the beginnings of state charity for the needy. Importantly for emergent patterns of dining, especially amongst the growing working classes, the growth of urban London changed prevailing notions of hospitality by foregrounding personal preferences and individualism against a more traditional rurality of social duties. Hospitality was increasingly frustrated and delineated by social rank and became focussed on rites of passage and communal festivities. Both of these would decline in nineteenth century London as part of the ‘civilising’ of the street and the allied pacifying of the mob (Golby and Purdue, 1984).

By the turn of the nineteenth century, the necessity of providing food services for those away from home resulted in “what might be called professional as opposed to amateur building. Prior to that... most buildings were ... adaptable for a variety of purposes” (Olsen, 1974: 269). We can see this in the building of new public houses that reflected the need for privacy and segregated drinking areas for different patrons. As so many of the contemporary eating places were inadequate to their new, expanded role (and fashions that dictated that middle class meals at home became increasingly ritualised) the public landscape within which the eel and pie shops would emerge started to change (Drummond and Wilbraham, 1991: 335). Coffee houses of this period had altered little from their heyday in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when their associated function was of facilitating debate amongst customers. Their wooden compartments were open to the centre of the room but, with the increasing concerns of Victorian propriety, many added upstairs spaces for women and families.

Astonishingly, by 1820 there were some 3,000 restaurants in Paris (Zeldin, 1977, 2: 739). Transplanted to London for the upper classes, these spaces were translated and revelatory. The Grand Divan Restaurant on the Strand in 1848 still nodded to the coffee house in booths on either side of the room but also utilised long mirrors set in gilt frames. In place of pewter, there were electro-plated tankards, clean linen and napkins (King, 1980: 237). From a dark London of the early century, “the new restaurant did good in other directions. It let in the daylight into London life generally (Scott, 1900: 12).” It is this cheerful and bright aspect the eel pie shops would inevitably copy.

Such spaces were well publicised in the press as *a la mode* and aspirational. We may certainly conjecture that an early taxon of the eel and pie shop would have been aware of these developments. However, for most of London’s population, public eating spaces in this period left a great deal to be desired:

On working days the artisans and lower middle classes often ate their midday meal at a Tavern or a cheap eating house where an ordinary of hot meat, vegetables, bread, cheese and beer costs from 6d to 1s. Some of these places were none too attractive (Drummond and Wilbraham, 1991: 333).

‘Himself’, the anonymous author of *Memoirs of a Stomach* (1853) records that:

I have dined at eating-houses, the effluvia of which, steaming up through the iron gratings made me qualmish before eating, and ill all the day after ... I have groped my way down hypocausts in Fleet Street, and dined in cavern-like taverns, wishing myself a thousand miles away the moment the eternal joint was uncovered (Drummond and Wilbraham, 1991: 333).

These are also highly gendered spaces. In Dickens’s *Dombey and Son*, women like Miss Tox have to seek refuge ‘in a musty little back room usually devoted to the consumption of soups and pervaded by an ox-tail atmosphere’ (Dickens, 1848 in King, 1980: 235).

In early Victorian London, certainly by 1830, we see a “hierarchy of eating-places, catering for a range of needs and incomes - from humble cook-shops and ‘ordinaries’ to better class inns, chop-houses and dining rooms up to a few renown taverns and hotels” (Lummel, 2016: 9). The emergence and fading of these numerous types of eating places are synchronous with the early eel and pie houses and in nearly all, some later element is partially visible.

The conduit between the working class food of the street, the beginnings of mass catering, the restaurant and crucially the owners of the embryonic eel pie shops is most clearly seen with the pastry cooks and their cookshops. These cookshops supplied a variety of cooked dishes to the lower middle classes and, according to Dickens, were often grim:

Mr Grazinglands looked in at a pastry cooks window, hesitating as to the expediency of lunching at that establishment. He beheld nothing to eat but butter in various forms, slightly charged with jam, and languidly frizzling over tepid water. Two ancient turtle shells on which were inscribed with the legend ‘soups’ decorated a glass partition within, enclosing a stuffy alcove from which a ghastly mockery of a marriage breakfast spread on a rickety table, warned the terrified traveller (Dickens, 1877: 27).

The poor frequented their own versions of cookshops or bakeshops which sold more or less similar fare but also had communal ovens where people without facilities could take food to be cooked. These date back to the seventeenth century and as well as housewives bringing meat in a pot to be cooked, street vendors would also have their food cooked here.²¹ Dickens, in *Little Dorritt* mentions such a place:

... a dirty shop window in a dirty street, which was made almost opaque by the steam of hot meats, vegetables, and puddings... within, were a few wooden partitions, behind which set such customers as found it more convenient to take away their dinners in stomachs than in their hands (Dickens [1857] 1967: 283).

²¹ For working class cookshops, see - Flanders, 2014: 291 (footnote).

Cookhouses, notorious for skimming slices of customers' meat for themselves, inevitably declined later in the century as more homes were built with rudimentary kitchens of their own.

When visited by Egan's Tom and Jerry, coffee-shops for the lower orders, seemed to be places of "drunkenness, beggary, lewdness and carelessness" but a few offered newspapers and a pause in the city *en-route* to work (Egan, [1821] 2019: 165).

Judith Flanders (2014: 294) relates how:

The coffeehouses clearly filled need: from only a few dozen catering to artisans in 1815, they had increased in number by 1840 to nearly 2000; There a full breakfast could be purchased for 3d. A coffee house in one working class district served up to 900 customers a day, who had a choice of three rooms: the cheapest was open from 4:00 am to 10:00 pm, where customers could enjoy breakfast of coffee, bread and butter for 1 1/2d day; the second grade room offered coffee, a penny loaf and a penny worth of butter for 3d; or, in the most expensive room, customers could order a dinner where the coffee shop supplied the bread and the coffee, but the diner brought his own cooked meat.

Soup houses were even less charming offering basic soup, bread and the inevitable potato for 2d or 3d. Chop houses were a cut above all of these, although they varied considerably in quality of food and surroundings chiefly because the waiters were not paid but expected to live off tips and paid for the tablecloths to be laundered themselves. So-called 'slap-bangs', named for the onomatopoeic slamming down at speed of the dishes, were a cheap and not-so-cheerful cousin of the more salubrious chop houses that fed better-off clerks and City gents alike.²²

Further taxons of the eel and pie houses could be found in less likely places. By the 1830s, traditional public houses were also under threat from modernity by the rise of the new Gin Palaces. From the mid-eighteenth century, gin had become

²² For a description of Guppy's meal in a slap-bang see - Dickens, [1853] 2008: 276.

progressively more expensive due in no small part to the 1751 Gin Act and pubs had developed from taverns that were essentially a front room of a house onto a more professional footing. Now, however, plate glass windows and gas-lighting meant that customers flocked to these fashionable, bright and decorous new wonders that served only gin. As Dickens ([1836] 1995: 217-218) significantly remarks, “the more splendid do these places become, the poorer the area.” Indeed, gas light could be such a modern and dizzying spectacle that *The Times* reported in January 1837 on a confused drunken man demanding gin from a baker’s shop (Jackson, 2019: 7).

By 1861, *The Sporting Life* gives us a rare and brief glimpse of what we may expect to find in a mid-century eel and pie shop when it mentions “splendid shops, dazzling with gas, and glass, and Women’s charms”.²³ The shops appear as a modern ‘spectacle’ synchronous with a nascent consumer commodity culture framed by the earlier Great Exhibition of 1851 (Richards, 1990).

One may conjecture that location, price and not a little business acumen was required to make these new prototype spaces profitable. The number of advertisements *selling* these new businesses are clearly noteworthy. One such, from 1848 is typical and from its mention of a coffee house may indicate a joint venture.

To be let, near Finsbury square, a HOUSE and SHOP, well adapted to any business - now in the pie trade - low rent, and partly made by lodgers - coming-in moderate. For particulars, apply at the Globe Coffee house, Caroline-place, City road (*Morning Advertiser*, 15 June 1848).

Further variants of the trade can be seen here:

Worthy of Notice - To be let - an old established eel pie house with immense Ginger beer trade, with fountain, cylinder, and receipts complete, in a crowded thoroughfare, near the Borough rent low; coming-in moderate. Apply at the eel-pie house, 49 White-street near St George’s Church, Borough (*Morning Advertiser*, 23 May, 1848).

²³ The Betting Interest, Its origin, *The Sporting Life*, 30 May, 1861: 1.

From the mention of ginger beer, we may assume a further (and unexpected) menu item from very limited source material.

In 1849 a mini *cause-célèbre* was reported in several newspapers of a romantic, failed suicide attempt by a young man who was (allegedly) prevented from jumping to his death from Blackfriars Bridge. He carried a letter to his new bride apologising for their poverty after he had “set up an eel-pie house, which had proved a disastrous speculation, for he had lost upwards of 40/-...” (*Daily News*, 16 January, 1849) An article a week later clarifies the situation that the man in question:

... prevailed upon a female servant to lend him 20/-. With which he took an eel-pie house in Barbican, and instead of being turned out by the landlord as he had stated, he absconded after selling some of the materials, and with the remaining portion of money got married, and lastly excited the sympathy of the public in his behalf by what the writer considered a sham attempt at suicide” (*Daily News*, 30 January, 1849).

1.7 Defeat and the culture of consolation

The potato blight of the ‘Hungry ‘Forties’ brought untold suffering but “[t]he fungus (*Phytophthora infestans*), however, did what 20 years of bitter agitation had failed to do; it brought about the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846” (Drummond and Wilbraham, 1991: 283). With this legislation dead, mid-century London expanded to an extraordinary 2.4 million people (Green, 1982: 129).

The following decade saw the start of a period where food generally became cheaper and, after years of economic and political turmoil, dining for the middle classes increasingly became to be seen as culturally significant within an arena of pleasure and amusement in an expanding ‘leisure’ economy (Rich, 2011: 2). For the London poor, a term that now included a vast army of casual labour and those whose occupations left them at the mercy of economic and seasonal fluctuations, charitable feeding and soup kitchens remained a constant presence. These parallels however were mirrored by an increasing ‘hollowing out’ of the capital as the middle

classes, increasingly drawn to an 'improving' Evangelicalism (Holladay, 1982), settled in the suburbs away from the 'corrupt' commercial centre.

Historically, the artisans, small masters, their workers and apprentices had lived in close proximity to their workshops. This community, full of rituals, drinking, gambling and sport was lost by the middle class flight and cut adrift from the proletarian poor that had moved into the city centres. The artisans, who could trace their lineage to the remnants of the guilds, had been generally hostile to mass industrialisation. Steeped in an eighteenth-century Radicalism, their language spoke to encroachments on the Civil War settlement of the 'free born Englishman' and they looked to the writings of Thomas Paine and republicanism. The traders and small masters were more influenced by the classic liberalism of John Stuart Mill who championed their own beliefs of self-reliance, free trade and individualism.

Nonetheless, the legacy of the 1832 Reform Bill marked a consolidation within the middle classes who strove increasingly to emulate the aristocratic elites. By the time of the final defeat of the 1848 Charter, London had become intensely stratified, and by the 1870s the middle classes were "generally voting Conservative" (Stedman Jones, 1974: 465). The working class, having no ideological vehicle of its own on which to carry its emancipation forward, fell into political despondency, largely abandoned and increasingly demonised by the bourgeoisie.²⁴ In turn, the class would divide as Engels, writing to Marx in the late 1850s explained. He saw a growing conservatism in some sectors of the working class and referred to it as a 'Labour Aristocracy'.²⁵ This notion, although contestable, regards these mostly skilled workers as becoming 'bourgeoisified' (Gray, 1981).

This working class introspection would not end until an upsurge in trade union activity in the 1880s, but by then the cultural framework into which proletarian culture developed had been largely set. The partial granting of suffrage by the Conservatives in 1867 served only to prove how limited the earlier radical threat had become and how unassailable the architecture of capitalism. In this context the

²⁴ Marx would not write the Communist Manifesto until 1848.

²⁵ See Marx's response to Engels on 9 April 1863 where he reflects on an "apparent Bourgeois infection of English workers" - Marx and Engels, 1965: 140.

working classes, through trades unions and co-operatives societies, increasingly sought an accommodation within class structures that would guarantee at least some stability and dignity.

During the last thirty years of the century the London working classes, as Stedman Jones (1974) suggests, appear to have turned more and more towards the consolations of pleasure and distraction found within family, sport, seaside outings and the music hall. In this it appears that they were at least outwardly receptive to an overwhelming new cultural hegemonic message from the middle classes. This was of thrift, hard work and a delineation between the 'good' and the 'idle' poor: one that equated cleanliness as a code for moral probity. This concomitant obsession with aspiration, materiality and consumption, drove an expansion of dining culture with its associated manners around public and private spaces. Here was a coetaneous "culture of governance and pacification by spectacle" (Harvey, 2004: 223) that now included both cheap cafes and expensive restaurants that signal directly to the growth of the eel and pie shops.

Although we might profitably conjecture that sections of the London working class were guided by some form of memory of *pre*-industrial solidarities and convivialities, much of the emergent proletarian culture from the 1880s onwards was formed within the interstices of now entirely working class neighbourhoods that had known little but urban living. As McLeod's (1974 in Savage and Miles, 1994: 64) work evidences, working class married couples came overwhelmingly from the same geographic areas and this hyper-locality of micro-class formation became crucial to the types of culture that proliferated. Despite the fact that the London working classes were constantly surveilled by the bourgeoisie, the culture that grew within these communities was largely opaque and defensive in nature signalling to its own uniqueness.

1.8 Cat's meat and glue for the gravy

From the thirteenth century onwards the Guilds and the Assize system oversaw much of bread and ale production and their prices. By the end of the eighteenth century however, regulations became more lax and rapid urbanisation, poor

sanitation and extended food chains meant that food quality and the incidence of deliberate adulteration became endemic. The level of contamination was made public as early as 1820 when Frederick Accum published a *Treatise on Adulterations of Food and Culinary Poisons*. By 1830 an anonymous publication called *Deadly Adulteration and Slow Poisoning Unmasked* made it clear that almost all commercially available food was corrupted in some form. A rising hegemonic belief in the free hand of the market, competition as well as periodic inflation, food shortages and remote, “highly capitalised and mechanised producers” meant that not only was the country’s food not safe, it was also not trusted (Burnett, 1979: 110, 113). Victorian literature is full of social horror at suspected (and sometimes real) poisoning at the hands of servants (Horn, 1990). It was this as well as potentially substantial losses to the treasury on heavily taxed comestibles (often the most adulterated) that led in the 1850s to Dr Thomas Wakely, the editor of the *Lancet*, commissioning Dr Arthur Hassal to write a report of his investigations into the scandal of contaminated food. These became known as the *Lancet’s* ‘Sanitary Commission’. There followed a Parliamentary enquiry itself followed by a Select Committee which led to the Adulteration of Foods Act in 1860 with much media interest. Successive legislation continued throughout the century (although the issue wasn’t resolved until comprehensive inspection regimes in the 1930s). Just as the early pie-man was slandered by notions of adulteration, the stigma was still referred to by Manby Smith about the new eel pie houses:²⁶ He retells a humorous story of a widowed pie-maker who refuses the matrimonial advances of a new upstart who has taken all her trade and who is saved by a friend arriving at the competitor with a “huge brace of dead cats” and announces that he’s arrived with the regular order...” (Manby, 1857: 208-209).

The 1850s to the mid 1870s, commonly referred to as the *Golden Age* of Victorian society saw the economy grow and ‘generally’ wages increased ahead of prices. There is a marked increase in consumption across all classes and this period prefigures a point where “... there was a dramatic growth in the number of public eating establishments in the second-half of the century” (Assael, 2018: 17-18). More “... the records of inspection and regulation illustrate the specific ways in which the

²⁶ See - Dickens, [1836] 2020: 292. The pie-man relates that in Summer, “fruits is in, cats is out.”

restaurant related to the issue of public health and testify to the increasing significance of public eating within the shaping and ordering of the later Victorian and Edwardian urban environment” (Assael, 2018: 130).

Restaurants had started to advertise themselves as ‘well ventilated’ and ‘hygienic’ literally building themselves into the narrative of the city, along with physical roads and pavements that were increasingly inspected and regulated. By 1874 *Kelly’s* lists thirty-three eel and pie houses and, although contemporary reportage is patchy, we can assume that they were at some level a deliberate replication of successful and fashionable bourgeois restaurants (Hawkins and Garlick, 2002). By this period then we might conjecture that the mid-century pie shop has likely morphed into a largely working class space that probably served pies of eel, and (probably) meat, stewed eels (likely in a liquor) and soup. The fare is almost certainly an aggregate of the offerings of an earlier pie shop with proletarian street food served in a space that resembles a cookshop or coffee house with bench and (possibly) booth seating. The pie-shop or house (not the bourgeois, restaurant) appeals largely to the employed, skilled or semi-skilled working class and possibly (largely depending on location), self-employed petty-bourgeois tradesman. It is situated within, or in close proximity to, a street market and is common in these areas with some operating until very late at night.²⁷ They were certainly popular, affordable and prolific as an article in 1869 explains, “There is a wonderful outbreak of pie shops... we know of a locality that boasts three such emporiums in succession” (“How we dine”. *London City Press*, 13 November, 1869: 13). The pie shops are, or try to be, respectable as several newspaper advertisements of the period record vacancies for: “*Respectable* [my italics] able boy... to make himself generally useful in Eel and Pie House” (*Kentish Mercury*, 2 August, 1895).

One of the best reportage that we have of shops of that era, however, does explicitly confirm that disreputable adulteration was continuing. As Olive Malvery, an extraordinary Anglo-Indian reporter recalls when undercover in an eel pie house, she is instructed to go to “...the oil shop to get sixpen’orth o’ glue” which will go in the

²⁷ “Report of two drunk and disorderly men”. *Lloyds Weekly Newspaper* 25 September 1898: 1. The article relates how “*Shortly after midnight*, the prisoners went into an eel and pie shop in East Street, Walworth.

gravy as the customers, “like it thick” (Malvery, 1908: 83). Malvery doesn’t reveal the identity of this shop but in this period, analogous to the emergent chains like J. Lyons and Spiers and Pond’s, we see the establishment of what might be called the triumvirate of the eel pie business that would dominate until the late twentieth century, each speaking of consistency and reliability.

In 1889 Robert Cooke, an East Ender with Irish roots and a background as a butcher, fishmonger and a publican, opened an eel and pie shop in Watney Street Market and, shortly after, his wife, opened another in Hoxton Street (adjacent to the market).²⁸ On his death, his widow, Martha would also own a coffee house at 169 Hoxton Street, illustrating well the complimentary and commutable relationship between different early taxonic working class eating establishments.²⁹ A decade before, a penniless Italian peasant, Michaele Mansi, had arrived from Ravello and married Cooke’s daughter Ada. The Cooke family gifted an eel and pie shop to them in Tower Bridge Road (that remains open to this day). From this Mansi built an empire of such establishments, in his own name, making himself and his family fabulously wealthy.³⁰ In 1915 another Irish immigrant Samuel Kelly opened an eel pie shop in Bethnal Green and by the outbreak of the Second World War had four of his own shops and a live eel business.

1.9 Modernity, space and identity

Adulteration had been so widespread that it’s little surprise that eel and pie houses, now splendidly dressed in their ‘gas and glass’, would appeal to a working class clientele by producing what was essentially honest, homely food. By the late

²⁸ The Cooke’s claim that it was their family that paired pies, mashed potato and parsley liquor in a shop in Sclater Street in 1862 although no record of this shop exists in either tax records or the Land Registry. There is evidence however from the 1871 census that Robert Cooke was resident at 104 Sclater Street with his wife and two daughters and was a fishmonger.

²⁹ Martha Cooke is listed in the 1901 Census at 169 Hoxton Street in the Borough of Shoreditch as an employer, working from home originally as a ‘Refreshment Housekeeper’. This is crossed out and written over with “Coffee Ho.” See - TNA PRO 1901 RG 13/274: 26. However by 1905 she is listed in the Post Office Directory as the owner of an Eel Pie House at the same address. See - *Post Office London Directory for 1905*, Commercial Directory, *Post Office London Directory for 1905*: 1051. An image of Olive Christian Malvery working in a ‘cheap coffee house’ shows an interior that would be instantly recognisable to a contemporary eel pie and mash shop. See - Malvery, 1908.

See - Appendix, fig. 2.

³⁰ The family would change their name to a less sounding foreign *Manze* during the First World War.

nineteenth century, the shops have about them an air of respectability and a cleanliness. Perhaps the best description of a late Victorian eel pie shop is this by the writer and *bon vivant* George Sims:

The dressing of an eel-pie shop window is conservative. It is a tradition handed down through many generations to the present day. The eels are shown artistically on a bed of parsley which is spread over a dish... To see the eel pie business at its best, to appreciate its poetry, you must watch the process of serving to its customers. Behind the counter on a busy night stands the proprietor in his shirt sleeves, a clean white apron preserving his waistcoat and nether garments from damage. Observe with what nimble deftness he lifts the lid of the metal receptacle in front of him, whips out a hot pie runs a knife round it inside the dish, and turns it out onto a piece of paper for the customer - possibly into the eager outstretched hand. He is generally assisted by his wife and daughter, who are almost, but not yet equally, dextrous. There are metal receptacles in front of them also, and the pies are whipped out in such rapid succession that your eyes become dazzled by the quick continuous movement. If you watch long enough it will almost appear that a shower of hot pies is being flung up from below by an invisible agency. (Sims, 1903, 3: 51)

Although Sims' description is likely from the 1890s and still speaks of pies as being eaten by hand, it also speaks of cleanliness and speed. Ultimately, it also speaks of a working class modernity, an arena engaged in commerce and debate. More, as Harvey (2003: 232) has outlined, such enterprises enabled spatial dialectics around which specifically community values and identities could be built. The London working classes, zoned into clearly defined areas, have used (and continue to use) the historic eel pie houses as gathering points in which to performatively celebrate their identity, partly unique and partly a distillation of bourgeois notions by osmosis.

Historically for many working class people we might imagine, the novelty of the eel and pie shop was seen as offering the possibility of experiencing in reality some of the idealised pleasure already consumed in imagination from the restaurants of the wealthy. Consumption of the food was by the late century not only the solution to

hunger but also about the excitement and crucially the *anticipation* of that purchase. It expressed the consumers' uniqueness - ('autonomous imaginative hedonism' (Campbell, 1987: 77) but also identified a relationship to 'acceptable' class tropes (Johnson, 1988: 27-42).

Indeed, as George Dodd reported of the mid-century pie shops, "At some of these commercial dining rooms... [that are] in themselves a characteristic of the middle class respectability of our times..." (Dodd, 1856: 507). Although this 'respectability' is crucial as it gave a moral and cultural framework to consumption and an indication of how to act 'appropriately', it requires some clarification within the context of a late nineteenth century London working class.

Delineations within that class were significant. The capital's artisanal elite had always divided itself from other workers and this appeared to mirror the hierarchy of micro-class divisions that "extended down to the very lowest stratum of the London poor" (Stedman Jones, [1971] 2014: 338). In that sense, the notion of Victorian working class respectability likely had a distinct, class-located sense. This was probably a contingent, situation-specific compromise and often performative rather than one "'emulative' of bourgeois patterns" (Bailey, 1979: 347). In that way, there could be a 'duality' of respectability as evidenced by performers within the music hall whose satire could undermine bourgeois pretensions (Walkowitz, 1992) or by negotiations around the strictures of Victorian temperance (Harrison in Bailey, 1979: 336).

Although the last two decades of the nineteenth century saw an economic decline, there was a rise in working class spending especially in the arena of entertainment and leisure (Bakker, 2011). The eel and pie shops would become, as I expand in a subsequent chapter, arenas of these class and site-specific 'respectabilities' and, like the music hall and Association Football, sub-cultural touchstones of a new working class life. Indeed, the shops would become as much a part of cultural production as any Marie Lloyd song or coster slang. In essence, although they held within them a refusal to completely acquiesce to bourgeois values and (overt) control, they were as much about conciliatory comfort and offered "...an assertion of personal dignity in the face of adverse circumstances" (Goby and Purdue 1984: 185).

By the turn of the twentieth century the shops had turned culturally inwards creating around themselves a protective cocoon of performative self-mythology and a political conservatism wrapped in a gastro-nationalism. They were, in the strictest sense, subaltern counter-publics (Fraser, 1990) without any of the implicit radicalism. Frozen in development from perhaps the 1920s, they have survived in a semi-fossilised state, spatialised to (often former) market-adjacent sites, hyper-local, unnoticed and untroubled within plain sight, becoming only visible to a twenty-first century London when their customer demographic and racial constituency was challenged by globalisation and gentrification.

Conclusion

Following Norbert Elias' warning that "nothing is more fruitless, when dealing with long-term social processes, than to attempt to locate an absolute beginning" (Elias, 1983: 232), I have sought to demonstrate that the origins of the eel and pie shops lie not in the entrepreneurial figure of any one family dynasty but much earlier in the changing class relationships between a largely corrupt state of Thompson's ([1980] 1991: 27) patrician 'banditti' and the artisans that served them.

Economic rationalisation along with the elements of an embryonic bourgeois state (aided by amongst other factors, an emergent press with its adjuvant literate readership) meant that the humble pastry cook now served a different clientele and in doing so would propagate a taxon of working class eateries respondent to the temporal disruptions of capitalism, one of which through class descent, would eventually birth the contemporary eel, pie and mash shop.

The shops themselves, clearly an earlier inception than previously recorded as my research evidences, would be partial responses to the 'coming inside' of the working class. This was a process of bourgeois control (physical, cultural and moral) of the street and the necessity of mass catering, initially as a reaction to hunger but also congruent with the middle classes growing consumerism, morality and fears of pollution. The genius of the new eel and pie shops was to combine elements of advancing modernity in a replication of the 'gas and glass' of, amongst others, the

gin palaces with the warmth and respectability of a home that spoke of a proto-industrial conviviality.

The food served utilised the historic food of the London poor (the eel) with easily available ingredients in a setting that was geared to speed and necessity rather than the reflexivity of the (Habermasian) public sphere. Contrary to contemporary memorialisation (the political and cultural signification of which I shall discuss in my final chapter), the fare was more mixed with some shops like Evans' (the forerunner of today's Arments) still serving soup until at least 1914.³¹ Indeed, in a revealing interview in David Furnham's forgotten film, *Noted Eel and Pie Shops* (1975), Joe Cooke's grandmother, Lily, 91 at the time significantly recalled that "Robert Cooke [the founder of the Cooke dynasty] was-my-father in law... in Watney Street, Stepney "He never sold pies, he sold hot eels and mash."

By the mid-nineteenth century, this intensely localised and market-adjacent communality, itself derived of a synthesis and 'remaking' (Stedman Jones, 1974) of the culture of different types of manual workers, saw the emergence of a unique coster identity, simultaneous with and intrinsic to, a wider London working class culture. This, by the 1870s, without political navigation, had turned inward, defensively orientated towards the family and home set against a pacified lifestyle of consolation and distraction that saw them congruent with music halls, association football and seaside excursions (Stedman Jones, 1974: 485). This was the community that would largely become the customer base for the late nineteenth century pie shop. Although we cannot be entirely sure, it is to this period that straddles both centuries and likely no earlier, that we can trace the contemporary shop, its rituals and its traditions. By the early twentieth century the shops had become numerous but shielded within an urban working class culture of hyper-local social solidarities based around micro-class divisions of work, respectability and propriety.

³¹ In an image from a family photograph held by the Arments dated c.1914, a window display clearly offers soup.

The handful of eel, pie and mash shops that now remain within London, memorialised in contested recollection, are the product of a unique synthesis and are nothing less than a fossilised *extant taxon* of an early feeding-station/canteen/restaurant hybrid closely associated with, and synchronous to, the development of the identity of the costermonger who in turn contributed in no small measure to the emergence of a distinct and unique London character. It is to that character, long in creation, that I now turn.

2. The Theatre of the cockney

Perhaps we can remember and adapt Marx's insight: we make our identities, but with inherited resources and not under circumstances of our own choosing. (Gilroy in Gilroy, Grossberg and McRobbie, 2000: 127)

Introduction

Except perhaps in a generalised, geographic sense, the cockney identity, fundamental to, and the main signifier of the contemporary eel and pie shop, is seen as more or less redundant in a global, neoliberal city. Today, cockney is a nostalgic signal. The image of the good humoured, 'rough diamond' of the Lambeth Walk has been in decline since at least the 1940s and is now largely found in half-remembered and reconstructed simulacra in Essex. However, it remains a referent of an exclusively urban, London identity whose dominant register remains a 'proletarian entrepreneurialism' (Hobbs, 1998) associated with selling and service. From London's historic army of clerks, artisans, shop keepers, costermongers or casual labourers it survives, if only in the recollections of old men as "you got something to sell? I'll buy it off ya."³²

In this chapter I attempt to chart the contested evolution of the idea of cockney that appeared to emerge from its pre-modern roots evidencing an increasing divide between earlier rural power and knowledge and nascent, urban forces synchronous with early capitalism. I trace the notion, increasingly defined by a spatiality that began to articulate the contours of the new, expanding city of London towards a tension between the commoners and the elites; between the educated and the non-educated, between the patrician and the plebian (Thompson 1991). In this sense I argue that cockney began to display a duality: firstly, as an identity defined by speech type and then by barbed comedy but increasingly as a metaphor for the interplay between the powerful and the powerless.

³² Brian. Interview by author 22 June 2022.

Towards Victorian modernity, I use cultural texts to plot the rise of, and brutal satire towards, an interstitial, Romantic class that defined itself in cultural opposition to the elites of the *ancien regime*. Secondly, I describe a new strata, initially outlined and personally represented by Dickens, as grocers, journalists, shop assistants and (eventually) eel and pie shop owners. I then examine the fluidity of the moniker and the circumstances of the term's rapid class slippage, synchronous to the alliance of the bourgeoisie and the old elites, that sees cockney become a symbol for the multitudinous urban poor. In that sense, I argue that the journey of the cockney is about who controls the word and its fluid connotation.

During early Victorian modernity, I trace the performativity of the cockney as both an escapist pantomime that simultaneously aped, celebrated and satirised the appearance of the elites and a dynamic, dramatic identity informed by street commerce (Jankiewicz, 2012). Both forms I suggest may owe much to pre-industrial forms of the crowd and carnival reflected back through early working class musical and entertainment traditions that began to shape a specifically London proletarian identity. This identity I argue was carved from precious moments of enjoyment during periods of extraordinary privation and political impotence after the defeat of the Charter. I attempt to contrast this by delineating the characterisation of the cockney as a representative of bourgeois fears of both the street and degeneration: simultaneously repulsive but erotic.

In this I question the notion of the construction of a Victorian 'underclass' (Davis, 1989) by examining the conflation of the coster class with cockney (Brodie, 2001) to describe the further class descent of the character and its re-inscription by the contrasting outlooks of Victorian Liberalism as both comic and criminal: simultaneously a representative of sympathy and fear. I relate this fear to a burgeoning cultural hegemony that sought to meld the potentially revolutionary cockney from the 'abyss' into a figure of imperial incorporation. Here, I utilise Stuart Hall's (1973) work on the dissemination of hegemonic messaging via television to sketch the increasingly middle class music hall's eventual co-option of the authentic voice of the street ventriloquised by a bourgeois performer across culture and media.

This process, I suggest, further utilised Walter Bagehot's (1867) idea of political theatricality to absorb the cockney into the nation via a popular imperialism within a discourse of 'invented tradition' (Hobsbawn and Ranger, 2012). The cockney is then I indicate, utilised as a vessel to encapsulate a particular type of 'ordinary' Englishness and periodically valorised according to its usefulness to capital.

2.1 The cockney in history

Writing in *The St James' Magazine*, Cadwallader Waddy (1873: 127) suggests that the origin of the cockney was "shrouded in mystery." The contemporary association of the cockney with a specific philosophy and dialect is however, largely a nineteenth century construction (Stedman Jones: 1989).

Indeed, in projections redolent of his own period, William Matthews in his seminal *The Cockney Past and Present* (1938: 4-5), identifies in amongst (many) others, the colloquialisms of Shakespeare's Mistress Quickly as those of a "Cockney char woman" and in Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1613), finds George the grocer and Nell his wife, "Cockney treasures". Yet upon inspection, these appear no more than Elizabethan conventions of guileless, 'lower' language. Matthews again hopefully cites the example of the dramatist Samuel Foote, "one of the first writers to formalise the Cockney" (1938: 4-5) whose *Taste* (1752) relies on the humorous mistakes of the alderman Pentweazel and his wife. These "vulgarisms" are again conflated with a later, 'lower-class' cockney.

Early editions of Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* make no linkage at all between cockney and diction, simply citing it as a London 'native' and secondly as an "effeminate, ignorant, low, mean, despicable citizen (Stedman Jones, 1989: 281). Johnson's subsequent etymological suggestion connects the cockney to the notion of *cockagne*, 'a country of dainties' that may additionally related to the Norman word for sugar cake but also refers to the Elizabethan notion of a dear child, or 'cocker'. Thomas Tusser in his *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry* (c.1557) seems to foreshadow this. He has -

Some cockneies with cocking are
made verie fooles,
fit neither for prentise, for plough, nor
for schooles (Tusser, [1557] 1878: 549).

Here, 'to cocker' was to spoil or pamper and all of these definitions seem to suggest that cockney was in this period identified with urbanity and a subject unused to hard rural labor.

Julian Franklyn (1953: 15) follows Matthews in citing John Walker's *Pronouncing Dictionary* (1791) that congratulates the cockney as "models of pronunciation to the distant provinces [who] ought to be the more scrupulously correct." Walker ([1791] 1830: 17) comments at some length however, on what would become a mid-nineteenth century cockney trope; the use of 'v' for 'w' and the dropped 'h'. This seems to be a grammatical mistake across the board: perhaps a fashion or an affectation and not just amongst the urban poor. His real concern with the mistakes of the 'lower orders' however is the mispronunciation of 'curtsey', that "... has its last syllable changed into the *che* or *tshe*, as if written *curt-she*."

The main problem in his view was the -

difference between the metropolis and the provinces is that the people of education in London are free from all the vices of the vulgar; but the best educated people in the provinces, if constantly resident there, are sure to be strongly tintured with the dialect of the country in which they live. Hence it is, that the vulgar pronunciation of London though not half so erroneous as that of Scotland, Ireland or any of the provinces, is, to a person of correct taste, a thousand times more offensive and disgusting (Walker [1791] 1830: 17).

The distinction of 'educated' and 'vulgar' is not necessarily class (this period certainly predates an industrial proletariat) but between the educated and the non-educated, the elites and everyone else. We might say, in echo of Thompson (1991), between the courtier and citizen, the patrician and the plebian - the genteel and the vulgar.

This tension dominated the late eighteenth century mirroring as it did the rise of a new kind of Londoner.

The first reference of cockney with its direct spatiality, Bow Bells, seems to have come from the English lexicographer John Minsheu in 1617 and he repeats a trope that links William Langland's *Piers Ploughman's* small and misshapen eggs ('cocken-ey') to people brought up in cities and ignorant of real life (Stedman Jones, 1989: 281).³³ The retelling of this story, again linking the townsfolk with ignorance, is repeated over and over in subsequent centuries:

That a cittizen's sonne riding with his father... into the country... asked, when he heard a horse neigh, what the horse did, his father answered, the horse doth neigh; riding farther he heard a cock crow and said, doth the cock neigh too? (Elmes, 2005: 52).

Cockney is then an early signifier of the developing tensions between emergent forces of capital in towns and older, feudal forms of power and knowledge in rural areas. Samuel Pegge's counterblast to Dr Johnson's dictionary echoes this analogy centuries later and his criticism is couched in exactly the same terms. Pegge objects to Johnson's alleged ignorance of "antient dialectical words... [and] ... treats them as outlaws who have lost the protection of the Commonwealth" (Stedman Jones, 1989: 281). For Pegge, cockney is a language "in use among the citizens within the sound of Bow-Bells is that of Antiquity and, for the most part, composed of 'Saxonisms' (Stedman Jones, 1989: 282). This is of course, a tenuous link to an older England: a more authentic and symbolic 'cockney' Englishness that allegedly predated the Norman yoke. The comedic also begins to link with the geographic. In Chaucer's *The Reeve's Prologue*, the cockney is a dull fellow. Oswald worries, "I shall be held a daffe, or a cockney". In the second act of *King Lear*, Shakespeare has the Fool exclaim:

³³ Interestingly, inhabitants of both London and York are described in this way by Robert Whittington in his *Vulgaria*, (1520) - "This cokneys and tytyllynges [*delicati pueri*] may abide no sorrow when they come to age. In this great citees as London, York the children be so nycely and wantonly brought up that comonly they can little good." McArthur, Lam-McArthur and Fontaine, 2018: 142.

Cry to it nuncle, as the cockney did to the eels when she put ‘em i’th paste alive; she knapp’d ‘em o’th’coxcombs with a stick and cried, ‘Down wantons down!

Not only is this useful in locating the eel in the historical English diet but it places the cockney as an early figure of modernity, completely uncomfortable in any other environment than the city. A century later, the *New London Magazine* would write that:

There is no popular subject of satire, on which the modern common-places if wit and ridicule have been exhausted with more success than on that of a mere cockney affecting the pleasure of the country.³⁴

The cockney was invariably a figure of humour, “a living paradox, a metropolitan provincial, the stunted offspring of the big city” (Dart, 2012: 5). Rather than a single tongue however, in Pierce Egan’s *Life in London* (1821), the city is a patchwork of local dialects:

A kind of *cant* phraseology is current from one end of the metropolis to the other... In some females of the highest rank, it is as strongly marked as dingy dragged-tail Sall, who is compelled to dispose of a few sprats to turn an honest penny. (Stedman Jones, 1989: 84-85).

This *cant* is located in the geography and attitudes of the character, but this is not identified by Egan as cockney. Egan’s cockney is to be found in his 1839 novel, *Pilgrims of the Thames*, where conspicuously monikered Peter Makemoney, a City alderman, becomes the Lord Mayor of London. Makemoney is “... a thorough cockney... The sound of Bow Bells... was delightful music... he had seen nothing else, but London and he thought that there was no place like London” (Stedman Jones, 1989: 285). Makemoney is a connective between the eighteenth and nineteenth century representation of the identity. He is a born and bred Londoner, who “... despised anything like ostentation; and self-importance he was equally

³⁴ “The Genius.” *New London Magazine, or Gentleman’s Monthly Intelligences*, August 1761: 424.

disgusted with; but his home and fireside were great objects to his mind..." He liked a drink and "was particularly fond of a good song..." (Egan, 1838: 7-8). Makemoney links the earlier idea of the innocent, London-as-the-world (he is gently mocked in an episode on the waters at Chelsea Reach) with an honesty and solid, burgher values. Similarly, Robert Smith Surtees writes in his 'sporting cockney' *Jorrocks* novels of the (more) comic, corpulent cockney squire who has risen through society. *Jorrocks* is not genteel, but he stands in his honesty and plain speaking contrasted with the greedy (and effeminate) aristocracy.

But 'arter all's said and done there are but two sorts o'folks l' the world,
Peerage folks and Post Hoffice Directory folks, Peerage folks, wot think it's
right and proper to do their tailors, and Post Hoffice Directory folks wot think
it's the greatest sin under the sun not to pay twenty shillings i' the pund
(Stedman Jones, 1989: 286).

Cockney could also technically refer to anyone who wasn't aristocratic. He could be the wealthy grocer, Watty Cockney in *Love in the City* (1767) or the out-of-place Cosey in *Town and Country* (1807) but he must have the city in his blood. That city was *old* London; the mediaeval and the historic. The city of a certain pedigree. According to Thomas Barnes (a future editor of *The Times*) in a review of James Kennedy's farce, *Love, Law and Physic* (1813) it is noted that the cockney shopman from Southwark, a character known as Lubin Log, exhibits "the illiterate vulgarity of manner and of idiom which distinguish the native London shopman... for the lash of comic satire" (Dart, 2012: 7). This seems significant in two senses. Firstly, shopkeepers typify for Barnes, "... the real home of the cockney character, the place where its peculiar mixture of pertness and illiteracy, dullness and vivacity, were most fully expressed" (Dart, 2012: 8). Secondly though, it marks the geographic spread of this new type of cockney to the (then) London suburbs such as Islington, Camden Town, Clerkenwell and Southwark. These are areas that become home to a "new lower middle class of dependent clerks, technicians and professionals" (Mayer, 1975: 417), part of the growing service-sector. It is from these areas and this constituency that the first owners and customers of the burgeoning eel and pie shops had begun to emerge by the 1840s. These were now part of an uneasy class and cockney had become code for the vulgarity of modernity uniting city and the new

suburbs. This is the grammatical (and lived) pivot of the central struggle of the nineteenth century, the rise of the bourgeois and its synchronous dance with the working class. At the turn of the nineteenth century, cockney had become a catch-all term for those who lacked property: a barbed metaphor for those without authority.

This barb is the spite and bile unleashed in *The Satirist* in 1813 and again in 1817 in *Blackwood's Magazine* against the so-called Cockney School of Leigh Hunt and his collaborators, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley and William Hazlitt *et al.* The main thrust of *Blackwood's* venom was Hunt's *commonness* and narrow, classed, crucially suburban vision, that "has never seen any mountain higher than Highgate Hill, nor reclined by a stream more pastoral than the Serpentine River (Cox, 2010: 251). The period from 1813 (when Hunt was imprisoned for libelling the Regent) up to the 1840s has been called 'The Cockney Moment'. As Jennifer Cox (2010) suggests, the Cockney School defined its own cultural legitimacy against the elites as part of an emergent bourgeoisie, a unique 'cockney cosmopolitanism'. The audience that Hunt (the son of a clergyman) and Keats (the son of an ostler) and the other 'cockney' poets were addressing was found "among the skilled workers, small shopkeepers, clerks and the better grade of domestic servants that the mass audience for printed material was recruited during the first half of the nineteenth century" (Altick 1957: 83).

Literature was but one part of a culture of self-definition that was, in some sense, solidified in 1832. The limited Reform Bill allowed the propertied middle class to define itself *against* the aristocracy and *from* the lower-middle class and the poor. According to this definition, cockney was a demarcation between cultural and political legitimacies and, not for the first time was a cipher for power: for those who had it and those who did not.

Now, cockney was in cultural terms, "the misshapen 'foster-child' of Romanticism and Social Realism" (Dart, 2012: 26). In political terms, it outlined the downward trajectory of a class, ascendent during the Regency but largely unaccommodated afterwards.

2.2 Dickens and descent of the cockney

The 1830s was a period of great influx into London. Dickens' sharp eye as *Boz*, collated the changing city through the prism of his own difficult formative years. Forced to work in Gray's Inn as a solicitor's clerk at fifteen he was, essentially, a north London cockney.

In his sketches Dickens outlined a new interstitial class of grocers, journalists, shop assistants and (eventually) eel and pie shop owners. This grouping, made precarious by the 1832 Reform Act, was unable to gain acceptance as true bourgeoisie yet desperate not to fall into the abyss below. As petty bourgeoisie they were as Engels remarked, "great in boasting... [yet] very shy in risking anything" (Marx and Engels, [1851] 1912: 232). This political impotence meant that for the bourgeois proper, the cockney class was no longer suspected of radical intent and "... even by the late 1830s in England, the clerkly and shopkeeping classes were no longer the object of quite the same suspicion as in the 'Cockney School' period" (Dart, 2012: 26).

It was also Dickens who seems to have encapsulated the class slippage of the cockney into more familiar registers by his portrayal of Sam Weller in *The Pickwick Papers*. He does this by transposing his London voice, rather archaic even by this time, with that of the lower-classes. As Benjamin Smart recalls in *Walker's Pronouncing Dictionary* (1846):

The diffusion of literature among even the lowest classes of the metropolis, renders it almost unnecessary to speak now of such extreme vulgarisms as the substitution of v for w, or w for v. Few persons under the age of forty years of age with such a predilection for literary nicety as will lead them to these pages can be in much danger of saying that they like 'weal and winegar wery well'... [this speech pattern belongs to a] ... more distant generation of cocknies...[and that] ... the cockney speaker has to learn at least consistency in his pronunciation (Stedman Jones, 1988: 287).

Certainly, Mayhew (1857: 5) writing of the 1840s in his *London Labour and the London Poor* makes a similar comment that "The characteristic dialect of Bow-Bells

has almost become obsolete: and alderman now-a-days, rarely transpose the vs and ws.”

Indeed, Mayhew (1857: 5) lists several other London dialects such as The London exquisite, The affected Metropolitan Miss, The fast young gentleman, The Cadger's Cant and the coster's backslang. A version of one of these would form the basis of what would be known as cockney rhyming slang but that connective between the coster community and the working class (labouring cockney) would be some decades away.

Dickens' motives for Weller's class demotion are unclear and it was an odd reversal: although Dickens only described the character as a “specimen of London Life”, the true cockney in the book should have been Pickwick himself, the epitome of the long-established vein of 'sporting cockney'. Yet Weller is by speech and manner a reassuring character. He has a rough, urban wisdom that is almost an ironic echo of the rural knowledge that the earliest cockney stood against, and his diction is a contrast to the staccato delivery of Jingle, the cockney confidence trickster. Weller, like his wider cockney compatriots has ambitions to be a gentleman but by the end is again Pickwick's loyal servant. This may be Dickens' way of putting working class ambition in its place, but it may also be seen as a gentle (if slightly patronising) humanising of the labouring classes: a repeat of his earlier attempts in his *London Recreations* (1833-1836). Tellingly, in 1850 Dickens remarked that (it is) “The wish of persons in the humbler classes of life, to ape the manners and customs of those who fortune has placed above them... is often the subject of... complaint. [Yet] some of the some of the finery of these people provokes a smile but they are all clean and happy, and disposed to be good natured and sociable” (Dickens, 1850: 55-57).

Although Turner (2020: 115) suggests his use of speech may have been deployed to “satisfy public expectations” and adhere to theatrical convention, it may also be a signal that the lower orders are no longer willing - or capable - of rising as a threat to the social order. Whatever Dickens intended for the cockney, the term now became a weapon of satire in the culture war by the dress and affectation of the aspirant class embodied in the youthful shop assistant or clerk. That these (men, predominantly) are typical of the new consumer dynamic that sees food (such as the

emergent eel and pie shops) and dress as modernity and progress is no coincidence.³⁵ Clearly, the journey of the cockney is about who controls the word and its fluid connotation.

The mid-century sees two major changes in the representation of the cockney. The first was the 1867 extension of the franchise and the second was the growth of consumerism especially amongst the lower middle classes. This was concomitant with the birth of the character of the 'sham-genteel swell'. Although the 'dandy swell' as a London figure had existed for some time in various incarnations, it is now linked to a performative life-style that crossed classes.³⁶ Cockney dandyism was an escapist pantomime celebrating the aping of the appearance of the elites. Revolutions in the fashion industry meant that decent but cheap imitations of the elites' clothes were, for the first time "generally available... to the better class of plebian worker" (Dart, 2012: 206). Although clerks and apprentices were restricted in what they could wear at work, they were free to dress as dandies in the evenings. This performative, simulacrum 'look' has transmitted itself down to contemporary working class (especially youth) culture - the Teddy Boys' adoption of Edwardian fashion being an obvious example. The appropriation of the elites' style and the ensuing cultural faux-pas (and fear) contingent upon that continues to be a subject of satire. The 'Del-Boy' character created by John Sullivan in the BBC comedy, *Only Fools and Horses* for example, combines the cockney ('flashy') adaptation of 1980s formal wear with the linguistic contortions reminiscent of Dickens' 'Wellerisms'.

Presciently, and somewhat ironically given the bourgeois appetite for social emulation of the aristocracy, William Hazlitt (1821: 41) would, in the early part of the nineteenth century warn on the dangers of "... being taken for what one is not."

³⁵ It may be instructive to look at Dicken's *Shabby Genteel People* - another Sketch by Boz - that reflects on the clothing of the less cheerful and not-so-young characters of the lower middle class, struggling in their patched and threadbare clothes. They wait to rise from their predicament but never do so whilst the young believe they will but find fulfilment in fashion and style.

³⁶ Piece Egan would write for example about the earlier dandy cockney fraudster, Samuel Hayward who affected the life of a man of leisure. See - Egan, 1822. We might see the Regency dandy, George Bryan "Beau" Brummell (1778-1840) here as an archetype of modernity and performativity in this sense against the backdrop of consumerism although his elite status meant that his style was as a leader rather than a follower.

Hackney-born Renton Nicholson's *Cockney Adventures and Tales of London Life* (1838) gives us a city full of aspirant cockney young men, their consorts and their often humorous adventures in dialect. A weekly penny-dreadful concurrent with Dickens' *Sketches by Boz*, Nicholson would describe the characters of the London street of the 1830s in an anticipation of Benjamin's (1999) bourgeois *flâneur* that would chronicle Paris' characters and *physiologies* in his *panoramic literature*.

2.3 The Music Hall as distorting mirror

The embryonic music hall, so crucial for the development of cockney identity, reflected back and refined these styles of the street. It became the mecca of the salaried youth of the new working population, the single young men ('counter-jumpers'), and performers like Alfred Vance (1839-1888) better known as 'The Great Vance' who embodied this symbiotic trend on stage as 'swells' or *Lion Comique*. These characters were parodies of the upper classes, generally dressed in evening wear, and sang songs that were "hymns of praise to the virtues of idleness, womanising and drinking" (Dagmar, 1996: 175).

The fear of the masses entering the polity via the music halls was expressed by *Tinsley's Magazine* in 1869:

We do not hesitate to lay upon the music-halls the parentage of that sham-gentility which has become so abnormally prominent among the striplings of the uneducated classes during the past few years. Nowadays, your attorney's clerk - apparently struck by some 'levelling up' theory of democracy - is dissatisfied unless he can dress as well as the son of a duke" (Stedman Jones, 1988: 290).

The 'swell' is just one of a range of characters that music hall performers could call upon. Others were Irish, blackface, the rustic - and the cockney. They are all by this time however played by professional middle class performers in what Derek B. Scott (2002: 243) calls 'the imagined real', "where the identity of the performance remains separate from that of the character portrayed." The period coincided with a simultaneous duality within liberalism itself that both articulated a

fear of this 'levelling up' and expressed guilt surrounding the extreme poverty that laissez-faire had undoubtedly unleashed. The sympathetic ventriloquising of the poor onstage by bourgeois performers may have partially reflected the cultural ascendancy of a Gladstonian moral tone, or as Himmelfarb (1968: 300) succinctly has it, "a Victorian angst". Increasingly, the cockney is simultaneously both satirised and represented in a more benevolent way in songs like "The Ratcatcher's Daughter" that take a romantic view of poverty (Koppen, 2014).

Discussion of the exact type of precursor to the music hall goes beyond the scope of this study, but my argument is that this largely undocumented culture is simultaneous with the working class culture that would meld into the eel and pie shops. Just as the early shops in the 1840s would adopt the appearances of the gin palaces, publicans in the 1820s and 1830s, "... successfully invested in gaslight and gilding" and looked for other ways to expand their business (Lee, 2019: 32). Public houses formalised so-called 'harmonic evenings' or 'free-and-easys' that would typically be held in rooms above the saloon. It seems that in addition, working class youth had their own clubs, and these were, allegedly, "[places where] boys and girls meet... and get drunk and debauch one another" (Lee, 2019: 36). It seems that a "Georgian permissiveness lingered well into the early Victorian period" (Lee, 2019: 36). What is equally clear is that there was a vibrant and authentic working class entertainment culture, that ran parallel to the bourgeois entertainment halls but waned (Speight, 1977). This decline was two-fold. It was achieved by moral panic in the press and by legislation. It seems likely that the intervention of Sir George Grey, the home secretary, in 1849 was decisive and his interest in opposing unlicensed music and dancing venues may well have had a great deal to do with the fear of Chartism and local unrest. Unlicensed and temporary makeshift theatres, the so-called 'Penny-Gaffs', continued for some time however, perhaps until the later part of the nineteenth century. According to *The Morning Post* (Lee, 2019: 51) their audience was young and very poor:

Farces and pantomime, were mixed with stories of highwaymen and murder, drawn from penny dreadful serials (e.g., *The Mysteries of Paris*) or along similar bloodthirsty lines (e.g., *The Blue Apron and the Cleaver*, or *The Sanguinary Butcher of Cripplegate*).

A newspaper article on a gaff in Poplar gives a good account of the audiences of these early taxons of the more 'respectable' halls. The audience we are told consisted of "Ragged boys, each one with his pipe, potatoe [sic] and (we must add) his prostitute" (Sheridan, 1981: 54). Mayhew ([1851] 208: 49, 50) specifically links them with the costers and their "dancing tunes" and is suitably outraged by what he sees. The disappearance of these theatres was simultaneous with the advancement of mass consumption, the 'control of the streets', the moralising of working class culture and its commodification by the forces of capital and modernity.

In a wider cultural sense, this development crucially enabled the creation of a transgressive low *other*, a synchronal notion of the working classes as different, monstrous yet tantalizing and vitally erotic (Walkowitz, 2012). Simultaneously this defined a cultural cartography that delineated zone of exclusion known as the *Abyss* - the East End itself.

This complicated, vampiric cultural ingestion and regulation of the increasingly prohibited carnivalesque in everyday life was fundamental because it "symbolically heightened the eroticised version of fantasy life" and therefore facilitated the "inner dynamic of the boundary constructions necessary to collective identity" for a nation-building project" (Stallybrass and White: 2008: 20). It would also have an ironic resonance in later notions of working class respectability, structural to the identity of cockney and the eel and pie shops.

This process also helped solidify a new cockney identity formed in the pages of *Punch*. The cockney character of 'Arry was created by E.J. Milliken in sketches that lasted from 1877 to the 1890s. He was a fusion of several earlier cockney stereotypes, notably in his aversion to the countryside, his diction, his caddish behaviour and his vulgarity. He was a 'swell', spending his salary on garish clothes, holidays and cheap cigars.

Politically, he was a product of the Disreali's 'Leap in the Dark', the limited franchise expansion of the 1867 Reform Act. 'Arry was a working class Tory ("the

petticoats want keeping down, like niggers and radicals” - Stedman Jones, 1988: 291) and a fervent Jingoist - the term referencing a bullying, expansionist nationalism around the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78.³⁷ The character was celebrated in the popular song of in 1881 that bears his name. Sung by one of the greatest stars of the day, Jenny Hill, the song is a defence not of ‘Arry’s character *per se* but more tellingly of what he represents:

The ‘Upper ten’ may jeer and say
What ‘cads’ the ‘Arries are,
But the ‘Arries *work, and pay their way* [my italics]
While doing the la-di-da (Stedman Jones, 1988: 291).

‘Arry prefigures by a century the latest incarnation of the cockney, the Thatcherite East End ‘barrow boy’ who, in a similar vein, is both comic and threatening; a grotesque that will make the eel and pie shop a central totem of their identity based on a palimpsest of previous (and invented) cockney characterisations.

2.4 The coster confusion

Mayhew’s cockney was rooted simply in an older “dialect of Bow-Bells”. For him, the costermongers were members of the dangerous classes, and their argot was that of “London thieves” (Mayhew, 1857: 5-6). They were “nearly all Chartists”, a synonym for the mob (Mayhew, 1857: 29). His views were angrily disputed at the time by the costers themselves and, although Mayhew is a valuable source of information, his reputation, even at the time was not entirely trusted (Himmelfarb, 1984: 15).³⁸ In light of this, recent scholarship around the coster community and indeed around the notion of casual labour is worth examination.

The demonisation of the street in this period, was part of a complex cultural shift. The costers, part of an older tradition of an informal economy stood, like all of the

³⁷ The term came from the lyrics of a song by George William Hunt, made popular by the performer G.H. MacDermott. “We don’t want to fight but by Jingo if we do/We’ve got the ships, we’ve got the men, we’ve got the money too...”

³⁸ For a contemporary account of a demonstration by costers against Mayhew’s ‘defamatory’ writings, see *Reynold’s Magazine*, 18 May 1851.

street-sellers, stubbornly in the way of this (Jankiewicz, 2012: 403). Rather than the retrospective label of simple ‘penny-capitalists’ (Benson, 1983) who allegedly pursued a “middle class occupation at the working class level of life”, theirs was more likely a “dwindling subsistence economy trapped within the expanding capitalist system” (Richards in Jankiewicz, 2012: 394). As such, their very presence, let alone their unregulated economic activity, was subversive. To the respectable, they represented a confrontation between the stability of the new bourgeois capitalist order and an older, more human set of interactions between members of all classes that were potential customers. Jankiewicz (2012) makes an excellent point when he says that by their very nature the performative role of costers was crucial. In a society where a person could disappear and reinvent themselves (often by necessity) one could transform one’s identity by changing the products that one sold. Although some coster businesses were clearly hereditary, this identity fluidity mirrored the street spaces that the costers occupied (Stedman Jones, 2014: 61-62). To be heard, it was necessary to stand out and perform, and this clearly prefigures their co-opted role in music hall. The open undermining of authority meant that the costers were seen as enemies of order and new laws. Indeed, *The Morning Post* in 1848, reporting on mass demonstrations in Trafalgar Square claims that the crowds were “chiefly composed of the costermonger class.”³⁹ This radical edge to the politics of the streets seems to have been somewhat forgotten by later historians. Work by Mark Brodie questions many of the later conservative assumptions about the coster’s political allegiances. It appears that in many cases they “quite consciously identified themselves and their causes with the working class... that was clearly recognised by politicians of the period, but ... has been largely ignored since” (Brodie, 2001: 149). Some of Stedman Jones’ work on casual labour in this regard is based on earlier studies by Pelling (1967) whose basis for resolving that the costers were an overwhelmingly conservative force is evidenced from just one specific area of east London. Yet “[W]hen first established in 1894, the Whitechapel costers deliberately chose to call themselves a labour union” and certainly, many coster unions “... like the Whitechapel and City unions, seem to have been generally to the left (Brodie, 2001: 149,152).”⁴⁰

³⁹ *The Morning Post*, 8 March 1848.

⁴⁰ It seems likely that the confusion about certain local political alliances was based on, for example, union membership figures from where costermongers *lived* rather than where they *traded*.

In this way, the costers, at this stage, rather than fitting the narrative of the unitary nature of John Bright's *residuum*, demonstrate a more nuanced existence (Koven, 2006).⁴¹ Indeed, Jennifer Davis' work that centres around the construction of a mid-Victorian underclass makes the point that the so-called 'casual poor' exhibited attitudes and behaved in ways "characteristic ...of the nineteenth century working class in general" (Davis, 1989: 20). More, perception and reality of the residuum,

continuously interacted to shape each other in a number of crucial ways. Thus, the behaviour of the casual poor, conditioned by their economic circumstances, often appeared to substantiate the popular image of them as inherently violent and lawbreaking.

This refinement is crucial and again, whilst beyond the scope of this study, challenges the axiomatic association of cultural divisions of the London working class. It postulates a convincing, more nuanced position that the 'casual poor' was an ideological 'turn' manufactured in the 1870s and 1880s as a successor to earlier notions of the criminal 'other'. In this sense, the residuum "was as much a consequence of its identification as it was a necessary precondition for it" (Davis, 1989: 13).

The implications for the identity of the cockney and especially of the eel and pie shops is that it signals a necessary duality: the very definition of a 'respectable' working class *depends* on the criminal, feckless other. These tropes are still, in so many senses, current in the contemporary cockney identity, evidenced in the eel and pie shops, mixed as they are with notions of cleanliness, hard work and respectability.

⁴¹ Bright, a Liberal MP was the first to use the term in reference to an 'irredeemable' Victorian 'underclass' in a debate against further enfranchisement. See - Alexander, 2013: 99.

2.5 The character refined

If street markets, costers and the residuum threatened to interrupt commercial progress mid-century, they provided contemporary writers and journalists, “good copy about the pulsating organism of living London” (Walkowitz, 2012: 144). The hardships of the costers and the closures of their ‘convenient’ local markets for the middle classes that they inevitably served, were clearly linked. It is in this period, largely perhaps due to the everyday utility to a large part of a cross-class audience in the theatres, that the costermonger makes his appearance as a music hall character. He is simultaneously a figure of sympathy and a crook.

Alfred Vance, who we have already seen typifying the ‘swell’ character, was also one of the first of the music hall performers to utilise this ‘respectable’ coster identity with such songs as *The Chickaleary Cove* and *Costermonger Joe*. In a unique character reversal of his dandy (of either the upper or lower-class variety), Vance transforms from the well-dressed cad to become one of “the brutal denizen of Whitechapel...” (Roberts in Stedman Jones, 1989: 295). Vance and a host of other Victorian performers adopted a stage identity of low-life (semi-) realism that exhibited an almost prurient fascination with poverty, moral choice and casual male violence.⁴² This was a performative flirtation between the character of the ‘respectable’ working class and the dangerous criminal, predicated on the middle classes’ increasing acknowledgement that there actually was such a thing as a working class culture.

It was the appearance of the actor Albert Chevalier in 1891 however that cemented him as “...the Kipling of the music-hall”, the cockney as coster and the cockney as a “new archetype in the early 1890s” (Chevalier in Stedman Jones, 1989: 272). Chevalier was an unlikely star for the masses. A veteran of more sedate middle class supper and recital clubs like *The Savage* and *The Green Room*, his debut was the result of a marriage between his artifice, his astute manager, Newson Smith and the founding of new West End Theatre syndicates.⁴³

⁴² See - Anstey, 1888: 36 - “Bein niver too tight of a Saturday night but what I kin wallop the wife...”.

⁴³ The Music Hall landscape that Chevalier conquered was in part the result of the liberalisation of the theatre sector by the Theatres Act of 1843 (amending the regime of The Licensing Act of 1737)

These posited a new financial model that moved away from the sale of alcohol into creating 'star' performers to carry audience numbers. In many ways, this professionalisation of the theatre mirrored the working class restaurants like the eel and pie shops: no longer an artisanal trade but a bourgeois inspired business enterprise. It should be noted however that Chevalier was preceded and outlived by a real cockney performer, Ernest Augustus ('Gus') Elen (1862-1940) who had a "voice of extreme authority, disillusionment and sardonic irony" (MacInnes, 1967: 51).

In terms of identity, Chevalier makes the cockney self-reflective and a figure of great sympathy. This is especially true in the rendition of his famous "My Old Dutch". The song is a lament featuring an elderly coster and his wife who, after forty years of marriage, are separated before the workhouse gates. Not only is this sentimentality a trope that will endure within the cockney identity, but also Chevalier's dialect turns from the comic Dickensian confusions into what might be recognised as a modern cockney cadence. Interestingly, in an interview with *The Graphic* in 1892, Chevalier makes no pretence of his artifice and admits that,

It's a great mistake to suppose that there is any one cockney dialect. There are half a dozen. The 'coster song', as people will call the things I sing, is a kind of embodiment of several; and it isn't necessarily cockney at all" (Stedman Jones, 1998: 299).

There can be no clearer indication that this formative portrayal of the cockney which in its major form still survives, is a fiction: a concoction of the music hall and a saccharine impersonation of the authentic voice of the street ventriloquised by a bourgeois performer across culture and media.

which had allowed for plays to be performed only in the so-called 'patent theatres' - The Theatre Royal Drury Lane and The Theatre Royal Covent Garden.

2.6 The character reflected back

The new, more acceptable representation of the cockney now became standardised. Marie Lloyd (1870-1922) similarly adopted a cockney identity, and she appears as a “respectable crossing-point in the journey of cockney from low to middle-brow culture” (Matthews, 1938: 99). Her, “A little bit of what you fancy does you good” and “The Coster girl in Paris” are evidence of “the music hall’s feeding upon itself rather than by drawing ideas from, or representing, the world outside... a representational code is learnt, reproduced and bingo, you have a cockney” (Scott, 2002: 256). These ‘cockney’ songs, as Matthews (1938: 98) has it, are now “nostalgic for a golden age that preceded modernity...” and can be a cross-class cipher for pretty much any and all representations that can be hung onto them. What was hung onto them, and onto the cockney identity of course, was nationalism.

It is in this late Victorian period, not completely and not necessarily before that it’s possible to categorise the London working classes as turning towards conservatism (Davis, 1989: 103-128). It is in this era that the cockney was conscripted into the nation. No longer part of a ‘wandering tribe’ or a member of the residuum to be feared, cleared or damned for their own moral failings, the cockney was now an imaginary, and cheerfully colourful character that encapsulated very British virtues. From Elgar’s *Cockaigne Overture* to Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, the poor had to be reimagined and repackaged as upholders of the status quo. More succinctly, they were accepted into the body politic because their difference was held in check within a framework of national unity. It is not coincidental that this shift happens against a backdrop of mass Jewish immigration, a rise in trades union activity and a significant dockers strike in 1889.

Indeed, “... from the 1880s, no aspect of Britain’s privileged position was secure. The history of the British state in this period illustrates the profound difficulties of accommodating the changing economic, industrial and political conditions” (Mica and O’Shea, 1996: 27). The riots in London on the 8th of February 1885 that coincided with the severe winter and mass unemployment were seen as more alarming than the threat of 1848 and increasingly the predominant reaction to the

rediscovery of poverty in this period “was not so much guilt as fear” (Stedman Jones, 2014: 290). A riot involving 20,000 unemployed building and dock workers ensued after a demonstration organised by the Social Democratic Federation in Trafalgar Square in November 1887. This in turn was followed some days later by ‘Bloody Sunday’, again in Trafalgar Square, when the police violently assaulted a crowd protesting coercion in Ireland. Certainly, for many within the bourgeoisie, these confrontations must have seemed like the thin blue line of order holding back the barbarians of the East (End) at the gate. Engels (1968: 370-371) was convinced that this ‘New Unionism’ was a political turning-point and William Fishman (1988) has suggested that for many in bourgeois London, these events signalled the start of the coming revolution.

Violent mass repression against the much-swelled residuum was never a realistic possibility. Rather, hegemony had to be “actively constructed and positively maintained” (Hall, 1996, 424). The response to this crisis was the formation of a culture of a ‘suffocating nationalism’ (Anderson, 1992: 24) that continues and is ‘useful’ to this day, visible within the larger identity of the London working class. As Cecil Rhodes had presciently noted, “If you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialists” (Porter, 1975: 125).

At the start of the nineteenth century, notions of an ancient constitution, nationalism and patriotic allegiance were identified with radicalism. This vocabulary was inherited by Chartism but by the 1840s “... the language of patriotism begins to pass out of the mainstream of English radical movements” (Cunningham, 1981: 18). Disreali’s Conservatives began to harness the power of patriotic feeling to both assure the bourgeoisie of Tory intent and to win working class votes.

Although (again) beyond the scope of this study, I argue that Hall’s (1973) work on the dissemination of hegemonic messages via television is analogous to the music hall’s construction of cockney in the struggle for the continued cultural domination of the late nineteenth century’s ruling elites. The music halls’ role in the racism inculcated in the working class audience is well documented (Hobson, 1901) although the work of Andrew Crowhurst (1997) offers a rare challenge, contending that the halls merely celebrated the emergent consumer culture. Hall’s argument is

that within the *discursive* form itself - in this case the *language* of song - (Hall's 'sign vehicle') the 'product' (in this case cockney identity) is circulated. It requires both a 'means' (performance) and its own set of production relations within a media apparatus (the music hall as a newly productive, professionalised arena). It is the 'encoding' and 'decoding' of the hegemonic message that are the *determinate* 'moments' in its (successful or unsuccessful) reception - and crucially - *reproduction*, from source to receiver. It was essential for the decoded identity to *appear* unconstructed: hence cockney was *required* to be palimpsestic, referencing numerous historical notions of origin (mediaeval artisans, street sellers etc) as for example, Matthews (1938) and Franklyn (1953) were only too keen to do. The notion of identity is, according to Hall, subject to the "continuous play of history... culture and power (Hall, 1990: 225) and I argue that it is the role of *memory* to naturalise and habitualise these codes, further concealing their origins. The eel-pie shops become in that sense, both in their linguistic connotations and what they signify visually for Hall, ideological *codes* or shorthand for the cockney identity.

It is this thesis' contention that the music hall was an effective hegemonic device (in tandem with popular fiction in late Victoriana) that centred the bourgeois capitalist class as the shining example of national and racial ideals that by economic and democratic necessity would have to become 'ordinary' and in turn, form a 'popular' imperialism. In that sense, it fits well into both Anderson and Hobsbawm and Ranger's (2012) paradigm that claimed lived 'custom' morphed, under modernity's pressure, into an inauthentic and invented 'tradition'. As Walter Bagehot (1867: 59) had suggested, the masses "defer to what we may call the *theatrical* show of society."

Significantly, as Alistair Bonnett (1998) points out, the inculcation of this popular imperialism was vital to the transition from the liberal, to the more advanced, socially consensual form of welfare capitalism that would emerge in the next decades. That said, it is likely that this patriotic fervour had at least some prior fertile ground amongst the lower-classes in which to take root. Fear of invasion during the French Wars had, as Perkin asserted, meant that "patriotism reinforced paternalism to hold overt class conflict in check" (Perkin, 1969 in Cunnigham, 1981: 21: 208). Further, there was always a "popular John Bullish Toryism" that foregrounded roast beef,

beer and hearty pleasure which found home in the ‘sporting cockney’ (Joyce in Cunningham, 1981: 21). This would be the English ‘ordinary culture’ that Raymond Williams would later transpose as the inheritance of the industrial proletariat.

The result would be a largely compliant, pacified and patriotic urban working class. In London, a loveable, sentimental coster plastered on top of the underlying vulgar of ‘Arry who loved his Queen and country, was “and-in-glove with the nobs” but who knew better than to challenge his position because of the “few bob in his pocket”.⁴⁴ A Frankenstein cockney; the latest in a line of palimpsestic identities.⁴⁵

It enabled the London (now white) working classes “...to start drawing on a form of social symbolism from which they had been once marginalised...” (Bonnett, 1998: 318). Crucially, going forward, the roots of this identification would be forgotten but would form the defence of the eventual Welfare State to which mass non-white immigration would be seen as antithetical to working class political and social ‘gains’.

2.7 The Pearlies

More than any other, it is the ‘pearly’ king and queen families, adjacent to the cockney and central to the cultural architecture of the contemporary eel and pie shop, that are the loci for, and a direct performative receptor of, the music hall tradition.

The pearlies, and their employment by music hall as faux-costermongers provide a folkloric link to, and a direct aping of, royalty and social stratifications. Overall, they provide the final clue as to why the Chevalier version of cockney would displace both the character of ‘Arry, the swell, the cockney-as-criminal and the wider fears of the residuum in popular culture and win cross-class approval.

⁴⁴ *Punch*, 11 May 1878: 205.

⁴⁵ A notion that references the biological and social imperatives of ‘Degeneration’ theory that would influence the second half of the nineteenth century and to some extent perhaps the first half of the twentieth.

As Samuel and Stedman Jones (1989: 64) have shown, the appearance of Henry Croft, the first pearly king, was as a fundraising performer. Croft was not a coster but a road-sweeper who in 1880 (or 1886 - records vary) sewed pearl buttons to his clothes as a charity exercise for the Temperance Hospital on the Hampstead Road. Croft's centrality to this narrative however has been disputed as Charles Coburn (1928: 107), another music hall performer claimed that the pearlies were actually invented by the singer, Hiram Travers who had a costume covered with *brass* buttons.

Although Croft may have simply been copying the music hall 'cockney swell', he might also, simultaneously, be seen as the inheritor of several historic London traditions. Samuel and Stedman Jones link the pearlies to the figure of the Jack-in-the Green associated with much earlier pagan May Day rituals although this is disputed by Judge (2000) who concludes that it seems likely that the tradition was associated with milkmaids (later with chimney sweeps) and was first recorded in the middle of the seventeenth century. Pearl Binder (1975: 19) links them, rather hopefully, to a 'Lord of Misrule' character, the instigator of annual, permitted disorder but this is based on an inaccurate conflation with the coster community.

It is however as showmen that the pearlies symbolise a complicated working class insertion between authority and the poor: one that reinforces the 'imagined tradition' (Anderson, 2006) of the Chevalier cockney. Generally seen as a conservative force evidencing overt patriotism and defence of royalty, the pearlies were, counter-intuitively, instrumental in providing essential funds to pre-state based, hospital, charity and church organisations via their friendly societies.⁴⁶ The pearlies inherited, and then superseded, a nascent system of provident clubs, some of which were temperance based and some, like the Jolliboys, which met in pubs.⁴⁷

Their activities mark a move away from simple charity to alleviate particular categories of poverty to a more universal welfarism providing a class-based

⁴⁶ "... timorous, bien-pensant insurance clubs and wavering support for the Liberal Party." See - Anderson, 1964: 36.

⁴⁷ Binder asserts that the membership of these clubs were the link to the early pearly kings. See - Binder, 1975: 77.

alternative to direct patronage that linked bourgeois guilt to the failure of laissez-faire. Geoffrey Rivett (1986) in his *The Development of the London Hospital System 1823-1982*, relates that dissatisfaction with the hospital system had been growing since the 1850s and that charitable funds were a confusing and inefficient form of administration set against the idea of modernity. Nevertheless, the intervention by fundraising of a section of the London working class caused some consternation among the well-to-do middle class that managed the schemes. Indeed, "Working men... expected a *quid pro quo* as of right, and to have a say in management. They did not see their contributions as an act of charity but as a form of insurance" (Rivett, 1986). This interjection into the political process was concomitant with, but not intrinsically linked to, trades unionism. Publicly however the pearlys never deviated from an avowedly non-political stance, and this may account for their largely enthusiastic reception from the elites: pearlys were honoured by Princess Marie Louise in 1927 and were officially represented at the 1953 Coronation.

Pearlys in some form prefigured the arguments upon which the National Health Service would be based but its institution meant that they lost as a body much of their initial *raison d'être*. Their collections were often carnivalesque affairs that echoed such mediaeval gatherings as the Bartholomew Fair which transgressed rules and subverted authority (Bailey, 1988). So unruly did these 'carnivals' become that the pearly fund-raising hospital processions were finally banned by the police in 1928. Yet the pearlys, analogous to the eel and pie shops (that they continue to promote), remain as independent working class entities and emblems of class solidarity and pride.

The pearlys were however unequivocally not costers but rather in some senses their social inferiors. This was a sub-class of the poor but not the casual poor, that aspired to the perceived independence of the coster with his cart and merchandise, but who were in no position to attain the capital required to purchase them. Despite Chevalier's lyric in his, "The Coster's Serenade":

Mine is the noblest turn-out in the crowd
Me in my 'pearlies' felt a toff that day
Down at the Welsh 'arp, which is down 'Endon way

C. Duncan Lewis offered, “we laugh at the ‘pearliers’... the true London coster would never dream of sporting such buttons” (Stedman Jones, 1989: 386) The idea of a late nineteenth century cockney stereotype was however useful for the pearlies as an adopted identity that both raised and distinguished them from the ranks of the residuum.

As the likely representatives of the working classes that the intrepid bourgeois reporter would usually find on their safaris, the numerous pearly communities were likely partly responsible for the (mis)representation of the pearly/coster conflation (Samuel and Stedman Jones, 1989). As a result of this, the pearly community willingly adopted an identity that was a stereotype based on a fictive notion of a ‘respectable’ poor, fit for an imperial era.

2.8 Modernity, ordinariness and the first decline of the cockney

By the 1890s a generation of novelists sought to challenge the alternate comedic or violent depictions of the cockney in popular cultural texts. The so-called Cockney Novelists, Arthur Morrison, Henry Nevinson, Edwin Pugh, William Pett Ridge and Clarence Rook *et al* relied on first-hand research and activism to portray a more accurate personal and group identity.

These works, whilst not entirely free of some of the patronising cliches of the poor as ‘threat’ or ‘other’ in mid-century writing, do intimate some sense of the living interiority in London’s working classes centring notions of community and belonging whilst not flinching from depictions of brutality or crime.

The authors largely however failed to give any sense of wider class structures that surrounded their characters who have largely accepted their place within the political landscape, “rendered harmless by the new beneficent state machinery, controlled by the upper classes” (Keating, 1979: 221). This cockney is differently ventriloquised but equally stereotypical. He is now a patronised figure with a ‘heart of gold’ and a ferociously loyalty to his superiors despite the poverty that surrounds him. This is perfectly illustrated by Pugh’s short story, *Bettles: A Cockney Ishmael* (1898) where an East End drunkard redeems himself (dying in the process) through his courage

during the imperial campaign in the Sudan. Pre-empted by Rudyard Kipling's *Soldiers Three* (1888) this cockney is the perfect 'pet' for the elites during the First World War who celebrated his subaltern humour, bravery and stoicism.⁴⁸

The duality between this acquiescence and residual working class defiance is more usefully imaged in some of the depictions of the cockney in the elite's art of the period. William Rothenstein's *Coster Girls* (1894) references Hogarth but the subject's hands-on-hips stance shows a wholly defiant, independent young woman.

C.R.W. Nevinson, the scion of radical bourgeois parents led a group whilst at The Slade before the Great War that called themselves *The Coster Gang*. These adopted the dress and boisterousness of the cockneys (Fox, 1987: 152), seeking out mock, and sometimes real fights with the police, progressive students and even authentic costers. This imitation of the subversiveness and violence that lurked under the surface of working class life may, according to Lisa Tickner (1992 in Black 2003: 23), reflect the 'crisis of masculinity' in avant-garde circles of the period highlighting the tension between modernity and the dulling conformity of consumer capitalism. In 1914, Eric Kennington, later an official artist in both world wars, painted the stark, brutal and overwhelmingly modern, *The Coster Mongers* (fig. 3 in appendix). The painting, whose main focus is the confrontational glare of a muscular, red-waistcoated street seller seems additionally to conceal a longing from the painter. In both instances the cockney coster had become an image on which to hang a bourgeois neuroses; a ventriloquised and caricatured symbol of 'real' life.

By the 1920s, after the slaughter of the trenches, the ubiquity of the cockney identity as formulated by Chevalier and the Cockney Novelists had waned. Caught between the dialectic of imperial decline and the first, heroic phase of modernism, cockney henceforth would be only periodically and sporadically useful to its hegemonic creators as a motif and a warning siren that a certain *type* of Englishness was under threat.

⁴⁸ For these wartime recollections see - Hamilton, 1920.

By now, the East End had been captured by Labour. Although this in itself was by no means a systemic challenge (rather the result of campaigning by a timid political organisation rooted in a “defensive solution to the employer’s counter offensive of the 1890s” (Stedman Jones, 1982: 118)), the origin of that success might be partly responsible for the elites’ re-identification with a timeless, bucolic, England *profonde*. The transformation of this hegemonic idea of ‘Englishness’ had certainly started much earlier, but the codification of it as a reflection of its bourgeois image - the cloaking of “...its cold mercantile heart in swaths of chiffon sentiment” - was a relocation of it to the Home Counties where it continues to symbolically reside.⁴⁹

In London, the middle classes looked to the Metropolitan Line and its suburban havens; the sterile semis, housing the sons and daughters of clerks, accountants and returning colonial administrators who had imagined from afar an ordered, leafy home in the image of ordered, imperial cities like New Delhi (Wilson, 1982).

For the cockney, this sense of the pastoral had been encapsulated by the rise of the allotment from the late nineteenth century. In many East End boroughs these small plots of waste land enabled the working classes, especially those in casual employment like dockers, to grow their own food and to supplement their diet. The allotments also linked these (mostly) men with their peasant pasts and cultivatable land lost through previous centuries’ enclosures. It conjoined with notions of local community, civic engagement and, kept them out of the pub (Scott, 2010). In some senses it foreshadowed the Essex ‘pioneer’ movement which by the late 1920s saw East Enders built their own, sometimes rather makeshift, holiday homes and cultivate their own land in the county.

It is within this period that the institutions of contemporary England are formed: The Oxford English Dictionary, the national art galleries and the employment of English as an academic subject. The ‘Georgian’ poets; Rupert Brooke, D. H. Lawrence, Walter De La Mare *et al*, all evoked a romantic rurality along with the virtues of a moral responsibility tied to a particular kind of ‘Englishness’. Kipling broken by the death of his son, retreated to Sussex and Ebenezer Howard planned to create the

⁴⁹ Self, Will. *The Guardian*, 6 September, 2014: 19.

synthesis of a rural fantasy in satellite towns. However, the period was one where, everything seemed, “pregnant with its contrary” (Marx, [1856]1969: 500). This reinvention of Englishness coincided with a modernism (albeit as a confusing site of several intersecting discourses) that championed the city.

Although these ‘Modern Times’ were about the ‘experience’ of the new-fashioned and exciting city, they were also about uncertainty. Once, working class identities had been formed singularly within families or within artisanal living arrangements, but they were now assembled in different, more complex multi-dimensional spaces as workers flooded into city’s offices from working class satellites like Barking or Dagenham.

Although references to eel and pie shops are conspicuous by their absence in the editorial content of Edwardian London’s newspapers and magazines (a reflection of the continuing lack of interest and understanding of developing working class culture by the bourgeois press), they are visible in plain sight and seem to develop quietly within unexamined working class communities away from the glare and approbation from the seats of the wealthier patrons of the music hall (and subsequently the cinema).⁵⁰

Although the coster, with his horse-drawn cart was now increasingly an anachronism, this period was ironically a golden age for the eel and pie shops. These decades mark the start of the empires of the triumvirate of the great pie shop families, the Cooke’s, the Manze’s and the Kelly’s. Print advertisements from the period indicate an expansion of eel and pie establishments and the changing nature of their role and fare. The shops were still selling foods like soup that the Victorian street would recognise but by now they were a natural inhabitant of a contemporary working class high street.⁵¹ In one poor area of East London a plethora of modest

⁵⁰ Within all of my research, I can find only one music hall song that directly references the shops - *The Little Eel-Pie Shop* from the 1870s - that was sung by George Laybourne to the tune of Rossini’s *Carneval de Venice*. I understand this absence as indicative of the ubiquity but perceived cultural unimportance of them. See - Newton, 1975: 61.

⁵¹ *London Daily News*, 10 April 1902: 2 - “£25 eel pie and soup house old established, well-known business, near King’s Cross genuine living trade capital fixtures and utensils included.” *Kentish Mercury*, 12 December 1902: 1 - “Under distress for rent. 31 high-street, Deptford. Messrs Newell and Hamlyn will sell by auction at Two O’clock... the fittings and utensils in-trade of an eel pie

eating places are recorded that included no less than three pie shops and one hundred and twenty-three coffee shops.⁵² This would seem to indicate, likely because of housing conditions - necessity rather than choice - “that much working class life still took place outside of the home” (German and Rees, 2012: 157).

After the First World War, real wages fell, and inequality had grown (Cole and Postgate, 1971: 496-498). Music hall reflected the cockney uncertainties of the time with sentimental songs that dealt with evictions (“My Old Man said follow the van”), homelessness (“I live in Trafalgar Square”) and overcrowding (“If it wasn’t for the ‘ouses in between”). This period may also mark the first of a series of epochs of ‘forgettings’ (and subsequent ‘rememberings’) of the cockney identity and its allied culture in the eel and pie shops.

Although the Chevalier cockney of late Victoriana was palimpsestic, it was, in the final analysis, a fiction. Its subsequent haunting of the following century might be interpreted as a way to anchor both a lost authentic working class culture (based on a pre-capitalist form and an invented platform) and a temporal anchorage *against* the ‘time-space’ compression of the new modernist century (Harvey, 1989: 147).

For the youth of the elite, the inter-war years saw a flamboyant reassertion of class difference. The ‘Bright Young Things’, the inheritors of Stein’s ‘lost generation’ caroused with a Modernist *swagger*, whilst the cockney made do with a flickering projection of their refracted lives in the escapist cinema. The East End sustained itself with Bank Holiday excursions and summer camping in Kent fields picking hops.

⁵³ By 1920 there are 89 eel pie premises listed in the Post Office Directory.⁵⁴

and dining room business comprising counter, seats and tables, eel kettle, pie warmer, crockery etc. Auction offices 487 New Cross Road SE.

⁵² *Clarion*, Friday 28 October 1904: 5 - “A report issued by Poplar Borough’s Sanitary Committee inspires a contemporary to remark that there seems no chance of anyone starving in the borough *if he be in possession of a few coppers*. It was stated that there are in the borough the following establishments - Coffee Shops, 123; fried fish shops, 68; eating houses, 23; dining rooms, 35; cook shop, 1; eel-pie shops, 5; restaurants, 109; pie shops, 3; sausage shops, 4; tripe shops, 7. But what of the scores of people who do not possess ‘the few coppers’ wherewith the purchase the succulent sausage and the toothsome eel-pie?”

⁵³ At its height, from the Twenties to the Fifties, about 200,000 East Enders - mostly women and children - made the annual pilgrimage down into the Kentish hop gardens, filling the ‘hopper’s specials’ trains which left from London Bridge station in the early hours of the morning.

⁵⁴ *Post Office London Directory for 1920*, Commercial Directory, *Post Office London Directory for 1920*: 2131.

The cockney was, however, still a figure of occasional journalistic curiosity, principally for editorial 'colour'. Stephen Graham, writing in the *Westminster Gazette* in 1925, visits the East India Dock Road where he recounts a Saturday night's revelry in the 'four-penny gallery' where "coster flappers" wedge themselves "among the lads." Outside, "The public-houses have arcades, wherein an overflow of customers stand and smoke" and "One walks along to what may be called 'Eel Pie Corner' - for there is so much eel pie for sale."⁵⁵ The cockney identity is alive, well and boisterous, but largely ignored. Again, newspaper advertisements are often the only way to gauge the condition of the eel and pie shops. They seem to reveal that the shops are popular, capacious, and busy often with live eel stalls on the pavement in front of them.⁵⁶ A piece in *The Sphere* from 1925 locates the cockney and the eel and pie shop as both numerous and as a place to eat quickly and run - synchronous with the busy, 'modern', urban cockney:

In the jellied eel and eel-pie centres round the Elephant and Castle the standers gather morning and evening at counters or ledges, wolf their stewed eels, pay and depart.⁵⁷

By 1938, Mass Observation, forensically reported from The Old Kent Road how,

The market men don't pack up until after nine, and the pubs fill up quickly... At closing time... [the street] fills up again ... some sing. Some make for the fish and chip shops, others to meat pie and jellied eel establishments. In these main sale is 2d and 3d. hot meat pies, with pennyworths of mashed potatoes, which have lots of parsley chopped up with them (This parley garnishing seems peculiar to south of the river in London. Obs. has seldom encountered it on the north side, but every sausage and mash shop in the Old Kent Rd or Walworth Rd districts has it)

⁵⁵ Graham, Stephen, "London at night. In the four-penny gallery", *Westminster Gazette*, 25 February 1925: 10.

⁵⁶ An advertisement in the *Westminster Gazette*, 27 September 1922: 3, speaks of "shop fittings inc. eel tanks £175 all in..." Another in *Westminster Gazette*, 29 June 1923: 12, references an "Eel and Pie busy spot. Camberwell. Seats 25: 3 rooms... old estb..."

⁵⁷ *The Sphere*, 18 April 1925: 16.

The piece continues to render further fascinating detail that echoes Victorian health scandals but also offers up rare evidence that by now the shops sell eels, pies and mashed potatoes.

In this shop there is a large notice saying, ‘I will pay personally to anyone £500 who can bring forward the newspaper showing I have been prosecuted concerning the contents of my pies.’ And another notice, on glass ‘Our celebrated pea soup Nourishes and Sustains. Per 2d and 3d basin.’⁵⁸

The mention of soup further gives lie to the contemporary claim that the shops have only ever sold their contemporarily (and false) memorialised combination.

These inter-war journalistic interventions, simultaneous with the reporting of the modernity of the elites, are part of a pivot away from an imperial, heroic national identity to a reinvention that privileged a private, domestic and understated ordinariness. The cockney archetype was now a useful metaphor for an everyday working class Briton defined by their modesty, quietness, simplicity and kindness to animals (Samuel, 1989: xxiv). This ordinariness would soon form the basis of a national fiction of the decent working class grimly ‘carrying on’ fighting Hitler. It would also form the basis of another fiction that Britons were a ‘race apart’ in that battle and subsequently contribute to an exclusively racial concept of citizenship that would develop problematically after the Second World War. For the time being, however, George Orwell could codify this native common-sense normality that “... centres around things which even when they are communal are not official - the pub, the football match, the back garden, the fireside and the ‘nice cup of tea’” (Orwell, 1946 in Waters, 1997: 211).

⁵⁸ MOA: TC Music, dancing and Jaz, 38/2/C – The Lambeth Walk, XIV: 7 (image1381).

2.9 The cockney keeps calm and carries on⁵⁹

The co-option of the cockney's cheerfulness and determination in the face of the Blitz is the basis of the haunting of the present-day's austerity nostalgia. The roots of this may partly be found in the framing of the extraordinarily successful musical, *Me and My Girl* (1937). In it, Bill, a Lambeth cockney stands to inherit an Earldom but risks it all for his 'common' girlfriend, Sally. The Lambeth Walk, the dance the musical popularised (with the help of the massed ranks of pearly actors onstage), cemented the London cockney as "the class who knew how to have a good time" (Madge and Harrison in Stedman Jones, 1989: 313). It contrasted their 'traditional' culture with the 'fast', Americanism of the Jazz age, and also valourised the notion of cockney as crucially *biddable* innocents perhaps a remnant of the Cockney Novelists.

In the inter-war period, the ordinariness of the cockney had additionally been moulded by the 'benevolent bureaucracy' of Herbert Morrison's London County Council. Morrison's endeavours, via the most moderate Labourism, housed and educated many of the London poor, yet the prosperity of this vision depended on the unquestioned role of imperial commodities that by now were traded via a kind of Empire market bloc in contrast to the former rigours of Free Trade. This hegemonic concept was instilled by the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) whose activities (and films like, *Song of Ceylon* (1934) inculcated an idea of benevolence and protectionism that would eventually form an element of the Welfare State.

The successor to the EMB, the General Post Office Film Unit, was responsible for much of the lauded documentary output of its time, especially the film *Night Mail* (1936). The documentary, a precursor to much of the wartime propaganda, features real working class men who were, almost for the first time, not the anonymous subject of ridicule (McGahan, 2010). Notwithstanding the rather ironic aesthetic debt

⁵⁹ I use this slogan in an ironic sense to reference the contemporary nostalgia that surrounds austerity. The now ubiquitous phrase was discarded by the Ministry of Information after a test printing and never found its way to public display. Rediscovered, it was sold as a reproduction by Barter Books in Northumberland and then in the shop at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London where it coincided with the austerity regimes of the Conservative government almost seventy years later. See - Hatherley, 2016: 18.

to Socialist Realism, this prototype of the everyday hero was utilised in perhaps the most famous wartime film, *London Can Take It* (1940). Although cockneys are not specifically mentioned, the title is significant. In contradiction to the profoundly conservative rural locale of the pre-war, the title is geographically specific (much to the annoyance of bombed northern cities) and the heart of the nation is seen once again as London.

It was to this end that the Ministry of Information conscripted the cockney into the war effort. Contrary to the axiomatic notion that the cockney was a reactionary patriot who could be willingly bombed night after night and actually enjoy it, the booing of the royal family in the East End seemed to have been a genuine shock to the political establishment (Calder, 2012). Less so perhaps was the extraordinary rise in crime under the cover of Blitz darkness and the role of the cockney black market 'spiv' who, along with more positive representations, has remained in the public consciousness, forever associated with London crime (Leg, 2017).

The enduring duality of the cockney identity notwithstanding, the experience of wartime shelters had foreshadowed an inevitable period of radical social change. According to Lord Morley in 1941, "It is quite common now to see Englishmen speaking to each other in public although they have never been formally introduced" (Timmins, 1995: 32).

The end of the Second World War definitively marked the universalisation of bourgeois democracy and in many ways was also the culmination of the long, concomitant nineteenth century journey of the cockney and its culture. Its identity, so long defined as a subordinate vehicle of political exclusion, would now be irresistible as a defining character in the new nation as determined by an insurgent Labour administration.

The imperial foundations of that nation however could no longer contain even the most modest aspirations of the working classes. This national, cross-class populist project was a reward, not only for winning the war, but also for their loyalty to capital.

In the decade after victory, the cockney *per se* played a bit-part cultural role but its translation as the epitome of cross-class wartime solidarity was important.⁶⁰

In *Passport to Pimlico* (1949) it was only through an appeal to a 'Blitz spirit' that societal cohesion could again be achieved. In 1959, the Dutch historian, Johan Huizinga suggested that the only distinctive national character the British possessed "was their susceptibility to the illusion that they had one, and a very remarkable one at that" (Huizinga in Waters, 1997: 213). As Chris Waters suggests, "To enter the later 1940s and 1950s is to enter a new world in which the components of national identity that had been manufactured in the 1930s and early 1940s seemed to come unstuck (Waters, 1997: 213). That misplacement of identity is painfully dramatised in the semi-autobiographical *Limelight* (1952) and more presciently in *The Entertainer* (1957) with Laurence Olivier's Archie personifying the ashes of a post-imperial Britain through the character of an old and bitter music hall comic.

The bright hopes of a more equitable post-war society were soon dashed by America's insistence on both the rapid repayment of war debts and Sterling's return to full convertibility. It was also dashed by the Labour government's use of troops to break the strikes of the working class in the docks of the East End in 1945. The docks continued industrial action along with lorry drivers, bus and train workers in 1949 and 1950 when Arthur Deakin, General Secretary of the TGWU told them he would "not move one finger" to help them (Murray, 2008: 100). The Labour government again used troops against power workers and the Smithfield meat porters in 1950 and in the same year sent gas workers to prison for illegal strikes.

Fascism resumed its domestic march as a resurgent Mosleyite movement marched through mostly Jewish areas in the East End and overseas Britain ignominiously withdrew from empire to the bloody horrors of Indian partition and the Palestinian *Nakba*. Phil Piratin (1948: 89) one of two Communist Party MPs elected in the East End in 1945, revealed that only one tenth of the planned 1300 council houses had actually been built by 1948 but that money had been found to redecorate Clarence House for the new queen.

⁶⁰ The character of Mrs Mop, a cockney *char-lady* is likely one of the last mainstream representations of this period. See - *It's That Man Again*, BBC Home service, 1939-1949.

2.10 Disillusionment and the spoils of war

After 1945, as Blackwell and Seabrook (1986: 64) attest,

... what was not recognised at the time, however, was that the bonding which occurred between the Labour Movement and the majority of the working class had occurred at a moment of unusual turbulence and, far from being a base which had been one for all time, was actually a precarious achievement which would have to be fought for in order to be retained.

The palimpsestic cockney identity that had been inherited from the struggles of the nineteenth century was a mixture of different sections of the labouring classes. London had always been a city of artisans and small masters, clerks and shopkeepers that teetered between the precarity of petty-bourgeois trades, the employed working class and the enormous pool of casual labour decried as the residuum. After the First World War, this structure changed. Rapid industrialisation meant that by the early 1930s,

London accounted for five-sixths of the net increase in the number of factories, two-fifths of employment in new factories, and one third of all factory extensions undertaken even though it had only one fifth of the population. (Pollard, 1962 in Stedman Jones, 2014: 348)

However, the ambitions and security of this new proletariat was undermined by the shallow roots of the socialist, Social Democratic Federation and factionalism between skilled and unskilled labour. Overwhelmingly, the future of this class was in the hands of Morrison's timid Labour bureaucracy that had been absorbed into the state apparatus during both world wars. Unsurprisingly, the social structures of these communities, largely uneducated, insular, sometimes self-employed and inculcated by the first bloom of modern consumerism via the music hall, remained relatively conservative by nature.

John Marriot's (1996) work on the history of cockney areas like Canning Town, Silvertown and North Woolwich, however, is instructive. The original migrants to

these areas had been agricultural labourers (not peasants) “who had direct experience of capitalist social relations in the countryside, and casual labourers displaced from the East End by collapse of stable economies ... all brought with them the imprint of an older rural culture and kinship systems that proved remarkably resistant to urban modernity” (Marriot, 1996: 87).

These communities, celebrating their lives in overcrowded slums were insular, boisterous and inevitably, in an inversion of the Victorian imposed social order, the street was their entertainment. The street was important not only because houses were cramped and small but also because the community represented a form of strong local identity, usually the result of casualism. This meant it was necessary for workers to live very close to precarious employment opportunities.

Entire streets were composed of workers and their families who formed inevitable social solidarities connected by work. For Marriot (1996: 87), “street parties... the celebration of body over mind, sport ... and ‘crime’ elements of the carnivalesque survived among the metropolitan poor.” Indeed, the formative Dock Strike in 1880, of which some of these communities had been part, “bore as much resemblance to a mediaeval carnival as to a modern industrial strike” (Stedman Jones, 2014: 347). This epitomised the East End as a spatial disruption to the rest of the city: its occupants transgressive. These were places that the police kept away from “... for the people are rough and more than once water has been thrown over constables” (Ridenhour in Fishman, 1988: 23). In an echo of the earlier eroticisation of the poor as *other* by the bourgeoisie, East End women were inevitably sexualised as simultaneously chaste or bawdy. This dynamic is played out in James Joyce’s ‘Lundub’ (as he has it in *Finnegan’s Wake*) where cockney matriarchs, so important in the nostalgic histories of the pie shops, are “vaudeville, sexually desirable, disorderly and humorous” (Boland, 2016: 84). The growth of these areas to the East of London promoted a distinct cultural and political character. They were “... everyday worlds... multiple sites of resistance and contest outside of traditional political institutions [found within] families and households” (Rose, 1998 in August, 2001:196). If the roots of the contemporary cockney are to be found it is, along with the proletarian entrepreneurialism of the coster, located here.

In 1892 West Ham (South) had elected the first independent Labour MP and the first Labour council, but election turnouts were consistently low. Marriot argues that because the Labour Party was universalist in aims (likely seen as middle class, outside irrelevances) this reinforced a resentful sense of local identity, where “[L]oyalties to place then take precedence over loyalties to class, spatialising political action” (Harvey, 1989: 279). Marriot’s research is clear that certainly in the local West Ham Labour party, sensibilities were un-ideological in that there remained a virulent anti-communist, anti-cosmopolitan and overtly local prejudice that rejected any progressive moves that did not address hyper-native concerns.⁶¹ Extrapolating these tendencies across London areas seen as traditional and cockney, we find that in terms of electoral politics, voting Labour had crucially become a habit for these communities but not a part of their defining identity.

It is within these local ties (albeit in post-war Bethnal Green) that Michael Young and Peter Willmott’s (1957) sociological work was based. Just as the defeated post-Chartist working class sought sanctuary and consolation in the distractions of blossoming consumerism and the music hall, as Richard Hoggart (1992: 166), recognised, the “real things are the human and companionable things - home and family affection, friendship and being able to say ‘Enjoy y’self’”. What counted was not class politics but “neighbours, family, patrons who could do favours or provide jobs” (Hobsbawm, 1989: 10).

However, Jon Lawrence’s recent critical re-examination of the original transcripts of *Family and Kinship in East London* (building on significant, mostly feminist criticism from the 1970s) finds a subtly different world where “... notes paraphrase respondent’s testimony... [and] generally represent *reconstructions* of vernacular speech rather than verbatim testimony” (2016: 574). The re-examined research finds the streets that defined what was left of the post-Victorian cockney identity riven by micro-class differences, petty antagonisms and “specious ramblings about kitchen matriarchs” (Oakley, 2014: 58). Johnny Speight, the working class scriptwriter

⁶¹ Perry Anderson’s arguments about the nature and historical context of England having the first proletariat are significant here. “It was not until the 1880s that the working class really began to recover from the traumatic defeat of the 1840s. By then the world had moved on. In consciousness and combativity, the English working class had been over-taken by almost all its continental opposites. Marxism had missed it.” See - Anderson, 1964: 36.

responsible for much 'kitchen-sink' television in the 1970s, would write of his family moving four streets to a different house in nearby Canning Town in the same period.

It was almost a social upheaval. Some of the people in this new street even had aspidistras in the window. They all wore shirts. At the very top end they even wore collars and ties. The houses had bay windows. We still had an outside toilet...But we were a cut above the others. (Speight, 1973: 20)

Certainly, this may have been a place where "Anyone feeling lonely only had to stand at the door, and ...someone would come along ... and cheer their neighbour up" (Blake, 1977: 12). But it was also a place from which many people couldn't wait to escape from; where despite Young and Willmott's well-intentioned bourgeois socialism, many people *wanted* to move to new council estates in Debden. Bethnal Green was a place where people were scared to admit they liked opera because they would be seen as 'snobbish' and where 'respectability' was often performative. (Lawrence 2016: 576).⁶²

"The working class community, as it survived in the writings and in the political discourse of working class commentators was a retrospective construction" (Bourke, 1994: 137).⁶³ Although this assertion may be too broad, it seems that the allegiance of social solidarities were restrained by limited choice: to 'make ends meet' and 'to keep up with the Joneses'. Relationships based on 'cockney culture' were about negotiations of power structures within tiny community 'cells' - differences for example about how well people scrubbed their steps (Blacker, 1974: 165-166). Different communities were often hostile simply because they were geographically separate, and association was made through marriage, music and sport (Benson, 1989). As Trevor Blackwell and Jeremy Seabrook (although talking more generally about working class communities) presciently recorded in the 1980s:

⁶² Interestingly, the East End *wasn't* an entirely culturally barren zone. As Paul Newland suggests, during WWII, "The working class also enjoyed a surprisingly wide range of culture, including jazz, classical music and drama. See - Newland, 2008: 47. More, The Sadler's Wells Ballet had performed in Victoria Park in the summers of 1942 and 1943. See - Palmer, 2000: 145-146.

⁶³ For a rebuttal of Bourke's 'trenchant' critique of community, see - Jones, 2018: 122-125.

These discoveries serve the function of covering up what was actually happening, which was that working class people were deserting these very communities, as individuals and not as a class as soon as they could afford to buy their way out. (1986: 110)

Indeed, as Carolyn Steedman's (1987) autobiographical work evidences, the grand nostalgic affirmations of working class life found in Hoggart, Young and Willmott often fail to recognise complicated individual psychologies of, for example envy and the very real emotional desire for material *things*.⁶⁴ It is partly these clandestine individualisms that will eventually re-shape the late twentieth century cockney and form its contemporary notion.

Urban densities had been falling since the 1920s and many wanted to move to places where community and personal relationships would be based on love not "proximity and need" (Lawrence, 2019: 1). The fracturing of those casual-work dominated communities, initially by the Blitz, slum clearances and then the palimpsestic replacement of music hall by first cinema and then personal television, showed a world outside these restrictive, 'defended' neighbourhoods (Suttles, 1972: 21). The failure of Labourism to capitalise on the wider solidarities of the Welfare State (and its subsequent absorption into the establishment at both local and national level) led to a further political disillusionment and an embrace of modernity among London's working classes that was profoundly capitalist, leading to a reinforced conservatism that largely defines contemporary cockney identity and with it, the constituency of the eel and pie shops.

For the East End communities that remained after subsequent waves of migration down the A13, that social conservatism was linked to a hyper-local identity that historically defined (in a large part) the customer base of each eel and pie shop. The shops had been overwhelmingly street market-adjacent (or adjacent to where historic street markets or 'ghost-markets' had once been). It is this study's contention that these memories of distrustful, hyper-local micro-communities ensured both the

⁶⁴ Steedman's work is a useful counterweight to the heavily gendered rendering of monolithic, collective, working class life. For a more London-centric perspective, see also - White, 2013.

popularity of the shops in their immediate post-war heyday and their continued anonymity in plain sight to other classes. It may also explain the (partial) cultural distrust of outsiders unaware of local social codes and solidarities, until these bindings were loosened by the final breakage of the traditional high street by Neoliberal forces and increasing gentrification from perhaps the 1990s onwards.

The contemporary 'forgetting' and 'remembering' of cockney, contingent upon utility to the dominant hegemony, can be seen in this context as a modern continuation of a constructed fear and suspicion in an urban geography unmitigated by bourgeois intervention or control and mirrored in the parallel defensiveness and suspicion of cockney communities.

Whilst the Victorian cockney was still within living memory, Franklyn (1953: 45) could observe that, “

Hidden in the cockney soul there is a stubborn, almost sullen resistance to reform; this is based on a deep attachment to environment... [in] the apparent appreciation of all that is being done for him, there lurks a wilful grip on life as he himself thinks ought to be lived, and as he intends to continue to live it...

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the cockney, a specifically London identity born of the increasing primacy of the capital, has signified different meanings at different times. The contours of cockney have largely however been defined by the powerful and in that sense, the ascription of the term has long been a weathervane of changing class relations.

The identity appears to have been an early signifier of the developing tensions between the emergent urban capitalist forces and older rural authority and privilege. By the eighteenth century, cockney had become a site of conflict between the Old Corruption of the *ancien regime* and different stratifications of a new class. This cockney was defined as much through cultural sensibilities linked to urbanisation, modernity and democracy as through cold, hard commerce. Here was a class that had been ascendent during the Regency but by the early nineteenth century was still

politically unaccommodated. The cockney became a site of contestation between the idea of the courtier and the citizen (Thompson, 1991) and this tension mirrored the rise of a new kind of Londoner.

Dickens' early nineteenth century (auto)biography of this precarious interstitial petty-bourgeois group of grocers, journalists, shop assistants and (eventually) eel and pie shop owners further revealed that cockney was now partly informed by a new consumer dynamic. The cockney dandy of the period, reinforced by popular cultural forms performatively linked lifestyles in an escapist pantomime that celebrated the appearance of the elites. However, by his use of an already "obsolete" dialect characteristic of the poor (Mayhew, 1857: 5), Dickens increasingly tied the cockney identity firstly to an urban working class and then by extension to its feared apotheosis, the residuum. This formation conjoined with a performative, dynamic, dramatic identity that was further informed by street commerce (Jankiewicz, 2012).

The continuing class deterioration of the cockney evidenced the identity's increasing dualities. The cockney was now situated between the law-abiding and the criminal; between the repulsive and the erotic and between the 'respectable' poor and the worthless 'other'.

Dickens' representation of cockney likely influenced the music hall, which called for ever more 'authentic' performers (Scott 2002: 237). This striving for authenticity was largely reflexive, with performers often replicating already existing representations, rather than any real figure (Turner 2002: 256). The increasingly palimpsestic cockney identity was further constructed by its conscription into the imperial nation to help pacify a disruptive proletariat additionally signalled through theories of racial superiority and a limited democratic expansion. This coding was transmitted via the behavioural forms of popular song, public houses and the eel and pie shops in, as we have already seen, a culture of consolation (Stedman Jones, 1974).

Largely insignificant between the wars except as a nostalgic signal to a good humoured and dutiful subaltern, the cockney re-emerges during the Blitz to define a stoic 'ordinariness' that would become the basis for the Welfare State. By war's end, the cockney, a character built on the foundations of assumed identity and fragments

of working class reality, did not simply fade as Stedman Jones (1989) suggests but had become inherently unstable, its contradictions, as I shall examine shortly, increasingly evident.

The cockney had at times come to define the nation yet, like the eel and pie shops, it was both culturally coded and hidden in plain sight, insular and hyper-local, its meaning complicated and precarious.

The notion of cockney, and thus the significance and prominence of the pie and eel shops I argue, rises and falls in direct relation to its usefulness to capital at times of political stress. In this way, cockney identity contains dual manifestations of welcome and hostility and is rooted in a deeply conservative melancholia and saccharine nostalgia.

Identity is the landscape upon which the eel and pie shop culture is built; *memory* - which I shall interrogate in due course - is the vehicle of its transmission.

3. The Defensive Trench of Empire

Introduction.

In this chapter I return briefly to the nineteenth century to thematically contextualise the cockney identity within the notion of whiteness and empire.

I examine how the ‘dirt and darkness’ of the London poor (Marriot, 2003) was recorded and classified by the ascendent bourgeoisie, simultaneous with contemporary racial theories, into moral notions (Stallybrass and White, 1986). These depictions, I argue, imported as they were from the conquests of Empire, were analogous to the representations of the slave society built in America and largely in contrast to the previous (relative) cultural flexibilities of the Georgian city.

The stratagem of extending ‘whiteness’ to the working classes during the New Imperialism to constrain potentially explosive domestic social forces was I suggest, a fundamental shift by the elites from overt repression to a more consensual version of hegemony. This reframing of the nation as a racial singularity (Bonnet, 1998; Virdee, 2014) I argue was comparable to the elite’s appeal to Protestantism during the seventeenth and eighteenth century wars with France.

I suggest that because the London working classes had been “invited to participate in the rule of others” (Mackenzie, 1986: 254), the eventual concessions of universal suffrage and the creation of the Welfare State were conducted within a racial context whose effects are entirely significant to the contemporary cockney identity memorialised in the contemporary imagination as emblems of a largely mono-racial, hyper-localism to which the eel, pie and mash shops are to a large extent a spiritual sanctuary.

By the extensive use of cultural texts, I thematically chart the cockney identity from the immediate post-war period to the New Labour era. The physical devastation of

the Blitz was for the cockney I suggest, a moment 'between two worlds'; the world of wartime Britain, its austere aftermath and the changed Britain that came after. I suggest that this subsequent memoryscape became a central motif within the social imagery of the period. Further I propose that this period and its subsequent reimagining retains enormous contemporary cultural and political relevance as a touchstone for the growth of anti-globalisation sentiment, populism and, eventually Brexit.

I link the destruction of cockney territoriality through generally unsympathetic zonal redevelopments, subsequent gentrification and gradual exodus to a partial paralleling of the Victorian 'clearing of the streets' which largely broke traditional kinship networks. I further connect these developments with the allied decline of long-established forms of labour and concomitant social structures simultaneous to the identity's contested relationship with modernity. In this I argue that housing and its allocation were central to the *ressentiment* towards mass immigration and the hastening of the transmission (and simulacra) of the cockney identity towards Essex and its 'dual class trajectories' (Watt, Millington and Huq, 2014).

In all of this I outline the contours of cockney as an identity concurrent to the evolution of a post-war national economy and a popular modernity celebrated in working class ritual of which the eel, pie and mash shops, although in a long trajectory of decline, remained relatively vibrant and central.

The traditional cockney identity I argue, simultaneously continued its role as a nostalgic conduit to capital but evolved multiple valances that spoke to an increasing emphasis on popular culture, age, choice and individuality (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2018) further complicating its continued existence as a palimpsestic construction. Through this notion I begin to trace a new and coexistent East End culture, born of an emergent multicultural narrative that corresponded to a social democratic project that birthed the ancestors of the contemporary cockney.

My research suggests that the cockney's role as a conduit to the forces of capital was reprised through the years of the neoliberal ascendancy as a signifier of tradition and as a nostalgic scaffolding. This in some ways narrated the "slow cancellation of

the future” (Beradi, 2011) by forces of the Right that captured elements of the East End working class by appealing to their race and their perceived abandonment through an ‘authoritarian populism’ (Hall, 1978). The contemporary reimagining of the eel and pie shops as a totem of a lost white, working class London is, I argue, firmly anchored within this nostalgic haunting.

Finally, I narrate the contours of the subsequent demonisation of the culture of the London working class by New Labour through Late Modernity’s valorisation of globalisation and aspiration. I suggest that the notion of ‘ordinariness’, once epitomised by the Blitz cockney, was now to be located in middle class values through the prism of culture not class. I suggest that Blair’s Labour Party had forced the white working class “to think of themselves as a new ethnic group” (Jones, 2011) and this would be increasingly reflected within the constituency of the eel, pie and mash shops.

3.1 The ‘whitening’ of the London working class

As the Victorian century opened, the bourgeoisie began to hegemonize and historicise their own ascendancy and distinction from the morass of the proletariat. Whereas the poor previously had been seen as simply criminal, the primacy of Britain’s industrial working class meant that it began to be defined in dark, monstrous terms: a creature born of a shadowy, labyrinthine city (Baldick, 1990). Progressively, the proletariat came to be seen, literally as a race apart and this notion was framed in terms borrowed from the subjugation of native populations conquered by Empire.

By the middle of the century, fear of decline and domestic disorder meant that delineations of race and class merged with pseudo-science and were recoded into an explicitly moral formulation around the ‘darkness’ of dirt and disease (Marriot, 2003). In this way, a constructed identity of ‘whiteness’ and racial purity became central to the bourgeois imagination. Its absence defined the location and exclusion of the poor within the nation. For the ‘fallen’ cockney of the late nineteenth century this categorisation would be crucial.

The gentlemen who explored the 'dark' inner-city colonies of London as brave colonial adventurers were a central conduit to this conceit. In this way, the journalist James Greenwood could reference in 1874,

Creatures that you know to be female by the length and raggedness of hair that makes their heads hideous, and by their high-pitched voices, with bare red arms and their bodies bundled in a complication of dirty rags (Marriot, 2003: 161).

Peter Stallybrass and Alon White (1986: 128) have successfully argued that dirt was an important signifier for the bourgeois cultural imagination as it could map a class-based otherness which might contaminate both the physical and moral boundaries of the city. This could be navigated, whereby "the axis of the body is transcoded through the axis of the city (1986: 145)". 'Good dirt' was the result of hard labour and 'bad dirt' the result of moral pollution. The correlation of London's topography in these terms was coterminous with Prince Albert's shocking death from Typhoid and dirt increasingly became a metonym for crime and anarchy.

In the gas, glass and gleaming counters of the early eel and pie shops we see this notion of hygiene and propriety internalised and translated into a nascent, aspirational working class culture. Ironically, of course the shops also traded in eels: a bottom-feeding creature that had been the staple of London's poor for centuries but at this stage, eel-eating still crossed class boundaries. Wesleyan allegories like 'cleanliness is next to godliness' however remain deeply rooted in working class domesticity, identity and memory.

After the mid-century, a racial coding of the home populations started to become central to the classification of the moral structure of the poor themselves. In this way, George Godwin, editor of the *Builder*, could in 1854 suggest that when in order to investigate the conditions of the working classes, "It is necessary to brave the risks of fever and other injuries to health, and the contact of men and women often as lawless as the Arab or the Kaffir" (Marriot, 2003: 161).

Domestically this paradigm created obvious contradictions. London's urban poor, an increasingly significant political and social force, were overwhelmingly white, and this meant that their 'blackness' had to be constructed within a framework of an 'internal colonialism'. The Irish had already been primed for this racial encoding as 'primitives' during the Famine in the 1840s (Thompson, 2013: 348). Against the backdrop of the Fenian campaign, they would be visually *simianized* as monsters in brutal cartoons (Curtis, 1996) and Carlyle would speak of them as "the white negroes" (Marriot, 2003: 165). Significantly of course, both the Cooke's and the Kelly's eel and pie dynasties share an Irish immigrant heritage but as working class entrepreneurs, they rose above "the floating armies of labourers who built the canals, the docks, the railways and transformed the face of England" (Bermant, 1975: 43).

Simultaneous with the new notions of social Darwinism, the theories of Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882) had specifically warned of miscegenation within the *abyss* that would lead to a degeneration of the race (Pick, 1993). In this way, *The Saturday Review* in 1864 could speak about the Bethnal Green poor as, "... a race apart... of whom we know nothing, whose lives are of quite different complexion from ours... offer a very fair parallel to the separation of the slaves from the whites (Malik, 1996: 93).

The Daily Telegraph in August, 1866 would refer to white, working class rioters as "... negroes... who have the taste in their tribe for any disturbance..." (Lorimer, 1978: 195). According to Edwin Hood, "the negro is in Jamaica as the costermonger is in Whitechapel; he is very nearly often a savage with the mind of a child's" (Malik, 1996: 97). Increasingly, there seemed a parallel between the representation of some of the London working classes and the slave society built in America. Bonnett (1998: 336) points out how this 'colour divide' was reproduced in cultural texts of the period and that "the popular stereotype of the Negro in the mid-nineteenth century owed more to the new world than to Africa" (Lorimer, 1978: 206). Indeed, during the Chartist agitation of the 1830s and 1840s there had been a rhetorical (if exaggerated) linkage made by abolitionists between the conditions of bondage of the British industrial proletariat and that of slavery in America and the Caribbean. By the end of the 1860s however, this moral, reforming correlation amongst sections of the English middle classes had started to flag. The Indian Mutiny/The First War of

Independence (1857-1859), The American Civil War (1861-1865) and the Morant Bay Rebellion (1865) had all shaken the notion that colonial subjects could be held captive at arms-length as voiceless subalterns. When significant bread riots followed the collapse of the Thames ship-building industry in the 1860s, adding to the vast and threatening casual labouring mass of the residuum, bourgeois fear led to the questioning of the confident utilitarian moral and economic rationale underpinning of the administration of the Poor Laws (Stedman Jones, 2014: 15).⁶⁵

By the mid-1870s in response to widespread international economic recession European powers scrambled to further exploit the wealth of their colonies by expanding their territories in a race that would become known as the New Imperialism. To simultaneously constrain domestic demands for social change and achieve popular support for such global conquest necessitated extending the notion of 'whiteness' to accommodate the working classes in a transition to a popular, socially consensual (and eventually, welfarist) form of Imperialism. In this way, the nation could additionally be reframed as a patriotic, racial singularity to exclude the racialised 'other' (Bonnet, 1998; Virdee, 2014).

The formula for this transition may however be found in a much earlier, significant extension of the nation that was the elite's appeal to Protestantism during the seventeenth and eighteenth century wars with France. This address was aimed at uniting an English nation with the Scots and Welsh against a Catholic enemy demonised since the Reformation. The ingestion of the idea of nation was a fundamental shift by the elites from overt repression to a more consensual version of hegemony. This national framework appears to have largely held in place when the English artisanal class enjoined an ideological struggle against the Old Corruption and when a specific class consciousness began to form within the early proletariat. Both of these strands coalesced around the rhetoric of liberty that looked backwards to a patriotism framed by the 'freeborn' Englishman's "birthright" (Thompson, [1963] 2013: 85) and forward to the ideas of Paine.

⁶⁵ Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life among the Lowly* (1852) was a well-known and popular novel of the time and the racism and segregation of the society it portrayed drew direct comparisons with the English working class. For the economic crisis and The Poor Law see - Jones, 2014: 15.

However, the early proletariat began to contest the elite's concept of the nation as unjust because it excluded other racialised groups that were seen as equally British. Indeed, contrary to the long-standing view that the working classes were a heterogeneous mass, Irish Catholic migrants appear to have been key actors within these early democratic developments uniting many "radical strands not least the emancipation of Ireland, the abolition of the monarchy and slavery" (Virdee, 2014: 14). Thompson ([1963] 2013: 483, 652-654) attests that the Irish workers were present in Luddism and Virdee (2014) cites both John Doherty, an Irishman who became a national trade union leader and William Cuffay, a leading Chartist and the descendent of an African slave as evidence of this cosmopolitan culture of proletarian solidarity. This nascent inter-racial and religious unity during the "heroic age of the proletariat" (Anderson 1964: 33) was a connected struggle against slavery, imperialism in Ireland and for emancipation. It appears to have terrified the elites.

The siding of the bourgeoisie with the upper classes around the 1832 Reform Bill and the subsequent banning of Combinations began to dissipate this political-racial unity. ⁶⁶Irish labour was used to undercut other working class wages and without political leadership, antagonism grew. As Nancy Stepan (1982: 4-5) suggests, identity began to be manufactured around "a more parochial and nationalist outlook." This was deployed by the elites against the Irish in the 1830s and 1840s and was a "racist discourse produced for the emergent English working class" (Hanley, 2016: 109).

The notion that the Irish were now 'other' became more firmly ingested within the English working classes who, after political defeat, entered a period of "prolonged catatonic withdrawal" (Anderson, 1964: 33). In direct relevance for the cockney, this historical, racial idea of nation according to Virdee (2014: 5) limited "the political imagination of even those who were representatives of the exploited and the oppressed."

⁶⁶ Combinations refer to an early form of trades union.

Whiteness had now been re-framed as ordinary and commonplace to signify “the homely virtues of quietness, tidiness, cleanliness and decency” (Bonnett, 1998: 330). Exactly the qualities that would coalesce around the identity of the ‘respectable’ working class, the eel and pie shops and their customers. Bonnett sees the project of ‘whitening’ almost exclusively as uni-directional but, as Jonathan Hyslop (1999: 402) contends, this “fails to give sufficient centrality to direct working class involvement and participation in, and movement through, the empire, as a historic formative force in British working class racism.”

Historically, notions of blackness as ‘opposite’ had long been connected with performances within English Mummery to represent ancient liberties against the foreign yoke. ‘Blacking-up’ had also used by poachers and dockside against pressing gangs (Thompson, 1977). Both strategies linked ‘blackface’ with protest against the enslavement of the ‘freeborn’ Englishman in some sense sympathetically connected subjugation to blackness whether inferiority was implied or not.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss in fine detail preceding working class racisms, yet it seems clear that previous colonial exploits were informed by notions of white supremacy transmitted through an earlier ethnic chauvinism. Charles White’s 1799 treatise *Account in the Regular Gradation in Man* had suggested all races shared a common heritage in the Garden of Eden, but that Africans were degraded by their lack of civilisation (Hanley, 2016: 118). Indeed, some radicals like William Cobbett appealed to working men to define themselves against abolitionist’s compassion citing the slave’s revolt in San Domingo as evidence of their “politically uninformed barbarism” (in Wood, 1999). A more conservative, overtly racist notion of patriotism itself began to supersede this earlier radical patriotism to enable “the working class to participate in the rule of others” (Mackenzie, 1986: 254).

Like the later cockney identity, it has long been argued that this racism (militarism and jingoism) was inculcated into the working class identity not only by the music hall but by the mass circulation of patriotic fiction (Hobson, 1901), compulsory schooling and semi-military organisations like the Boys Brigade.

By the late 1870s, the instilling of Imperial whiteness linked to a nascent (masculinist) Labourism saw an emergent 'waterfront' culture in the East End docks. This, the defensive trench of Empire was where a tight-knit, hyper-localism of sailors and dockers saw themselves as bulwarks against 'alien cultures' in their own vernacular version of the pure white Englishman (Cohen, Qureshi and Toon, 1994).

Labourism further disseminated whiteness through an imperial working class of British, Australian and South African workers that traversed the world (Hyslop, 1999).⁶⁷ The incorporation of the working class as racially white allowed capitalism to mutate towards a more interventionist form. This mollified the sharper edges of class struggle and simultaneously addressed the "increasing complexity and consumer orientation of capitalist production" (Bonnett, 1998: 329). It was clear that the battles for the eventual creation of the Welfare State (and elements of welfarism across the white Commonwealth) were not conducted in a context free from race. Indeed,

The Imperial working class of the pre-First World War era was unable to separate its hostility to its own exploitation from its aspiration to incorporation in the dominant racial structure (Hyslop, 1999: 418).

So, when it did finally arrive in 1945, "welfare came wrapped in the Union Jack" (Bonnett, 1998: 329).

This process was however not linear: Andrew Crowhurst (1997) posits that white working class people still continued to concurrently identify and represent themselves positively as 'black' or 'other' using earlier music hall traditions. Indeed, when the American cake walk (a dance developed from gatherings on black slave plantations) was introduced to the London music halls in 1898 it was adapted by South London cockneys in their own swagger and eventually became the first danced Lambeth Walk in 1903 (Howkins, Collis and Dodd, 1986: 47).

⁶⁷ Jonathon Hyslop's work on the trans-national nature of the Imperial working class is formative here. He charts the progress of a largely Cornish mining community with in-demand specialist skills imbued with a small-masters ideology of individual liberalism rather than a working class communitarian socialism whose influence on the labour movement was profound. It was their championing of white-worker supremacy within an Imperial commonwealth that dominated the Trades Union movement until after World War Two. See - Hyslop, 1999: 398-421.

Cockney culture was certainly *not* in itself inherently racist. Although the bourgeois construction of the cockney in the cartoon of 'Arry in Punch was deeply prejudiced, London had for centuries been racially mixed - what might be called an early 'ordinary cosmopolitanism' (Gilroy, 2000).⁶⁸ When racial tensions emerged (such as national race riots in 1919) they were almost always due to the economic stresses of scarcity within capital but referred back to the elite-created racialised 'other' of the early-mid nineteenth century. Testimonies of cockneys around race and whiteness in the early twentieth century are rare but Doris, a white resident of Canning Town's Crown Street, known locally as "Draughtboard Alley" for its racial mixing could reminisce about growing up alongside black and mixed-race families in the 1930s with little apparent tension.

There were lots of black kids. We used to play together, no animosity between any of us. There were white women married black, you know, West Indians, they were working on the boats. Got on ever so well together... Everybody in the street used to speak to each other, and all the children used to play together (Padfield in Caballero, Chamion and Aspinall, 2018: 142).

Similarly, Anne Bowes, a mixed-race woman from the same area would recollect that "Where we lived there was no feeling that mixed marriages were wrong. The white people we lived with accepted it" (Padfield in Caballero, Chamion and Aspinall, 2018: 142).⁶⁹

Such solidarities in London's working class communities reflected the rapidly changing nature of cockney territoriality. Mass Eastern European immigration from the 1880s into traditionally cockney areas had created, by the inter-war years, a confident and relatively integrated Jewish population that saw themselves as 'EastEnders'.⁷⁰ The concept of the East End and cockney, although now virtually interchangeable, were crucial spatial delineations of identity from Victoriana to

⁶⁸ For a historical perspective on London's racially mixed past see - File and Power, 1981; Bell, 2002; Shyllon, 1992.

⁶⁹ These interviews started life as a sensational *Daily Express* article, ironically about the 'dangers' of racial mixing with the inevitable brutally cropped photograph excluding smiling white children standing with their black friends. See - "The street of hopeless children" *The Daily Express*, 18 March 1930.

⁷⁰ For a fascinating treatise on Jewish linguistic integration in the East End, see - Sivertson, 1960.

modernity. In areas like Spitalfields, Jews came to dominate the shops and street markets. Some of these 'foreign' costers - especially around Hoxton and Bethnal Green - were members of large socialist and anarchist organisations (Knepper, 2008). It was members of this community that reinvigorated and radicalised notions of a wider cockney community that saw itself valorised at opposition to Blackshirts marching at Cable Street in 1936 and in the almost forgotten post-war struggles against fascism. Indeed, Jews played a crucial, if unintentional role in redefining the identity of cockney through the inter-war years by consciously identifying themselves as locals and to some extent, divisions between Jew and gentile broke down as a younger generation moved from the ghettos into more mainstream white-collar employment (Lammers, 2005: 332). It is this formulation of the cockney that rebuilt the East End from the rubble of the Blitz whilst an historically older, 'whitened' proletariat either decamped to Essex or became marooned within their mono-racial memories within more mixed communities.

It was, however, the arrival of the first wave of non-white British subjects from the Caribbean in 1948 to (in part) address the post-war labour shortage, that almost immediately unsettled the newly-won welfare structures of a constructed cross-class, racial-national community.⁷¹ Their landing coincided with the questioning of what it meant to be British in a post-war and post-imperial world. Bill Williamson (1988: 170) suggests that a more exclusive concept of citizenship had already started to develop and cites the Conservative opposition to the 1948 British Nationality Bill which had sought to expand the definition of citizenship linked to a multi-ethnic Commonwealth.⁷² A wartime national identification towards 'ordinariness' (the conscription and valorisation of the working classes into the nation) that centred around the domestic and private (Light, 1991) meant that "the migrant other was constituted as the 'stranger' *par excellence*" from the 1950s onwards (Waters, 1997: 228). Indeed, Bill Schwarz (1996: 73) pertinently perceives this period as a 're-

⁷¹ In fact, the Attlee Labour government was "taken by surprise by these arrivals of immigrants" but had no legal way to stop them as they were British subjects. The very real labour shortage, put at somewhere between 600,000 and 1.3 million workers, aimed to be stemmed by de-mobilised Poles and freed German and Italian former prisoners of war but not enough of them could be recruited. See Patel, 2021: 61. Indeed, as Neal Ascherson reports, "... the Windrush only put in at Kingston, Jamaica, because it was half-empty, and the captain - hoping to cut his losses - had put an advertisement in the local paper offering berths to London." See - Ascherson, 2021: 6.

⁷² I think it's important to note that Caribbean immigration was also seen as a 'return to the motherland' after Colonial efforts during World War Two. See the arguments in Patel, 2021.

racialisation' of England where the tropes of the colonial frontier came 'home' to Britain (Webster, 2001) along with a generation of Empire administrators creating an atmosphere that resembled the 'embattled' Afrikaner and whites in the American South desperately trying to cling to segregation. Here perhaps was the beginning of the notion of 'whites as victims' where the immigrant would eventually have the 'whip hand'. In cockney communities this may have fed into anxieties about the emasculation of the working man against the increasing gains of woman and of miscegenation. Immigrants, in an echo of the Victorian residuum were seen to live in vice and squalor as evidenced by Colin McInnes' *City of Spades* (1957) in opposition to an increasingly settled and domesticated working class normality. They were also a threat to white women. In Roy Baker's *Flame in the Streets* (1961), Trade Union leader Jacko Palmer upholds the rights of a black worker but struggles with news that his daughter plans to marry a West Indian.

The contestations of the rights and primary entitlements of the white population of East London, of which the cockney subsequently become the embattled motif, is one of the defining legacies of this period memorialised in the contemporary imagination as emblems of a largely mono-racial, hyper-localism: the eel, pie and mash shops, to a large extent, their spiritual sanctuary.

3.2 From the terrace to the tower block

The terrible damage of the war had erased much of the territoriality of the East End and in that sense, part of the historically geographic notion of cockney identity itself. The cockney sanctum, St Mary Le Bow, was lost during the Blitz of 1941. The bells were recast at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in 1956 but not installed until five years later. By the time they pealed again, they did so over a transformed landscape and an increasingly dissociative cockney identity.

This devastated cartography is shown in *Hue and Cry* (1947) in which East End school children battle crooks and spivs over bombsites that brutally expose the compressed multiple buried layers of the city's history. The film links the children's

ingenuity, the new energy of the age, with the lumpen characters of the cockney villains whose password, 'Lambeth Walk', links them to a pre-war *pastness*.⁷³ In *The World my Wilderness* (1950), Rose Macauley's central character Barbary Deniston squats a deserted flat in the anarchy of the destroyed inter-zone of post-war London and engages with a community of outcasts, criminals and deserters. The sites simultaneously speak of the past and the future and damaged cockney youth set against the new Jerusalem of the planners' dreams. Here, the vibrant and chaotic "green world" of the fast-growing rosebay willowherb (*chamaenerion angustifolium*) is contrasted to the grey austerity of London. Macauley suggests this is a potent period of innocence which the cockney children of *Hue and Cry* will never know again.

The children stood still, gazing down on a wilderness of little streets, caves and cellars, the foundation of a wrecked merchant city, grown over by green and golden fennel and ragwort, coltsfoot, purple loosestrife, rosebay willow herb, bracken, brambles and tall nettles, among which rabbits burrowed and wild cats crept, and hens laid eggs (Macauley [1950] 2018: 53).

Within these edge-lands, several generations of Londoners would hide, play and make love away from their impossibly cramped and conservative homes. Antecedents to prefabs and unauthorised, makeshift, re-purposed spaces were the emergent cockney youth's practical responses to the landscape. Eventually, this 'unofficial countryside' (Mabey, 1973) of allotments, pigeon fanciers and 'drosscape' was only to be found in the forgotten outer wastes of Stratford and Bow and would be finally destroyed in the corporate devouring of post-industrial wildernesses by the behemoth of the Olympic Park. Yet this 'temporary' cockney figure, a child of the post-war years that wandered, played and danced pan-like in nature before the city buried it again, stands in ironic opposition to the original mediaeval connotation of the urbanite fearful of the countryside.⁷⁴

⁷³ The film's childhood heroes are not so far removed from reality. During the London Blitz, seventeen-year-old Patsie Duggan, the son of a Poplar bin man, led a gang of children, some as young as ten that acted as unofficial firefighters and rescue squad and were responsible for incredible acts of bravery. They were photographed by Bert Hardy for Picture Post in 1941 but largely forgotten until the publication of a children's book in 2015. See - Ashley, 2015.

⁷⁴ For a description of some the last of London's lost wastelands, see - Sinclair, 2012.

The devastation narrative runs through to the 1970s in cultural texts and is finally contrasted in *Bronco Bullfrog* (1969) with the real and idyllic countryside where Del and Irene, the young, doomed couple temporarily flee to escape their drudgery and entry into adulthood. As Ben Highmore (2012: 75) suggests this devastated landscape became, like the Blitz itself, a central motif within the social imagery of the period. “It constituted an affective landscape that played host to a mood world... sometimes resilient or defiant, joyful and exuberant, and sometimes resigned.” The ‘cultural feelings’ around this panorama and its privation congealed over decades and have been reformed in contested contemporary memory-scapes in which the cockney, as an unwitting agent of nostalgic capital, is once again valorised as an exemplar of self-sufficiency and *robustness* via modernity especially within the Brexiteer generation.⁷⁵

This devastated interregnum is for the cockney, simply a moment ‘between two worlds’ (Hall, 1978); the world of wartime Britain, its austere aftermath and the Britain that followed. In *A Place to Go* (1963), Ricky croons in his local Bethnal Green pub about a council waiting list that is “a mile long” just before his family are given eviction notices as part of their slum’s clearance. The moment is, however, pregnant with possibilities - a rebuilding of the cockney areas in line with organic communities or within a bourgeois modernity: a sympathetic re-assessment of the city and its people or a Brutalist re-imagining. This rebuilding is, in some senses, the continuation of the Victorian project to literally sweep the London working class from the streets and re-zone them. The cockney is banished from this (temporary) Garden of Eden to face re-housing within concrete towers or dispersal to the hinterlands.

There is a forgotten context in which these communities might have been more sympathetically accommodated within a popular modernism whilst “[T]he leftist planners and architects who briefly dominated under Atlee were side-lined after 1951 in favour of developers... are still the usual punching bag for the latter's schemes” (Hatherley, 2008: 131). Raymond Williams however was very clear that the planning decisions taken during this period, while supposedly democratic, were used to mask

⁷⁵ See for example - Hyams, 2011; Jacobs, 2015.

a bourgeois authoritarianism. He ruefully called this the 'smokescreen of consultation' (Williams, [1961] 1992: 312). Opposition was ruthlessly suppressed and framed as "... the white working class as a 'hazard to modernity'" (Skeggs, 2004: 91).

The very public and violent eviction in 1968 of Stephen Hurn and his wife from their home in Victoria Road, Leytonstone following a compulsory purchase order is particularly telling. In Pathé footage the couple are seen behind a barbed wire barricade remonstrating with police and bailiffs who pay no attention to their pleas about their own little "freehold piece of England" and significantly, likening the council to the Nazis. Their appeal to an earlier, radical patriotism of the Englishman and his liberty is almost a century too late. They are beaten and dragged away.⁷⁶

The tower blocks and low-rises that came to dominate the East End throughout the 1960s, although initially welcomed by some of their new residents, destroyed the recognisable landmarks of communal spaces of places like the pie and mash shops. They imposed a -

privatised space of family units stacked one on top of each other, in total isolation... [and] the ... effect of redevelopment was to destroy what we have called matrilocal residents. Not only was the new housing designed on the model of the nuclear family, with little provision for large low income families... but the actual pattern of distribution of the new housing tend to disperse the kinship network... (Cohen, 1981: 79).

By the early 1970s white Bethnal Green residents that remained in traditional housing found themselves squeezed between their own decrepit living conditions and a (largely bourgeois) squatting movement enjoined by a small community of Bengali seamen living in equally squalid private lodging houses. New housing, predicated on council waiting lists that had traditionally kept generations of East Enders together and was seen as the white community's post-war reward, was largely allocated on the basis of need to the fast-growing immigrant population of

⁷⁶ Pathé. "Angry scenes during East London Eviction, 1968." See - <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/VLVA52HPMYO0ZRUY0BPPUAGXFFZRM-UK-ANGRY-SCENES-DURING-EAST-LONDON-EVICTION>

Bangladeshi's.⁷⁷ This was supported by new urban modernisers within the local Labour Party. There followed what Dench (2006: xviii) called “a lengthy period of undercover class war” where white residents were “required to submit to new social rules and rulers and above all to continuing immigration” (Dench, 2017: xviii). Increasingly branded by the media as racist and supported by far-right groups, many white residents moved out of the area (largely to Essex) leaving behind a mostly poor and elderly population who were joined by new “[M]iddle class whites who did not need to compete directly with international immigrants for public resources, and so could take pleasure in their exotic culture and pride in their presence” (Dench, 2017: xviii).

This so-called ‘white-flight’ from the East End however, had a long history. During the early 1920s, London had continued to grow at an enormous rate. It did so increasingly outwards, pushing towards the suburbs. Inwood (2000: 708) suggests that around “...two million migrants (a third from inner London, the rest from elsewhere in Britain) settled in suburban London in the interwar years” (Inwood, 2000: 708). Even so, by the 1930s, East London was still, along with the industrial North-East of England, the most overcrowded area in the county (Inwood, 2000: 758).

Many in the capital looked longingly to the fresh air of the of the Thames estuary, historically a place of day trips for London’s respectable working classes. The landscape they would have passed through on the trains to the seaside became building sites for local authorities and private investors buoyed by low interest rates and the burgeoning building societies movement. Encouraged by the extension of rail and Underground lines, a building boom between 1934 and 1938 meant that in London’s eastern outer suburbs there were several huge London County Council estates with a total population of around 250,000. By 1939, Becontree in Essex had 116,000 tenants, more than the population of Ipswich or Halifax (Inwood, 2000: 718). These homes, with indoor toilets, several bedrooms and outside garden space were a huge improvement on London’s decrepit slums. There was something of an ironic

⁷⁷ Between 1971 and 2001 the numbers of Bangladeshi residents in Tower Hamlets, the borough that contains Bethnal Green, rose from around 4000 to almost 66000: from 2% of the area to just over 30%. See - Young, Gavron, and Dench, 2006: 227.

Empire notion about the idea of the East London homesteader colonising the empty veldt although many of the villages that were swallowed or annexed by these newcomers took a dim view of the new populace. The working class settlers, heirs of the world's first proletariat drew on the only image available to them for an ongoing vision of this promised land. This was the bucolic, ordered middle class suburbs of the well-to-do Home Counties - an image itself largely borrowed from returning colonial administrators. It would sometimes sit uneasily with the modern and often Brutalist designs that the post-war New Town designers would envisage.

After the devastation of the Second World War London still had a “‘crude net deficiency’ of 470,00 dwellings” (Inwood, 2000: 824). New towns linked to the 1944 Greater London Plan like Harlow and Basildon were constructed through cutting-edge architectural design and planning and all the while slow, steady emigration from the East End continued across generations. Older, better-off East Enders sought out their old holiday locations to settle for their retirement. In such matrilinear cockney culture, “where ‘nan’ went the rest of the extended family often followed” (Cohen, 2013: 67, 83).

In May 1948 Lewis Silkin, the Labour Minister for New Towns nodded to Ebenezer Howard's vision of a suburban utopia suggesting that the towns would “produce a new type of citizen... healthy, self-respecting... with a sense of culture and civic pride.”⁷⁸ John Reith, the first Director of the BBC and chairman of the New Towns Committee called them “essays in civilisation” (Cowley and Palmer, 2018: 132). Many of the new residents shared the Utopian dream simultaneously with recreation of a lost East End embodied in Welfarism, education and social housing. By the 1970s however, some of the New Towns began their inexorable decline with lack of investment revealing their “marks of early malnutrition” (Cowley and Palmer, 2018: 147). The children of the original settlers began to embrace the increasing cultural and politically assertive individuality that had emerged through the 1960s blended with a largely conservative, working class cockney heritage whose culture was one of small business and ‘betterment’. Ian Dury would attest to one half of this vibrant, dual culture that was “doing very well” in songs like “Billericay Dickie” whilst Mike

⁷⁸ Silkin, Lewis, Labour. HC Deb 08 May 1946 vol. 422 col. 1072-184.

Leigh presciently satirised the *nouveau-riche* inhabitants of Romford in *Abigail's Party*. These might best be described as emergent “dual class trajectories” (Watt, Millington and Huq, 2014: 127).

Both of these portrayals drew heavily on the ‘sociology of aspiration’ (Hall 1992) and the idea of the (alleged) dealignment of social class. These evocations of the ‘new’ Essex anticipated a significant turn to the Right as detailed in the MP for Chingford, Norman Tebbit’s book, *Upwardly Mobile* that would appear a decade later. It is between these twin geographical and cultural co-ordinates that the cockney and the pie and mash shops’ future would be reinscribed.

Hand-in-hand with the re-location of cockney families to Essex was the decline in London’s traditional patterns of work. Much of London’s skilled working class started to decamp to the New Towns and automation began to replace traditional artisanal skills that had been the backbone of London’s small industries. Tailoring, furniture-making and dock work slowly died by the end of the 1970s. In *A Place to Go* (1963) Matt, the epitome of the individualist working class cockney who had worked in the docks all his life remarks, “... in the old days a job was a job, and nobody told you how or when to work... but at least it was your own life, and you was in charge of it.” The docks represented perhaps the distillation of all that might be seen to be cockney. Here was a closed community that had fascinated the bourgeois since Pierce Egan’s wanderings, “...[the] patriotic cockney and congenial crook, heroic boxer and sexual rough trade” (Cohen, 2013: 67). The docks came to symbolise what Phil Cohen (1981: 80) suggests was,

a gradual polarisation in the structure of the labour force: on the one side, the highly specialised skilled and well paid jobs associated with the new technology and the high growth sectors that employed them, on the other, the routine, dead end: low paid and unskilled jobs associated with the labour intensive sectors, especially the service industries.

Work was no longer to be found locally and employment meant travelling further. The historic connection between the artisanal London workplace and the community was lost and social solidarities inevitably dissolved. What Cohen (1981: 82) calls the

working class 'respectables' were trapped between the pull of the new, rising suburban working class, their adoption of conspicuous consumerism and the downward pull of a residual precariat clinging to the dignity of manual labour. This had a disastrous effect on the young of the East End whose living examples of work and familial cultures disappeared and were replaced by the growth of youth subcultures.

The territoriality of the East End was not just disturbed by relocation to the Essex or Kent hinterlands, however. Emigration to the (white) colonies of especially Australia and Canada continued apace after the war with many fleeing the East End for the promise of a better future.⁷⁹ In reality, this was largely the result of an official policy to source cheap labour and reinforce a white managerial class in the colonies. This crude social engineering had in actuality been happening in various forms since the seventeenth century (Coldray, 1999). Although records are imprecise, it appears that British emigration into Australasia was around 50000 in the early 1950s and grew to a peak of 80000 in 1965 (Clarke, 2004: 321). Footage of Tommy Trinder, the cockney comedian, wishing young East End orphans from Barnardo's well before they set sail for a new life in Australia is incredibly poignant given the catalogue of abuse, rape and forced labour that many were subsequently subjected to.⁸⁰

In London, the streets themselves became a site of transformed meanings. The communities that had been built around working class terraces were specific responses to issues of space and social conditions. For good or ill, people gathered outside to socialise and used the street as a kind of neutral zone - a way of maintaining the privacy (and primacy) of the home (Townsend in Moran, 2012: 172). The growth of television sales during the 1950s and 1960s meant that the pivot of the street became focussed into the living room. Similarly, the enormous growth of motor traffic meant not only that roads were widened but were becoming dangerous to children's traditional outside play. Despite updated legislation that stipulated certain roads had to be closed to traffic in the evenings, by 1971, nineteen million

⁷⁹ See - Constantine, 1998: 176-195.

⁸⁰ For this abuse see Child Migration Programmes Investigation Report, March 2018 at <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/reports-recommendations/publications/investigation/child-migration>. More than one million people left Britain for Australia alone between 1945 and 1972. In 2010, the British Prime Minister Gordon Brown formally apologised on behalf of the nation to the child migrants.

cars meant that effectively children's outside traditional play was stopped.⁸¹ The pie shops, the focus of many working class neighbourhoods, reflected this change. Many, like the Cooke's shop in Stratford who found themselves next to vast and busy roads that had brutally cut through traditional areas, simply closed. However, for some of the pie shops the redevelopment was not all bad news. Roy Arment, the owner of Arments Pie and Eel shop in South London recalls that "... we still had some of the locals but also... we had the biggest council estate in Europe [The Aylesbury Estate] on our doorstep... we were massively busy in the 1970s and 1980s..."⁸² For other pie shops, the demolitions and remodelling of the city marked the end of an era. Chris Cooke, the co-owner of what was regarded as the city's most palatial pie shop in Dalston recognised that times and demographics had changed, "A lot of our customers had moved out... they wanted to improve their standard of living ... they wanted their own house..."⁸³ The experience of relocation outside the capital, especially of those who came from the Bethnal Green slums was summed up by Betsy, Ricky's sister in *A Place To Go* (1963) who has moved to one of the Essex estates. "The house is nice really, trees all down the street and that but it's just a bit lonely ...the nearest pub is miles away ... it was all so new and shiny [but] there was nobody in it."

In *Sparrows Can't Sing* (1963) Maggie, played by Barbara Windsor, symbolically refuses to embrace the new future that has been forced on her, leaving the modern tower block (and the dependable Bert) to be reconciled with her former lover, the violent cockney sailor, Charlie. Windsor of course was a real-life pivot between the complex social solidarities of the East End's working class communities and their dark underbelly of criminality and violence. Her (alleged) relationships with the underworld and specifically her friendships with the Kray Twins are a significant acknowledgement of the duality of cockney culture. For the Krays themselves, it is their courting of fame and celebrity through a reprised, performative role as conduits

⁸¹ In 1961, Section 49 of the Road Traffic Act updated previous 'Street Play' legislation allowing local authorities to "prohibit traffic on roads to be used as playgrounds."

⁸² Roy Arment, interview by author, 11 November 2020.

⁸³ Chris Cooke, interview by author, 17 November 2020.

to the powerful that connects the 'modernist' cockney back to the Victorian music Hall.⁸⁴

Simultaneous to the demolitions and relocations, another process, as yet unnamed, had begun around the mid 1950s to further destabilise London's working class districts. Slowly at first but with growing confidence, young middle class professionals began to buy and move into the "unspoilt areas of the city... where they... live[d] cheek-by-jowl with the polyglot poor" (Raban, 1974: 181-182). The process of what would become known as 'gentrification' was a reversal of the bourgeois exodus of inner London in the nineteenth century. Yet these were not the "slummers" that the *Weekly Echo* had attacked as 'do-gooders' in 1885 by living amongst the poor but young couples enacting a bourgeois *lebensraum*.⁸⁵ These 'Nigel's and Pamela's' as Raban (1974) has them, took advantage of "the political vacuum created by the decline in the heavily-directed municipal planning of the immediate postwar period (Moran, 2007: 102)." Unsurprisingly, once ensconced they formed highly effective class pressure groups. One, the Barnsbury Society in Islington, successfully lobbied to create a conservation area and redirect traffic through neighbouring working class areas. By valorising their thrift and ingenuity they created a market for 'heritage', lifestyle goods, fashions and cuisine, publicising their achievements in the new weekend colour supplements for whom they worked. The traditional working class residents of Islington were largely puzzled by and suspicious of the bourgeois settlers yet seemed to prefer them to the other newcomers, West Indians (Bugler, 1968 in Moran, 2007: 114).

Through this inward immigration, house prices rose steadily through the period and the gentrifiers formed the basis for the eventual property speculation on which London's contemporary economic landscape is built. They were initially satirised as 'Hamsptead Lefties' by the Right and then by their own class as evidenced by Alan Bennett's BBC radio sketch show, *On the Margins* (1966). By the time Posy Simmonds started to draw a weekly cartoon strip for the *Guardian* in 1977 these

⁸⁴ It is alleged that on the first day of filming of *Sparrow Can't Sing*, men in the employ of the Krays threatened the cast and crew because they hadn't been consulted nor had given 'permission' for the filming in the East End. See - Price, 2021.

⁸⁵ *The Weekly Echo*. 30 May 1885 in Joyce, 1996: 521.

North London gentrifiers were more complex characters. Their financial security was matched only by their liberal self-doubt and their continued, entirely symbolic inability to communicate with the Heeps, their working class neighbours. Their focus was no longer on charming period features and colourful 'locals' but on liberal multiculturalism, cultural change and globalisation. They had become a class within themselves and would eventually form the 'liberal intelligensia' of the Blairite generation, or the "chattering classes" as their entirely unembarrassed bourgeois cousins categorise them.⁸⁶

3.3 The kids are alright

From the 1950s the late-Victorian cockney began to play several simultaneous roles still referencing what Williams (1977) might define as a residual cultural formation. Periodically useful to capital in the form of a nostalgic yet insightful character, the cockney was seen as an anachronism but also as a cultural signifier against urban renewal, town planning and the growing American hegemony. The character was additionally split between the strict traditionalist family and youth rebellion of modernity. The post-war East End became (and remains), a cultural and geographic backdrop for themes relating to a waning of authority, the decline of empire, family breakdown and crime (Hebdige, 1982).

Fittingly, it was partly in the performative arena of social realism, typified by the work of the Unity Theatre and Joan Littlewood's People's Theatre, that cockney was viewed as an authentic and politically revolutionary mirror to society. The emotion of loss for an older working class London is thoughtfully examined in John Krish's *The Elephant Will Never Forget* (1954) that symbolically mourns the city's last tram ("... past the pawnbrokers and through the street markets...") whilst the awkward, conflicted and modern generation of cockney youth is portrayed in Karel Reisz's sincere, *We Are The Lambeth Boys* (1959).⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Watkins, Alan. "The Chattering Classes," *The Guardian*, November 25, 1989.

⁸⁷ In Krish's film, the fear of forgetting the old working class city is underlined by the use of a song from the Music Hall (Archie Haldane's *Riding On Top of The Car*) as a soundscape to accompany a tram journey that sentimentally crosses the Thames. The narrator subtly warns us ("the trams were theirs") that these everyday objects so central to working class life - like the eel and pie shops - are passing and we should beware.

Inevitably, the replication of the cockney character found its way onto the emergent, single channelled television, via the genial (and by the end of the series in the 1970s, geriatric) Jack Warner as *Dixon of Dock Green*. Warner was the perfect establishment cockney; loyal, conservative and inevitably, hyper-local. It was however in the contribution to popular music that the 1950s cockney was perhaps most interestingly and effectively evolved. *My Fair Lady*, a Broadway musical based on the earlier *Pygmalion*, first performed in 1956 (and made into a film of the same name in 1964) internationalised the cockney stereotype. As Dave Laing (2003: 219) points out, this reference would be reproduced by Colin MacInnes in his *Absolute Beginners* (1959) when the modernist hero, the photographer 'Blitz Baby'... refers to a London barman as speaking in an "authentic old-tyme My Fair Lady dialect" (Laing, 2003: 217).

Stedman Jones (1989: 302) rightly suggests that the "earthy freshness" of the language of the cockney was lost to American slang in this period. In the West End, the site of a new, pioneering cosmopolitanism (Panayi, 2020: 52) London's taxonic cafes and tea shops were being replaced by coffee bars resplendent with Formica and the music of Bill Hailey and Elvis Presley within a kind of "working class bohemia" (Coutts-Smith in Medhurst, 2023: 54). Whilst most of the young English pretenders like Cliff Richard and Marty Wilde imitated an American accent, Adam Faith and notably Tommy Steele sang in a voice that as MacInnes suggested was 'Young England, Half English' with a cockney inflection (Laing, 2003: 218). The sinister Teddy Boy, an emergent working class subculture built around Rock n' Roll, wore as a uniform a pastiche of the American Zoot suit, Edwardiana and violence. The Teds were largely drawn from the ranks of unskilled and distinctly *un*-modern working class youth and like their Victorian forebears from the abyss, rough, unpredictable and dangerous to know. MacInnes links them to the racial violence of Notting Hill and has his 'yobbo' talk in a reproduction of the (pre) Victorian cockney confusion of 'w's and 'v's ("So a few of ver blacks got chived. Why oll ver fuss?") (Laing, 2003: 219). The Teds were an intersection of the bourgeois moral panic around the brutality and boredom of Lewis Gilbert's post-war landscape *Cosh Boy* (1953) and a distinctly American cultural brutishness of the American teenager, prefaced in the earlier perfect criminal foil to Sergeant Dixon.

Musically, a naive melding of traditional jazz and the austerity 'make do and mend' ethos of skiffle, (that owed much to American folk music) was fused for a time by performers like Lonnie Donegan who's upbeat, comic songs borrowed heavily from the nostalgic cockney and its music hall roots. His "Rock Island Line" (1956), "Does Your Chewing Gum Lose its Flavour on the Bedpost Overnight" (1959) and "My Old Man's a Dustman" (1966) link to a lost vaudeville tradition that was still within living memory.

More than anyone perhaps it is the figure of the gay, Jewish, East End socialist Lionel Begleiter - later Lionel Bart - that perhaps typifies the performed role of the cockney in the 1950s. Already accomplished as a writer of hit pop songs for Tommy Steele and Cliff Richard, his association with the author Frank Norman resulted in the musical *Fings ain't Wot They Used T' Be* (1959), produced by Littlewood's Theatre Workshop. The show opens up a world of pimps, prostitutes and *polari* (the underground gay language) couched in a nostalgic cockney slang. The words (some of which had to be changed for causing offence) neatly condense an anti-modern, sentimental, *pastness* typified by the cockney characters.⁸⁸

They changed our local Palais into a bowling alley and
Things ain't what they used to be (chorus)...
There's Teds in drainpipe trousers and Debs in coffee houses and
Things ain't what they used to be (chorus)...
Once our beer was frothy but now its frothy coffee well
Things ain't what they used to be (chorus)...
It used to be fun Dad an old Mum paddling down old Southend
But now it ain't done...

It was succeeded by his *Oliver* (1960) which transformed Dickens' workhouse orphan and the murder of a prostitute into a jolly musical caper. In the same year,

⁸⁸ Redacted and re-written lines included "How we used to pull for them, I've got news for Wolfenden" (that referred to the 1957 Wolfenden Report which advocated tolerance on homosexuality) and more bluntly, but still correctly referencing the very real gender violence of the day, "Once in golden days of yore, ponces killed a lazy whore".

the British actress Elsa Lanchester (famous from her 1935 role as *The Bride of Frankenstein*) released her album *Cockney London* and the comedian Bernard Cribbins sang the comic ditty “Right Said Fred” about hapless cockney removal men. By 1962 the cockney, his accent and his impertinent audacity was becoming normalised. Mike Sarne implored the bored and irritated Wendy Richards to “Come Outside” and soon Ray Davies (*The Kinks*) and Pete Townsend (*The Who*) began to familiarise ‘common’ London accents.

These cultural notions nodded to at least the appearance of a complementary shift in inequality via widescale nationalisation and a Welfare State. This mirrored the profound changes in Britain from the classic liberal regime towards a ‘Buy British’, *national* economy largely encompassing both the left and the right against American and EEC (as then was) free marketeers.⁸⁹ Indeed it was the Labour Party that could be seen as “...*the* nationalist party. It put nation before class” (Edgerton, 2018: 386). From the late 1940s into the early 1970s growth averaged 2-3% of GDP per year and by the mid ‘Sixties both Labour and the Conservatives were calling for (an ultimately unrealised) 4% (Edgerton, 2018: 283).

For the working class these were decent years of post-austerity and spending; a long boom with (generally) low unemployment and high union membership.⁹⁰ It is these years, building on the ‘Britain alone’ myth that I contend forms the contemporary nostalgic memory epoch of current populism that has coalesced around the eel and pie shops. In this period, “self-sufficiency in food increased steadily but slowly... as Britons got richer and ate British food” (Edgerton, 2018: 287).

Apart from Joe Brown’s (1960) comic sung homage to the jellied eel (with lyrics inevitably by Lionel Bart) the pie shops during this period remained relatively invisible in cultural texts reflecting their anachronistic status within the emanent modern city. Still very much located in unglamorous working class districts whose Victorian high street landscape of street markets, pubs and corner shops remained largely unchanged, they continued to be part of the traditional, gendered cockney *passaggiata*. For mothers dragging children between market stalls and the kitchen

⁸⁹ See for example - Nairn, 1972: 5.

⁹⁰ In 1960, the TGWU, the largest union had one million members - *The TUC General Council, Report*, 1960 at <http://www.unionhistory.info/reports/index.php>

sink they were the site of vital and connective neighbourhood chatter. For working men, an alternative to the greasy spoon cafés and part of the pre-match football ritual. At the weekends, a take-away relief for the housewife and a post-pub sponge after the 'local' had closed. Chris Cooke, the co-owner of Cooke's pie and mash shop in Dalston, remembers a post-war "heyday" for the shops which were busy and popular.⁹¹ Joe Cooke, his nephew, recalls the 1960s as working "six days a week and two nights slogging our balls off."⁹²

The mid to late 1960s however located the cockney seemingly polarised between two worlds. Alf Garnet, the cockney bigot in the BBC sitcom *'Till Death Do Us Part* (1965-1975) was very much the product of Empire and its defensive trench in a rapidly changing world of immigration and youth revolt. Garnett, like the dock workers and the Smithfield meat porters who marched in support of Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood" speech in 1968, represented the loyal, patriotic incarnation of the earlier century. Unsettled by the decline of imperial power and uprooted from their traditional territory and notions of racial supremacy by the forces of modernity, they provided the foot soldiers of an ascendent Right's economic and cultural counter-revolution against the gains of the Welfare State and (allegedly) faltering egalitarianism.⁹³

Yet concomitantly, the 'Sixties also located the cockney within an arena of working class cultural dynamism primarily through its youth. The roots of this lay in several places. Firstly, we might uncover it in the growing acceptance of the idea of the 'people's war'. This, as we have seen, grew from the desperate scramble of the elite's valorisation in 1940 of a one-nation 'ordinariness' in which the cockney played the starring role as a metaphor for the entire British working class. Secondly, the cultural shift engendered by the Angry Young Men's portrayal of changing class landscapes became something of a bulwark against the reassertion of the literary (and political) values of the Establishment. This prepared the way for 'authentically' working class cultural actors during the more radical 1960s. Lastly, the post-war

⁹¹ Chris Cooke. Interview by author, 17 November 2020.

⁹² Joe Cooke. Interview by author, 25 November 2020.

⁹³ Powell, a member of neo-liberal Mont Pelerin Society and the Institute of Economic Affairs had, along with the Chancellor of the Exchequer Peter Thorneycroft and his Treasury colleague, Nigel Birch resigned from government in 1959 in protest at plans for increased government expenditure in a move widely seen as one of the first articulations of 'monetarism' linking economic and political freedoms that would provide the cornerstone for the ideology of the later Thatcher governments.

cockney was clearly not immune to the attendant narrative of Americanisation and consumerism nor to the burgeoning siren call of 'youth culture'. Like their northern cousins (epitomised by Alan Sillitoe's Arthur Seaton in his *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, 1960), the young cockney saw little value in hard manual labour but hankered for an individual and more personal expression of 'style'.

The son of a Billingsgate porter and a char-woman, Michael Caine (originally Maurice Micklewhite) epitomised this ebullience. Along with David Bailey (the child of East London tailors) and Terrance Stamp from Bow whose father was a tugboat stoker, some fortunate young working class people found themselves at the heart of a new cultural formation that would last perhaps until the 1980s. However, they also remained between two worlds: wealthy but "a synonym for a working class jack-the-lad... and so sustained the 1950s representation of a cynical but *contained* [my italics] male rebelliousness" (Dodd and Dodd in Strinati, Dominic and Wagg, 2004: 125).

For most young cockneys however, not much had - or would - change. The doomed romance of Del, a mod from Stratford and Irene the daughter of an imprisoned armed robber, flowers when they flee to the countryside in *Bronco Bullfrog* (1969) only for them to return to their personal and class fate of drudgery and the new grey Brutalist concrete. The physical and cultural relocation of the cockney would lead Georgia Brown and Lionel Bart (both critically, Jewish 'East Enders') to ask, in a *schmaltz-laden* piece, *Who are the cockneys now?* (1968).

Norman Cohen's curiously unsentimental, *The London that nobody knows* (1967) showed a city increasingly distanced from itself. The film, edged by a haunting early electronica soundtrack excavates a forgotten city that is in sharp contrast to the 'Swinging' Sixties. The camera pans across Islington's Chapel Market and enters Manze's eel and pie shop, a gloomy, forgotten space that competes with the film's documentation of meth-drinkers and Victorian architectural oddities. Inside, we see a succession of elderly Londoners. They are wrapped in caps, scarves and grimy overcoats cheerfully eating pie, mash and bowls of eels in a dingy interior as if in a time-warp: a 'tribe' forgotten. As well they have been - relevant only within a nascent blooming of 'heritage' amongst the young early gentrifiers of the area and wealthy

flaneurs of the city's inner reaches. The only nod to the decade is a young Caribbean girl struggling to manoeuvre her knife and fork amidst the debris of a pre-cut pie and potato.

We get another rare celluloid glimpse, for all of four or five seconds of a pie and mash shop in the saccharine Peter Sellers vehicle, *The Optimists of Nine Elms* (1973) that is repurposed as a generic café.⁹⁴ The film is remarkable only for the texture of the shocking urban deprivation around the edge lands of the Thames that it reveals, the music of Lionel Bart and the hackneyed trope of Seller's faded music hall star.

David Furnham's extraordinary and forgotten documentary *Noted Eel and Pie Houses* (1975) opens to the mournful strains of an old pub piano and later introduces an elderly cockney chanteuse singing the Georgian ballad "Betty Brill". The film, the only dedicated audio-visual record of the shops up to this era, catches them in one of the first waves of their post-war decline. The film gives a sense of observing a living Victoriana. Initially focussing on the Cooke's family eel and pie shop in Broadway Market, the film surveys an almost derelict street and the adjacent rubbish-filled canal to the strains of a barrel organ. The squalor encapsulated the era's (so-called and contested) *Declinist* narrative; the strike-ridden, Sterling Crisis landscape of unrest and decay that 'inevitably' led to the economic redemption of Thatcherism.⁹⁵

Although Mary Cooke is shown dishing out pies in a very busy shop, one of her sons, Bob, merrily gutting eels in a stall outside laments, "You go down on a Tuesday and you see ten stalls where before there was a hundred."⁹⁶ The family matriarch, Lily Cooke, 91 at the time of recording, remembers a very different era when her father, drumming up business for his eels "... used to shout to a packed market, 'everyone a bright eye and silver belly' ... and you never hear that now".

⁹⁴ The shop featured is the long-closed Maggy Brown's Pie and Mash Shop on Battersea High Street, yet Seller's character clearly but incongruously purchases newspaper-wrapped fish and chips for the hungry siblings in his charge further reinforcing perhaps the untranslatability of pie and mash to the general audience.

⁹⁵ For a thorough reinterpretation of the historiography of post-war Britain and the ascendancy of the neoliberal narrative see - Tomlinson, 2016: 76-99.

⁹⁶In fact, records seem to indicate that even during the busiest period of the market - the 1940s and 1950s, there were only ever licenses for up to 69 stalls granted at one time.

Much of the area's urban decay stemmed from the demolition and subsequent emigration of traditional Victorian housing residents that bordered Broadway Market's south side. Fred Cooke, co-owner of the family's shop in Dalston presciently remarked "I should imagine it won't be many years before they [the pie shops] disappear because you've got Chinese, takeaway meals, Kentucky Fried Chicken and that's replacing them."

The first glimpses of the Neoliberal ascendancy that would come to epitomise the next incarnation of the cockney would be Bob Hoskins' portrayal of Harold Shand, the undisputed king of the capital's underworld in *The Long Good Friday* (1979). Self-described as "a businessman with a sense of history and also a Londoner", Shand is attempting to redevelop his idealised childhood stomping-ground, the now derelict Docklands, with the help of crooked local politicians ("the Corporation") and the New York Mafia. Shand is the embodiment not only of the coster writ large but also of his post-imperialist delusion. Hoskins portrays a different cockney in *Mona Lisa* (1986). Here he is George, a tough ex-con recently released from prison who is forced to drive for a high-class call girl. In the opening scenes, his cockney significantly registers surprise at how multiracial his traditional neighbourhood has become in his absence ("where did all this lot come from?"). Yet it is as an enduring moral signpost that makes his cockney significant. Interrupting his charge Simone whilst she is with an upper class customer he offers, "Put yer clothes on. Make yourself respectable..." It is within that charged phrasing that he is offered as the reprised historical cockney; a character of 'ordinary', dependable decency.

A gentler characterisation of the 'lovable cockney rogue' still selling from market pitches but with a more realistic sub-plot of the inevitable working class proscription to poverty is found in the BBC comedy series, *Only Fools and Horses* (1981). The lead character, 'Del-Boy' Trotter is one of a long line of bourgeois-viewed characters seen through the prism of malapropism and cultural confusion from earlier cockney stereotypes like the ventriloquised voice of Richard Whiteing's *Mr Sprouts* (1868). Trotter is redeemed however from the worst excesses of Thatcher's children by his warmth and humanity: still a simultaneous cockney trope.

Created in opposition to *Coronation Street*, ITV's long-running drama of northern working class life, *Eastenders* (1985) followed on from an earlier and forgotten BBC attempt to reflect the now disappeared cockney communality and territoriality of Soho, *Market in Honey Lane* (1967). *Eastenders* was on some level simply a revised cultural text, the latest manifestation of the malleable cockney character. It reproduced the politically expedient valorisation of the much simplified 1940s cockney and, according to the producers, attempted to encapsulate the East End in the phrase, "hurt one of us and you hurt us all" (Smith, 2005: 11). Despite valiant nods to themes of race, sexuality and gentrification (often portrayed in the style of social realist dramas of the 1970s), *Eastenders* took as its starting point the palimpsestic cockney identity, "... that invented past for the actual past, so the future look[ed] nostalgic" (Edgerton, 2018: 386).⁹⁷

Indeed, the early years of the Thatcher government were characterised, especially in advertising, by the accommodation of nostalgic working class cultural tropes utilised synchronously with an appeal to aspiration and social mobility. This was evidenced in the adaption by the BMP agency in 1979 of the 'cockney rock' music hall of Chas n' Dave into an advertising campaign for Courage beer ("Gertcha"). These campaigns, (along with the less successful George, the lager-drinking cockney bear) and those that dealt with American, blue-collar 1950s memories, (for example, Levi jeans) were examples of what Svetlana Boym (2001) has called a 'reflective nostalgia' that "engages in antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths ... build[ing] on the sense of loss of community and cohesion and offer[ing] a comforting collective script for individual longing" (Boym, 2001: 31-32). Antithetical to this cultural position was a rare and entirely authentic post-punk feminist homage to both cockney and pie and mash from the forgotten all-girl band, The Gym Slips. Their 1983 single *Pie and Mash* celebrates visits to (the now closed) Georges' pie shop in Canning Town. The song recounts their ritual enacted "every Saturday" where you would "... collect your spoon and fork/ shovel it

⁹⁷ After the first episode of *EastEnders*, BBC Breakfast garnered reactions to the show in an East End pub. Significantly one of the interviews suggested positively that "...it's not the usual cliché of pie and mash". Breakfast Time, BBC1, 20 February 1985.
<https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/a7f6ea355fc094a70fd0ba25a192b401>

down, no time to talk.” The song, a B-side to their *Big Sister* proudly chants that “Pie and mash is working class!”

Working class or not, the Thatcher project however (along with the simultaneous New Right Reaganite propaganda across the Atlantic) appealed to some “people who feared they no longer recognised the Britain that they had grown up in” (Blackwell and Seabrook, 1986: 153). It offered the battered and temporally confused working classes a national reconstruction of imperial greatness couched in the language of a Victorian domestic stability described by Hoggart. By utilising working class symbols like the decent, industrious and patriotic cockney, the Thatcher project simultaneously stole Labour’s appeal to workers and closed down the future with a capitalist realism that prefigured Francis Fukuyama (1992) by more than a decade.

3.4 The Unmodern

From the late 1970s onwards, the image of a heroic, wartime British proletariat had started to disappear from cultural texts and the white working class were, as Leon Hunt (1998) attests, increasingly identified with unmodernity. Yet this identification did not come from the working classes themselves. As Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite (2018) has suggested, what “‘ordinary people’ meant when they talked about class” had started to change significantly in this period and that shift directly related to the cockney constituents of the pie and mash shops and the process of the reformation of their identities during the next thirty years.

For the pie and mash constituents, the 1970s were a period of relative plenty. As Michael Collins (2004: 205) suggests, his working class Southwark family were emblematic of such class gains. “People were getting more things now - filling out their homes with new carpets or new sofas... dimmer switches, knotty-pine wallpaper, a bar in the corner and L-shaped Campari red leatherette sofa.” For Paul Kelly, his father’s pie shop in Bethnal Green was symbolic of a simple good life where people “... had a few bob [and the shop] ...was like the hub of the

community... the queue used to be 30 or 40 people.”⁹⁸ Similarly, Melanie McGrath (2018) recounts an interview about two branches of a different pie shop (also Kelly’s) on the Roman Road. “In the seventies it was so, so busy: three people working behind the counter, three continually making pies, two people baking and four people washing up’. And there’s yet more to do at the branch number 600.”

From the angry young man of the 1950s to Caine’s cockney hero as outlaw in *Get Carter* (1971), London’s working classes had become observers of, and participants in, a process of increasing and overt individualisation. With the end of conscription, greater access to education, growing consumerism, secularisation and, via the New Left, the ‘self-realisations’ of gender parity, many saw an era of greater equality. It was captured by a distinct culture of a post-war generation where “‘youth’ itself became a metaphor for social change” (Hall in Barker, 1978: 285).

In a sense, the 1970s were defined by and through this new working class cultural experience. Texts from the period portray a vigorous populism: mass entertainment, especially television comedy, took aim at privilege and pomposity and, for the first time valorised working class characters.⁹⁹ So-called ‘low-culture’ from football to seedy sex comedies reflected proletarian visibility; popular music and fashion reflected working class (sometimes even androgenous) heroes.¹⁰⁰ Yet this success was no revolutionary moment, rather a gate-crashing of the perceived fruits of capital. Its dependence on the Fordist peak spelt its inevitable end and the start of a counter reaction from the Right.

During this period, cockney as a one-dimensional music hall caricature and prop to authority had begun to wane. Its dance with modernity and youth I contend, bestowed the identity with multiple valences and in a sense, the increasing choices of a new generation. One could choose to be a cockney by attitude, by race, heritage or simply by location; but even this was now open to negotiation, largely the result of

⁹⁸ Paul Kelly, co-owner of Kelly’s Pie Shop, Debden. Interview by author, 15 December 2020.

⁹⁹ Television ‘situation comedies’ paved the way for this trend. *Steptoe and Son*, BBC TV 1962-1974, *The Likely Lads* BBC TV 1964-1966 (reprised as *Whatever Happened to the Likely Lads* BBC TV 1973-1974), *Porridge* (BBC TV 1974-1977), *Rising Damp* (ITV 1974-1978) and *Till Death Do Us Part* (BBC TV 1965-1975) are prime examples.

¹⁰⁰ See - Simonelli, 2012.

displacement, gentrification and mass immigration. This 'mobility' of identity echoes Robert Hewison (1988: 7) who comments that increasingly, "moral choices were now a matter of taste, and the collapse of a general system of accepted moral values culture acquired greater importance as a guide to political choice."

Some neighbourhoods like the Isle of Dogs would remain solidly white and firmly closed to outsiders for at least another decade but other cockney heartlands like Bethnal Green saw an influx of Asians. As Monica Ali (2003: 208-209, 92) would write two decades later of the area's changing motifs and cockney's racial structures,

In between the Bangladeshi restaurants were little shops that sold clothes and bags and trinkets... I'm talking about the clash between Western values and our own... the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one's own identity and heritage.

For Paul Kelly, "... the Asian immigration changed a lot of the landscapes of the [eel and pie] shops ... thus you weren't getting people shopping down the market...[and coming to his father's pie shop]" - but you were already seeing cockneys in curry houses.¹⁰¹

Hackney, previously the site of mass Jewish immigration, was now extraordinarily multicultural but especially Afro-Caribbean. The reggae rhythms (like the Blues before them) adopted by punk bands like The Clash and John Lydon would form the musical and cultural backing for a culture of anti-racism and cultural mixing that is the basis of a contemporary and hybrid London working class culture. Jimmy Pursey's Sham 69 articulated a harder edge to London working class life with songs like the semi-comic "Sunday Morning Nightmare" (1978) but it was songs like "The cockney kids are innocent" (1978) which attracted a problematic right-wing following that led eventually to the bands demise. The Cockney Rejects and other Oi! bands were less embarrassed by their "white proletarian masculinity" and their songs

¹⁰¹ In terms of food and constituency, Londoners are more likely to indulge in food from the "imaginary landscape' of former colonies of the British empire that have significant numbers of white settlers. This is the imaginary of the (post) colonial white British." Savage, Mike, David Wright, and Modesto Gayo-Cal 2010: 612.

attacked traditional cockney targets of the age - “hippies and the race relations industry” (Laing, 1985: 112). It is in the figure and music of Ian Dury however that the multi-valent cockney identity in this period reached its apotheosis. The son of a bus driver, Dury studied painting before evoking a music hall tradition that fused a cockney and punk ethos. His use of cockney speech, idiom and characters (“Clever Trevor” and “Plaistow Pam”) not only illustrate a modern, self-critical cockney but also the wider territoriality of the identity whose “...‘imagined’ centre” was shifting eastwards” (Newland, 2008: 151).

Despite the retrospective ascription of chaos in both culture and politics by the right to the 1970s, the New Economics Foundation found that 1976, in terms of national economic, social and environmental well-being was the best year since 1950 (Shah, Hetan and Marks in Beckett, 2009: 3). Class however had certainly not disappeared. If this was the era of ‘Workerism’, it was also the era that the reactionary Middle Class Association (1974) was formed.¹⁰² This was an organisation set up by a Conservative MP, John Gorst and the Ulster Unionist Captain Lawrence Orr that sought to represent the “persecuted, vilified and sneered-at ... minority of managers and the self-employed” (Bechhofer and Elliot, 1978: 57). After less than a year however it descended into a far-right pressure group and disbanded. Yet, the fear of working class gains fed an increasing notion of economic Declinism within the elites that echoed the Victorian and Edwardian cultural and racially inflected fear of Degeneration.

This powerful and melancholy trope was aided by hegemonic messaging from an ascendent New Right through The Monday Club and The Centre for Policy Studies. In 1974, Keith Joseph, a disciple of Friedrich Hayek and Monetarism, gave a speech in Edgbaston where he suggested that the “human stock” was threatened by the over-breeding of the poor and their chaotic lives.¹⁰³ This image coincided with both widescale employment changes and economic insecurity brought about by rapid

¹⁰² For Workerism, see - Edgerton, 2018: 408. For the Middle Class Association, see - Bechhofer, and Elliott, 1978: 57-88. For wider middle class campaigns of the era see - King and Nugent, 1979.

¹⁰³ <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/§document/101830>.

For more on Joseph, his “home-made casualties” and the transmission of deprivation between generations, see - Welshman, 2006: 107-126.

deindustrialisation and globalization.¹⁰⁴ There was further, as Emily Robinson *et al* (2017: 268-304) suggest, a growing frustration across society at the slowing trajectory of people gaining control of their own lives. Modernist solutions - and the 'experts' behind them that had scattered working class communities - were increasingly seen as failures.

For the traditional cockney, disillusionment with the largely unaccountable and remote forms of Wilson's technocratic government had perhaps chimed with deep artisanal roots within their own radical Enlightenment heritage. More, it spoke to their suspicion of bureaucratic and 'corrupt' local labour authorities and traditional politics in general.¹⁰⁵ The death-knell of technocratic modernism was the acceptance of an IMF loan in 1976 by a Labour Party bereft of new solutions within 'The Marketplace of Ideas' that opened a new consensus dominated by the Right. This intersected with a general paranoia around conspiracy, corruption and 'shadowy elites' that characterised the decade (Wheen, 2010).

Unlike the multi-valent and youthful cockney of the parallel popular culture, the traditional cockney formulation was increasingly used in mainstream texts of the period in the form of a nostalgic proletarian masculinism. The television film *Regan* (1974) opens to an East End pub full of grotesques singing the Marie Lloyd music hall song "My Old Man" before an undercover police officer from the Flying Squad ('The Sweeney') is abducted and murdered by East End gangsters.¹⁰⁶ Regan, the 'avenging copper', is thwarted by 'rules and regulations' in his pursuit of the villains. He is a moral cockney figure, but now, congruent with British Noir (and American Western tradition), he doesn't play by the conventional, discredited rules of the establishment 'do-gooders'. This theme of the so-called 'dishonesty' of liberal elites was a key narrative in this period of what Schwarz (1996: 65-67) calls the 're-

¹⁰⁴ The decline of London's manufacturing base in this period was shockingly rapid. In 1961, Greater London had a manufacturing workforce of 1.6 million. By 1974 this had shrunk to 900,000. See - Inwood, 1998: 895.

None of these issues were necessarily unique to Britain. The long post-war boom of capitalist economies was coming to an end and growth was slowing. It was not specifically that Britain was slowing down, rather than the rest of the world was catching up. See the arguments in Edgerton, 2018.

¹⁰⁵ For housing corruption in Hackney, see - Wright, 2009. For a revision of the corruption narrative of Labour leaders, especially with reference to housing issues, see - Griffiths, 2019.

¹⁰⁶ The Sweeney is itself a cockney slang for the fictional pie house murderer Sweeney Todd.

racialization of England'. Robinson *et al* (2017: 297-298) place race relation legislation squarely within the contexts of the critical intersection of the rise of popular individualism. They trace this law-making framed through state planning and consumer rights complete with "whole new professions of race experts and advisors... within *market relations* [my emphasis]... and equality of opportunity." The resentment that this sowed amongst the white working class, fanned by a hostile right-wing press, was allied to growing disillusionment with the framing of the Welfare State itself. If welfare had come "wrapped in the Union Jack" for a London working class that had been made 'white' only a century before, the identities it defined were being "marshalled... in ways that challenged the multicultural narrative of the social democratic project" (Hall in Robinson *et al*, 2017; 297). These narratives of compulsion were also antithetical to the increasingly every-day negotiations between traditional communities that, although problematic, were organic. For the Right in the 1970s and 1980s, the idea of 'unfairness' and 'white victimhood' picked up a key thread of Powellism and became a way to court the white working classes via a contract that would eventually re-categorise them again as largely 'unmodern'.¹⁰⁷

An antipathy to these state-imposed racial narratives was also to be found in the 1970s in what would become known as 'Thatcherism'. Whilst Margaret Thatcher blamed societal decline and the 'crisis of authority' in the 1960s on a Keynesian social democratic state that enabled permissiveness and profligacy, her austere monetarism was simultaneously and fortuitously (partially) congruent to the generational aspirations of a working class, consumer-led individualism enacted within the cockney identity. It (again fortuitously) chimed with a long dissatisfaction with traditional Labourism among some conservative sections of the London working class that it saw as largely remote and antithetical to its nascent entrepreneurialism but also the failure of a corporatist Labour Party to offer solutions to a state in crisis. The adoption of an 'authoritarian populism' allowed Thatcher to condense multifaceted popular discontents and channel them through an increasingly right-wing state. In this way, the project managed to construct a 'historical bloc' of contradictory forces - a reactionary, nationalist section of the white working class, an

¹⁰⁷ See the arguments of - Hewitt, 2005 and Rhodes, 2010: 77-99.

entrepreneurial, managerial petit bourgeois and older elites - that remains largely intact.¹⁰⁸

Fundamentally, the Thatcher project was about creating a new 'common sense' that simultaneously transformed the basis of British capitalism by colonising the past with what Stuart Hall (1988) categorised as a "regressive modernisation." Thatcherism sought to reconfigure (specifically English) memory to "erase the melancholy of a dead empire and to address the fears, the anxieties [and] the lost identities of a people."¹⁰⁹ As Hall suggests, it did this through simple imagery: the stiff upper lip, the Dunkirk Spirit - 'the Good Old Days' - all of which could be regained, though sacrifice, from the opium sleep of the degenerate post-war settlement. With the lack of an alternative mainstream narrative, the possibilities of a wholesale generational renewal of cockney receded and an older identity, reprised through comic caricatures like the self-employed East End plasterer 'Loadsamoney' (an updated version of the jingoistic Victorian, 'Arry from *Punch*) began to proliferate.¹¹⁰

The Thatcher project further re-valued the notion of class from an economic to a *moral* position and thereby, as Hall noted early on, constructed "an enemy within". This pitched the 'trade union bully boys' against, amongst others, the 'hard working cockney sparrers' so that eventually, "on council estates, a freshly painted front door and a copy of the *Sun* in the letterbox was a signal of Thatcher's achievements in remaking the Conservative party" (Clarke, 2004: 400). Cockney was, once more largely a nostalgic scaffold linking rulers to ruled. The pie shop, it's food, history and the lives it contained were now again congruent to a hegemonic message of a rediscovered Victoriana as a marker of stability and propriety in a changing working class landscape. The contemporary reimagining of the eel and pie shops as a totem of a lost white, working class London are firmly anchored within this nostalgic haunting.

¹⁰⁸ For a contestation of the exactitudes of this formulation of Stuart Hall's 'Authoritarian Populism', see - Jessop, Bonnett, Bromley, and Ling, 1984: 147.

¹⁰⁹ Hall, Stuart. "*Gramsci and Us*". <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2448-stuart-hall-gramsci-and-us>

¹¹⁰ 'Loadsamoney', the thuggish cockney plasterer who made a fortune from renovating and gentrifying homes for the middle classes was the product of the comedian Harry Enfield from around 1984. See - Biressi and Nunn, 2013: 32-37.

This trend however was not entirely linear. If mainstream texts were congruent to a regressive Victorian cockney, the conversations on inner-city streets of London were starting to sound different. In 1985, David Emmanuel, a black South London DJ who performed as 'Smiley Culture', recorded "Cockney Translation", a song that spoke to another valence of the identity - a more-or-less successful hybrid racial mingling. The song, largely in Jamaican patois (literally) translated the experience of black Londoners who were by now melding with a younger generation of cockneys and adding another cultural layer.

When New Labour came to power it largely accepted the parameters of the neoliberal state seeking only to blunt its sharpest edges.¹¹¹ However, central to its polity was the notion that struggle was now based, via what became known as Late Modernity, around culture not class.¹¹² Correspondingly, the Blair administration adopted a language of "aspiration... [that] attempted to exploit the fissures in the working class that had emerged under Thatcherism" (Jones, 2011: 91). It instituted a programme of cultural reconstruction to reabsorb what it saw as an incorrigible, recidivous white 'underclass' hooked on a 'dependency culture' into a modern, globalised, multicultural modernity. It did this by challenging the notions of welfare on which a racialized proletariat had been incorporated into the nation targeting "the white working class poor as symbols of a 'backwardness' and specifically a culturally burdensome whiteness" (Haylett, 2001: 351). According to New Labour, now associated with an increasingly professionalised political class, 'ordinariness' was no longer to be found in the stoic cockney of the 1940s but rather in a construction of middle class values (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst, 2001). According to Owen Jones (2011: 102), now that class had been superseded, "multiculturalism became the only recognized platform in the struggle for equality."

In this way, Blair's Labour Party forced the white working class "to think of themselves as a new ethnic group... [and refused] to acknowledge anything about [them] as legitimately cultural [which led to]... "a composite loss of respect on all fronts: economic, political and social" (Jones, 2011: 102). More, it ignored not only

¹¹¹ When asked her greatest achievement, Thatcher replied, "Tony Blair and New Labour. We forced our opponents to change their minds." Burns, Connor. 11 April 2008 - <https://conservativehome.blogs.com/centreright/2008/04/making-history.html>

¹¹² See - Giddens, 1990.

the heritage of very real residual racism in some London working class communities but also an organic, 'deep multiculturalism' - an unofficial assimilation, experienced and "negotiated" on a daily basis by the capital's inevitably mixed communities and the successful anti-racism of the previous decade, embedded in popular music and wider working class culture.¹¹³ It also stoked working class resentment by its "advocacy of immigrants and formerly marginal cultural groups... [which became the] ... moral justification of a layer of cheap labour and enforced entrepreneurialism" (Winlow, Hall and Treadwell, 2017: 70).

Through bureaucratic distance, an increasingly powerful 'liberal' commentariat and a 'fickle parent' style of governance, New Labour issued cultural and moral diktats that took aim at the working class gains of the 1970s.¹¹⁴ It demarcated the whiteness of the middle classes from those classified as 'chavs' or 'dirty' whites contaminated by violence and poverty within their zoned, concrete estates. One of the main arenas of this cultural demonisation was around the working class body and the traditional foods it consumed. I will deal with this notion, as a form of memory, in the following chapter.

Conclusion

The cockney, and his allied signifier the eel and pie shop, is the historical outcome of an intersectionality of identities. This ongoing dialectic is the result both of the interplay between an internal group identification and the categorisation of others; between an emergent nineteenth century working class, its indivisible bourgeoisie partner and modernity.

The identity that categorised the cockney who emerged from the Blitz rubble to stumble, jive, twist and then pogo into the 1970s, simultaneously forgotten and remembered, was not merely palimpsestic in a linear sense but rather the result of

¹¹³ For "negotiation" see - Back, 2017.

The re-written and imposed narrative of New Labour also ignored the very real anti-racism gains of the 1970s and 1980s that revolved around campaigns in music like Rock Against Racism, Red Wedge and the anti-racist / anti-fascist work of East End Trades Unionists like Micky Fenn - see - Fekete, Liz, 2016: 55–60.

¹¹⁴ For the 'fickle parent' argument see - Winlow, Hall, and Treadwell, 2017.

multiple junctures of memory and identity traces. In this way cockney, by the mid-twentieth century, consisted of (amongst many others) mediaeval notions of urbanity, eighteenth century assumptions around developing petit-bourgeois ascendancy, nineteenth century Irish immigrant entrepreneurial anti-authoritarianism and late Victorian propaganda around race and empire.

However, within a framework of mid-twentieth century modernity, the cockney began to play several simultaneous roles. It remained periodically useful to capital as a largely reactionary and patriotic force through which was channelled opposition to American consumerism and the expanding EEC. More, in defence of its Welfarist gains, adjacent to the forces of decolonialisation and amidst mass immigration, the cockney was used to bolster the colonial frontier that “came ‘home’” (Schwarz, 1996: 73) via Powellism. Additionally, however, the cockney developed multiple internal valances around the expanding horizons of choice and individuality via an expanding popular modernity. These were linked largely to its changing age demographic which were partly antithetical to its traditional role, again altering the course of the notion of ‘ordinariness’ within British society.

By the late 1970s cockney continued to embrace a vigorous low-cultured populism but simultaneously began to embody a more moneyed, conservative upwardly mobile element, birthed of a nascent proletarian entrepreneurialism which was valorised and subsequently liberated as politically expedient by forces of the Right, both elements held within dual class trajectories.

These contradictions, I suggest, highlighted by the neo-liberal ascendancy, provoked an increasing internal instability: a confusion around the changing physical and cultural loci for the cockney that accelerated its Great Trek eastwards towards Essex. Here, a simultaneous, adjacent but declining culture had been incubating. Originally birthed within the pioneering, progressive optimism of the Labourist New Towns this enjoined within the precarious memory forms of the new settlers to create a simulacra of what used to be ‘jellied eel London’ (Sinclair, 2004: 58).

Synchronously, within the active crucible of a modernising capital, cockneys changing territoriality, migratory composition, linguistics and transformed meanings

were central to the formation and experience of a new, composite and parallel identity. This was a stratified, multi-layered, modern cockney, increasingly racially mixed and as much contained within a structure of feeling or looser group identifications of cultural signifiers, as the traditional tropes of geography and occupation. These signifiers might be palimpsestic layerings of half-remembered music hall pub songs, a dropped 'h' to the fading "chalky villains, swollen knuckles, liver spots, back from a seven in Parkhurst" (Sinclair, 2004: 37).

As Calvino (1997: 14) had it, "[A]s this wave of memories flows in, the city soaks it up like a sponge and expands." The eel and pie shops, as a unique historical text, inscribed and re-inscribed with these ebbs and flows reflect a cockney whose London and its 'imagined centre' now points eastwards but whose history reminds us of its complicated past.

4. Tastes and spaces of resistance

Introduction

In the almost complete absence of any significant contemporary body of literature surrounding the workings and wider significances of the eel, pie and mash shops, I employ, in the first half of this chapter, a sensory ethnography utilising a ‘democracy of the senses’ (Rhys-Taylor, 2020: 6) to examine the sights, sounds and smells of the F. Cooke’s eel, pie and mash shop in Hoxton. The research was carried out during the autumn of 2019 but is additionally informed by years of work and visits to this and more than thirty eel, pie and mash shops over the last decade or more. Cooke’s is one of the last surviving London shops, its owner a direct descendant of one of the earliest Irish migrant dynasties that dominated the trade from the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Sensory ethnography is a phenomenological methodology that is influenced and guided by the senses, perceptions and experience. It is an emergent research field at whose heart is a growing interest in “new forms of ethnographic knowing and routes into other people's experiences” (Pink, 2015: 187).

I explore the space of the shop as a unique site of a hyperlocal, performative territory of working class culture that through ritual and the ‘secret habits of the home’ are zones of resistance to the modern neo-liberal city “from a stubborn past” (De Certeau, 1998). I suggest that these rituals are mythologised, signified and coded through the senses and the sedimentation of gestures. These remain unwritten but are, I suggest, part of the ‘true archives’ of the city (De Certeau, Giard and Mayo, 1998) that link hospitality, conviviality and memory within and upon the bodies of the customers (Connerton, 1989).

I examine the cuisine of the shops, the ingredients, the preparation and unique serving methods linking them to sensual “generous and familiar” ‘foods of necessity’ (Bourdieu, 1984). I consider the food’s unique historical significance within the British

working class diet using both historical reportage, contemporary theory (Bourdieu, 1984; Douglas, 2003) and examples from popular modernity. I place the food, especially the eel, in historical and cultural context and additionally within contemporary notions of disgust (Falk, 1991; Lupton, 1996) relevant to a changing and problematically memorialised habitus that surrounds them.

I use the sense of smell to conduct an olfactory and sensory history of London's proletarian sensibilities, poverty and memory which, in addition to parallel, embodied gesture, "brings the past into the present" (Serematakis, 1994). I further use the sense of smell to examine changing ideas of cleanliness, so vital to the culture of the historical shops.

The second half of the chapter situates the work within a theoretical framework that examines the significance of the shop, its food and memorialisations within a wider context of a changed and nostalgic working class identity. I examine how the food is an arena "for that most ubiquitous signifiers of class", the performance of respectability (Skeggs, 1997: 1), but also of a particular 'working classness', subtly delineated from the refinements of bourgeois dining and manners as 'microresistances' (DeCerteau, 1998). These I suggest may point to changes in how the contemporary working class may perceive itself (Bellah, 1985; Maffesoli, 1998) around a conflicted cockney identity leading to an inter-class contestation. Finally, I explore how pie, mash and especially eels by their class contestations are a crucial insight into why class tastes have not wholly declined with modernity as Stephen Mennell (1985) has previously suggested but rather, as Beverley Skeggs (2004) notes, are subtle, changeable and subject to a process of constant production.

4.1 Resistances from a stubborn past

It's lunchtime. In the market, people move rhythmically, meandering between stalls selling fruit and vegetables in colourful bowls, cheap winter coats and catchpenny cutlery. The greasy spoon café is filling up and several people wait in soft rain for complicated coffee orders at a mobile barista. A small queue of three elderly women has formed outside the pie and mash shop. One has a tartan shopping trolley and is having some difficulty negotiating the small step at the entrance.

F. Cooke is a former bank refitted in 1987 and owned by Joe Cooke and his wife Kim. Joe is the fourth generation of Cookes to sell pie and mash and grew up with his brother in the family's pie shop (now closed) in Broadway Market, several miles to the east which opened in 1900. The Hoxton shop has Victorian inspired green signage and a glass front with windows inscribed in gold type advertising "jellied eels, tea, coffee, mash, pie mash, fruit pie, ice-cream, cold drinks".¹¹⁵

The space inside is cavernous; high ceilings with white walls lined with white and green tiles. Rows of plain iron and wooden communal benches sit beneath heavy marble tables. There is a scattering of sawdust in the floor. The long counter to the right stretches across the whole of the width of the shop and leads to the kitchen at the back from where food is carried in to be served. The space is utilitarian: clean, bright, functional and unfussy. The movement of the food through to the serving area is linear, fast and efficient. Pies are carried from the kitchen in steel baking trays and emptied, still in their piping hot individual pie cases into a lidded, hinged metal receptacle under the counter ready to be plated by hand. The mash and liquor are brought from the kitchen as needed and emptied from steel buckets into antique heated urns on a ledge that overlooks the street. Cooked eels are brought to the plate when required from the kitchen.

As one enters, one is surrounded by noise and bustle: the clatter of plates, the clack of cutlery. These create a wall of echoing noise that competes with shouted orders and chatter and laughter. There is heat and the room smells of warmth, hot ovens, baking, pastry and because of the drizzle outside, very slightly of damp clothes. There is a constant flow of people coming in, ordering at the counter, being served, sitting, eating and leaving. There are multiple, overlapping conversations. In the far corner an infant is being fed with a mixture of mashed potato and liquor. By the wall, a man devours a pie covered in white pepper and vinegar. Another has a bowl of eels in liquor that he swirls around his mouth indulgently sucking at the flesh. He

¹¹⁵ For a visual comparison to an earlier historical taxon that echoes the plate glass, see - "The Betting Interest, its origins", *The Sporting Life*, 30 May 1861: 1.

uses his spoon to spit out the bones back onto the plate underneath. In another corner, a waitress stacks and clears empty plates and wipes down a table.

This is a transactional space full of action. On the one hand it is "...a social world, taking part in a play of sociability within the confines of the marketplace" (Erickson, 2007: 22), on another it is I contend, a unique and living archaeology of an early industrial feeding station caught and ossified in the transition to modernity where habits, rituals and preferences have inscribed upon and within the body.

There is a sense that the food served here could *only* be served here, the space inimical to the gustatory offering. This is, to paraphrase Marx's notion of 'species being', a place where the historical and contemporary socially constructed cockney body is being fed; an "entity in the process of becoming" (Schilling, 2012: 24).¹¹⁶ Here the (cockney) body is a nexus of class and modernity; the food a negotiation between the worker and the owner. The shop is the interstitial space of that negotiation.

The eel, pie and mash shop and the food it serves might also be defined by what it is not. Based on the specificity of its menu and the nature of its temporality it is neither restaurant nor a café. The eel, pie and mash shop is not a place for daydreaming where time is measured in Prufrock's coffee spoons nor the 'layabout' cafés that Quentin Crisp (1981: 33) remembered where "you would sit through lunch, tea and supper without ordering anything more than one cup of coffee..." In very clear terms, "You're meant to queue up, get it [the food], find an empty table ... hopefully if you're a good shop that chair's still warm ... eat it as quick as you possibly can and fuck off..."¹¹⁷

London's dwindling pie shops are almost what Ray Oldenburg (1999) calls a *Third Place*. These are social spaces that are not 'home' (first space) nor work (second place). Third places - like barbershops for example, are sites that anchor communities through informal ties that stimulate and nurture broader social

¹¹⁶ Shilling refers to Marx's notion from *The German Ideology* (1846) that the full potential of the body as a biological *and* social entity could only be realised in a future communist society.

¹¹⁷ Greg Camp, joint owner of T.J. Kelly, Debden. Interview by author, 5 October 2021.

convivialities. They are “public place[s] that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work (Oldenburg, 1999: 16). Anna Marie Steigmann (2017: 46) also suggests that within late capitalism “retail and gastronomic facilities” have blurred distinctions between private and public life. Accordingly working class spaces are arenas that have become “important symbols in postmodern life.” These are spaces where different social classes may meet, and entry isn’t based necessarily on social capital - a place where people might “rub elbows” (Rosenbaum in Steigmann, 2017: 47). In some respects, because of the gentrification of places like Hoxton Market and its surrounds this is increasingly true.

Rainer Kazig (2012) suggests that in all of these type of businesses, the owners often exhibit the behaviours of a host and create an atmosphere where everyone feels at home.

The old lady at the door, a regular for many years, is still having trouble getting her shopping basket over the threshold. “Come on in love” shouts Joe from the kitchen, “we don’t bite.”

The eel, pie and mash shops have become semi-secret spaces where only locals may tread. These are territories that in a sense cannot be seen from the “normal globalised street”: where locals, or “ordinary practitioners” make use of spaces that are only semi-visible (De Certeau, 1988: 93). The pie and mash shop in this sense becomes a sort of secular *eruv* - a Jewish tradition where an outside space is temporarily and ritually redefined as part of the home. This religious loophole is usually made by natural or man-made boundaries and is sanctified by the sharing of food that merges the spaces. Within this space, ‘home-like’ behaviour is tolerated, and, in that sense, the shops bridge a space that exists between “the public world of the market and the private world of the home and family” (Erickson, 2007: 22).

Historically, the early eel, pie and mash shop, as a response to working class hunger around the capitalist temporality of labour, sat between the home and workplace. As Hoggart (1957: 35) has it, “‘home cooking’ is always better than any other... café food is almost always adulterated ...” Yet of course, ‘home’ cooking often wasn’t an option for some of the shops’ original customer base. As we have already seen, working class Londoners were often forced to eat away from where they slept either

because of work pressures or lack of cooking facilities. The 1911 Census of England and Wales showed that in London, Finsbury, Shoreditch, Bethnal Green and Stepney were all areas where a third or more of the population were living two or three in a room, while in Southwark, Holborn and St Pancras just over a quarter lived in overcrowded conditions (Oddy, 1971: 265). Unsurprisingly then, as Maude Pember Reeves (1914: 103) recounts, in similar areas, “The Lambeth woman has no joy in cooking for its own sake. The eating of food then was therefore seldom a social occasion and, in terms of diet, “the limited consumption of animal foods indicated their uses in working class diet as a vehicle for consuming larger amounts of carbohydrate foods.” Meat, in Benjamin Rowntree’s (1913: 308) words, was often “a flavouring rather than a substantial course.” That said, “potatoes are an invariable item. Greens may go, butter may go, meat may diminish almost to vanishing point, before potatoes are affected” (Reeves, 1914: 98). Yet, “a good deal of pastry consumed. Some housewives make nearly half the flour into pastry, ... It is usually regarded by the worker as more satisfying than bread; and it saves butter” (Rowntree, 1913: 39).

Inevitably, by the turn of the nineteenth century, the food offerings of the eel, pie and mash shops reflected these basic tastes (largely jettisoning additions like pea soup and baked potatoes for example) and seem to have settled for easily available and cheap ingredients in a simplified meal that in some sense mirrored the food of ‘home’.¹¹⁸ The ‘homeliness’ of the shops was a result of an intimacy that nodded to notions of bourgeois hegemonic ‘respectability’ but represented a ‘sensual’ food pleasure - a food that was warm and filling, eaten in the spirit of the “generous and the familiar” (Bourdieu, 1984: 179). Indeed, in 1938 *Picture Post* quoted a customer in an eel-pie shop in Lambeth honestly remarking that the plain food was “... something that fills you and after all, that’s the chief thing.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ In an interview with Graham Poole from Manze’s he explained that “we stopped doing that (soup) just after the Second World War because that was a meal in itself ... we still make it at home as a family... you get a marrowbone, cook all the marrow out, add the split peas and handfuls of mincemeat. It was almost like a ragu – so by the time they’d had that, customers wouldn’t want pies.” Graham Poole. Interview by author, 14 December 2020.

¹¹⁹ Barber, Ada. “Life in the Lambeth Walk”, *Picture Post*, 31 December 1938: 47-53.

These spaces were not ‘posh’ (an adjective that encompasses an entire gamut of ‘non-working classness’) but because of their origins they contain within them negotiations with a bourgeois respectability where we “speak and act against our feelings and ... control our passions” (Finkelstein, 1989: 130). They are also places where in the words of the “Lambeth Walk”, you might (within limits) “do as you darn well pleasey”. Here, people might additionally indulge in the ‘secret’ habits of the home. People might eat with spoons; they may slurp their tea - laugh and eat with their mouths open. These are zones of *de facto* working class rules and respectability that have organically formed within these spaces. Indeed, within living memory people spat eel bones on the floor and smoked at the table.¹²⁰

Although the less sanitary eating habits may have disappeared, the performative element within this ‘cockney eruvim’ means that people (especially men) appear to become *more* cockney here. Once temporarily freed from the strictures of the globalised city (and perhaps more so in the new out-of-London pie shop locations like Essex, the Kent coast and Norfolk to where the London diaspora has emigrated), one may experience an over-emphasised, almost caricatured behaviour, ironically mirroring the original music hall creation of the character. This is particularly noticeable within a demographic of the post-war generation of the 1950s and 1960s (a generation largely, although not entirely, responsive to Thatcherite and subsequent Brexit messaging). This over-emphasised behaviour is evidenced by men gruffly ‘bowling’ and ‘strutting’ in from the street and affecting a slang dialect where they might exaggeratedly drop their ‘h’s or replace the ‘th’ sound for an ‘f’ sound.¹²¹ They become, as Paul Kelly reports of many that come to his shop in Debden, Essex, “more ‘London than London’... they hear the stories... that’s how things should be, pie and mash, West Ham. That’s what they aspire to be and that’s how they portray themselves.”¹²² Prescient here is Marcel Mauss’ seminal essay, *Les Techniques du Corps* (1934) that showed how societal membership meant that people use their bodies in situation-appropriate activities like walking, sitting, eating

¹²⁰ Rita Arment. Interview by author, 20 November 2019. Rita, now in her 90s recalled people spitting eel bones onto the floor into the 1950s.

¹²¹ For the cockney ‘bowl’ see - Kersh, [1938] 2007: 38. “... the swagger of the Cockney costermonger, the indomitable fruit-vendor, tougher than leather, more indestructible than the stones of the City...”

¹²² Paul, Kelly joint owner of T.J. Kelly, Debden. Interview by author, 15 December 2020.

and marching. The food served within this TARDIS-like space is a sensory and gustatory conduit for this behaviour: a foci for an increasingly re-imagined city and a temporal and spatial anchor for a projection of a past identity.¹²³

In this way the meal, as Margaret Visser (1991) contends is multi-faceted, simultaneously a social interaction, a commercial transaction and in some cases, a form of art. Within the space of the contemporary eel, pie and mash shop, staff and customers appear to collaborate (self-consciously or otherwise) in a thoroughly post-modern performance where they bring together these elements together. For the eel, pie and mash shops, these foods and behaviours are according to Michel De Certeau (1988: 133, 141) like “resistances” to the planned city “from a stubborn past.”

4.2 No mate, this is a pie shop...

A young, fashionably dressed man with a fashionably dressed beard who has been queueing behind the elderly women comes to the counter and asks Julie, one of the staff, what kind of pies are served. Joe Cooke, on his way out from the kitchen and, wiping his hands on a tea-towel simply but politely answers, for her. “Meat” he says and then almost as an afterthought, “but we can do you a vegetarian one.”

The man’s eyes look upward to the (limited) menu on the wall in front of him. He sees:

1 LARGE PIE & MASH 4.50; 1 SMALL PIE & MASH 3.90; 2 LARGE PIE & MASH £7.60; 2 SMALL PIES & MASH 6.40; VEGAN PIE AND MASH £3.40; SMALL EELS & MASH £4.90; LARGE EELS & MASH £8.30; JELLIED EELS £3.50.¹²⁴

¹²³ TARDIS is a reference to a time machine and spacecraft in the BBC television series *Dr Who*. I use it to signify an expansive and expanding internal space that defies logic where a whole re-imagined world of the past is performed and glorified.

¹²⁴ This menu echoes Malvery’s description of an East End eel shop. “The windows of these places were generally placarded with printed slips which conveyed the information that hot stewed eels were to be obtained at *3d.*, *2d.*, and *1d.*, a basin”. See - Malvery, 1908: 74.

“Do you do anything else?” he asks. “No mate” says Joe plainly still wiping his hands, “this is a pie shop”. With that, the man turns and, without another word, leaves. The space and the food remain untranslated for those who are not local in the geographic and cultural sense. Within this cockney *eruv*, there is a “... collective convention, unwritten but legible to all dwellers through the codes of language and of behaviour...” (DeCerteau, 1988: 16). Behaving in a certain way is expected. De Certeau calls these “miniscule repressions”, and they are I suggest, a code for hyper-local and hyper-situated behaviours.

The next customer is another young man but one whose paint-splattered overalls suggest that he might work locally, perhaps renovating one of the many ex-council properties that have found their way onto the open market and are being traded for huge profit.¹²⁵ Clearly a regular, he orders in a code that few outsiders would understand. “Two and two and a coke please love.”¹²⁶ Kim, who has taken his order shouts to the kitchen for more pies to be brought out of the oven.

This insider language is reminiscent of that used in an earlier taxon of working class eateries at the turn of the twentieth century. Olive Malvery, the Anglo-Indian investigative journalist writing about working class life, reports that whilst working undercover in a cheap coffee house, customers would order from her in similar terms:

- Now then miss, ‘arf of thick, three doorsteps, and a two-eyed steak”
- Rasher an’ two, three and a pint”
- Large tea, two slices and a neg, my dear (Malvery, 1906: 152)

¹²⁵ The so-called ‘Right to Buy Scheme’ was a cornerstone of Conservative government policy in the 1980s. By the end of the 1970s, almost one in three homes were owned by the state. The policy subsequently forced the remaining council rents to rise to cope with a shortfall and contributed to some working class families leaving the area completely. The current market rates for ex-council houses around areas like Hoxton are prohibitive and even small properties now occupied by gentrifiers are exorbitantly priced. The situation has created much anger and resentment amongst the remnants of ‘traditional’ communities that either still cling-on in (very) diminished social housing or come back to the market and the pie shop to reminisce.

¹²⁶ The figures simply refer to the number of pies and servings of mash potato: two pies and two helpings of mash.

Now, mashed potato is brought from the kitchen in a steel bucket. The potatoes are usually *Maris Piper* that are boiled and mashed in huge pots without the addition of either salt or butter. “It’s plain and honest” Kim tells me. Crucially, it is *never* scooped onto the plate with the help of an ice-cream scoop as some pie shops use, rather it is *smear*ed and *scrap*ed over the side of the plate. “Joe’s mother taught me (how to do it) ... you stand your mash up on the plate... its tradition... it’s my way or no way...”¹²⁷ This performative culinary exceptionality is, for regular customers part of the attraction. The anticipation of “seeing them smarm the potato on the plate on the pie and what I’d call rubbery pastry and the liquor... you wouldn’t dream of doing it in your own home...”¹²⁸

These repetitive ‘movements’, these ‘ways of doing things’, these ‘gestures’ are a living ethnographic archaeology that links generations together. For De Certeau (1988: 141) they are “... the true archives of the city” and are the “bricolage” of a palimpsestic cockney identity “that Lévi-Strauss recognised in myths.” They are echoed in the way that Joe Cooke still bones out his own meat bought from Smithfield; in the way that he mixes the pastry, the way that he moulds (“podding”) pastry pie tops onto filled pie tins. They recollect the worldview of Bourdieu’s (1984:173-174) old cabinetmaker: “... the use of his language and choice of clothing are fully present in his ethic of scrupulous, impeccable craftsmanship and in the aesthetic of work for work’s sake which leads him to measure the beauty of his products by the care and patience that have gone into them.”

With deft, practised hands, Kim empties two pies from their scalding tins onto a heavy, white china plate and, with a wooden spoon, scrapes two piles of mashed potato onto the side. With a ladle she spoons a liberal amount of liquor from a steel urn over the entire plate. She leans back and grabs the customer a tin of Coke from the shelf behind her. She takes his money, proffers his plate as he walks further down the counter to collect his cutlery.

¹²⁷ Kim Cooke. Interview by author, 2 December 2020.

¹²⁸ Eileen Errol. Interview by author, 22 October 2021.

The meal “brings diverse factors together... [and] in doing this, no one factor, not even nutrition or attentive experience to the food, is the [whole] point of a meal” (John, 2014: 258). According to Mary Douglas, the mid-century British anthropologist, pie and mash is an anomaly. Douglas, sought to classify working class meals within a set of rules by delineating their serving order and ingredients. The working class cooked meal - a ‘proper’ meal - with a centre piece of meat, fish or eggs must, according to Douglas’ research, be served with a carbohydrate like potato from below the ground. This is usually accompanied by another (green) vegetable from above ground like peas, beans, brussels sprouts, cabbage or broccoli. Gravy is the “essential but last ingredient of the meal, the element which links the other components together to form a plateful (Douglas, 1975: 273). No addition of cold foods like jellied eels are accepted on or with the plate. Additionally, meat and fish cannot be mixed so that meat pies and (hot eels) should not exist simultaneously.

The role of gravy is substituted for liquor in the shops as a sort of false green vegetable. Liquor is a simple sauce that contains fresh parsley and historically (although generally no longer because the shops do not keep fresh eels) the juice from the boiled eels. Douglas suggests that in working class households, if these dietary ‘rules’ aren’t followed, disharmony will result. Yet eels, pie and mash are an example of a London gustatory exceptionality that additionally defies eating times for main meals. Indeed, the food is still eaten for breakfast, lunch and evening meal further revealing its historical roots as fuel for workers.

The young man in overalls reaches noisily inside a plastic tray to collect his cutlery as the cash register crashingly rattles shut. He slides into an available bench and shuffles along to make room for others, nodding to his near neighbour - a stranger - in an unspoken yet meaningful micro-conversation of mutual recognition and acknowledgement of spatiality. This simple movement speaks to the heritage of communal eating. Once painfully associated with soup kitchens or the workhouse, the contemporary pie and mash shop excavates a pre- or early- capitalist “conviviality that sweeps away reticence and restraint” (Bourdieu, 1988: 179). A place where “those who choose to eat together tacitly recognise their fellow eaters as saliently equal” (Korsmeyer, 2002; 200). Falk (1994: 25, 20) suggests that

although “the role of the meal as a collective community-constituting ritual has been marginalized”, this kind of space-sharing signals “the incorporation of the partaker into the community simultaneously defining his/her particular “place” within it. The contemporary eel, pie and mash shop is, by definition a negotiation between a premodern “eating-community” and a modern individualised space: between what Pasi Falk (1994: 20) suggests is an “open” and “closed” body that is both “eating into one’s body/self and being eaten into the community.” In that sense, the shops are a kind of living tableau of older London solidarities that in some senses pre-date the restaurant form completely.

After delivering a tray of hot pies to the serving area, Joe Cooke has emerged from behind the counter with a large mug of tea inscribed with the words ‘salaam alaikum’. He jokingly shouts over to a woman who is a regular customer sitting eating with a friend, “You back again? I thought we banned you...” Several heads turn and there is a general murmur of laughter. Joe squeezes onto a bench next to another man with an exaggerated movement and a comic expression of pain and enters into a conversation that starts with him enquiring about the health of the customer’s mother.

These interactions are as much genuine conversation with frequent customers as they are what Anne Marie Steigemann (2017: 49) refers to as “alibi practices” that allow for small talk with people that are known or not yet known. These “... small social life worlds are created ... through ... social practices on a very local level, yet each life world is always linked to broader national and global levels.” Specifically, “the on-site practices link the global (e.g., sold products - in this case the food) with the national (e.g., the legal framework) and the local level (e.g., the business ethos) ...” (Steigemann, 2017: 49).

Karen, the shop girl weaves in and out of the tables, delivering a mug of tea that has been ordered and picking up a fallen fork from the floor. The pie shop seems to run like a machine: no-one runs, no-one bumps into each other; everyone knows the rules that have been passed down through families within this hyper-local community. There is an almost *performative geography* - a sort of dual *dance* of service and of customers. Steigemann (2017: 50) suggests that there is a kind of

“business ballet” where staff ‘dance’ for the audience who wait to be entertained or served. This almost echoes June Jacobs’ (1961) “intricate city side-walk ballet”: the pie and mash shop as an interiorised fossil of the faded coster markets.

The customers and owners have their own unwritten rules and unspoken regulations to which outsiders are not party. There is a “consensus - a tacit understanding between consumer and shopkeeper” (De Certeau, 1988: 20-21). These are the rituals for ordering, the recognition of regulars and the *structure* of exchange. These, especially in the pie and mash shops, signal to both a theatre and performance that recall the late nineteenth century music hall. This echoes Erving Goffman’s (1949) notion of ‘front’ and ‘backstage’ behaviour where the ‘self’ is a performed, if collaborative, character. This approach is reproduced in Philip Crang (1994: 696) writing of his work as a waiter on the English south coast where the *context* (my italics) of interaction “was...’located’ through a range of meanings of there and here, presences and absences.”

London’s eel pie and mash shops are, however, a unique type of space. They can be seen as a version of Oldenburg’s ‘third place’ yet they are additionally arenas where “... rather intimate practices, such as touching, shouting or teasing, along with other practice that are considered to belong to rather private social settings, such as hugging, child-caring and nursing... create a different type of sociability” (Steigmann, 2017: 53). Although the shops are primarily businesses, it is their heritage of ‘working classness’ that delineates them as uncommon. These are spaces, hidden in plain sight, where generations of the same family still visit and the continuities of the family dynasties of their owners provide a unique backdrop to working class family life. Indeed, the shops, by their warm, intimate welcome to regulars are in some senses linked to the distillation of the physicality of the lost Bakhtian carnivalesque of an earlier London. This embodied closeness and affection may mean that “[m]oving in or through a given place, the body imports its own emplaced past into its present experience (Casey in Feld, 1996: 93). Simply put, people eat where they are comfortable and, within the communities that use the eel, pie and mash shops that is largely based in memory. These ‘embodied’ memories become part of our habitual physical movements as well as part of particular environments (Pink and Mackley, 2014). It is to that bodily memory I shall turn shortly.

4.3 Too heavy to steal

As two o'clock approaches, the flow of customers has begun to lessen but is still steady. An elderly man shuffles onto a bench and places his plate, replete with a single serving of pie and mash, onto one of the distinctive marble tables that look like "slabs of old streaky bacon" (Sommerfield, [1936] 2010: 163). When Olive Malvery takes a temporary job in an eel-pie shop in Lower Marsh in Lambeth at the turn of the century, she describes the shop's interior in an exceedingly rare piece of reportage.

... the shop was furnished somewhat after the manner of an ordinary coffee-house with a number of pew-like compartments, each containing a small wooden table flanked with benches. The shop, however, was more bare; and the fittings and appointments were poor and scanty. Tablecloths were superfluous luxuries, and the eel stew and pies were served in basins on the bare tables. (Malvery, 1908: 74)

Gerald Kersh in his *The Angel and the Cuckoo* ([1966] 2011: 57) recalls the remnants of these furnishings, still common to various taxons of cheap London eating places in the Edwardian city and now much prized by the remaining eel and pie houses. "There were tables of cast-iron frames and marble tops, such as used to be favoured by the keepers of poor men's eating houses because they were too heavy to steal, required no cloths, showed no dirt, and might be wiped with the corner of an apron." The benches themselves are wooden, iron and old. They *look* simultaneously antique and Italian which is of little surprise given the immigrant experience of those that came to work in London's burgeoning catering trade in the second half of the nineteenth century. Graham Poole, one of the brothers descended from Michael Mansi, who now runs the Manze shops in London and Essex, recalled a visit to Italy on holiday.

... last year we were walking round a market in Florence, and we went past a shop, and it was Tower Bridge Road to a spit. They weren't selling pies but

Italian food - but it had the marble tables, the benches the mirrors, the sawdust... it was all the same...¹²⁹

in

Not all of the pie and mash shops evoke a *fin de siècle*, Italianate style. The Castle's shop in Camden dates from 1934 but at some point, in the early 1970s it was re-decorated with plastic, orange seating and a Formica counter. Although this would no longer be considered a 'classic' pie shop by purists, the styling nods to the utilitarian outlook of working class space that often attempts a pastiche of bourgeois fashion of the time. The (now closed) Cooke's shop on Kingsland High Street epitomised for example, the late Victorian aesthetic with stained glass and ornate mirrors. The (now also closed) Manze's shop in Walthamstow was resplendent with a pressed tin ceiling. Newer shops, (mostly in Essex or the London suburbs) or recently renovated shops like Harrington's in Tooting have re-interpreted their look to match a contemporary zeitgeist of bare brick walls and industrial lighting.

The pensioner stills himself in front of his plate of food and picks up his cutlery. Instead of a knife and fork, he has chosen a fork and a spoon. This, according to Joe Cooke, is a tradition across all traditional eel, pie and mash shops although few people seem to know from where it originates. Some suggest that it stems from a shortage of metal during World War One, others that knives were discouraged for use in the shops for fear of stabbings (although their use in other working class eateries would suggest that this was not the case). That said, the echo of criminality was reflected in the writings of Malverny (1906: 165-166) who recorded at the turn of the century that "[I]f they were to eat in, the customers were given knives and forks inscribed with 'stolen from Mrs A'. This chimes with the recollections of Rita Arment, ninety at the time of interview, who remembered some pie shops did indeed have their names stamped on cutlery to deter pilfering.¹³⁰ From a utilitarian point of view, it seems likely that the spoon is simply a remnant, first of eel-eating - a vehicle to convey the fish to the mouth and a temporary receptacle to discard its bones back to

¹²⁹ Graham Poole. Interview by author, 14 December 2020.

¹³⁰ Arment, Rita. Interview by author, 20 November 2020.

the bowl - and secondly a relic of the almost-forgotten dish of soup that some shops historically sold.¹³¹

Fully equipped with his cutlery of choice, the man turns over the pie on his plate so that the crust is facing downwards and pauses.¹³² Anticipating. This "... brief ritual prayer is a striking deferral of eating by very hungry people" (Eileen, 2014: 258). He smothers the entire dish in vinegar from a bottle on the table and dissects. As the spoon enters the pie, there is a puff of steam, and the man takes a second to breathe deeply.¹³³ An aroma of pastry and meat and ovens and heat and consolation and family and pleasure is cut by the vinegary tang. The man breathes it all in and starts to shovel. The meal is bland and unseasoned and comforting: it has a 'pre-globalization' smell and has all the madeleine-esque connotations of childhood that may likely be understood fully only by those that were weaned on this culinary (allegedly) 'uninspiring' fuel. The man smiles. He is at home and surrounded by the sensory bouquet of his past.

4.4 The lower classes smell

'What's wrong with the East End anyway?' she demanded as they walked along...

Sure, it smells. It smells of public houses and marketplaces and fried-fish shops. I love the smell of fried-fish shops, don't you? Come and have some chips. (La Bern, [1945] 2015: 153)

Although Georg Simmel ([1907] 1997: 119) saw the sense of smell among the 'lower senses', he suggested that "they penetrate so to speak in a gaseous form into our

¹³¹ Arment, Rita. Interview by author, 20 November 2020. Arment remembered that during the Second War, her mother-in-law buying meat bones to make a hearty broth that was sold in the shop. In a story in *Picture Post Magazine* from 1938 a poster in a pie shop clearly advertises pea soup as a main dish. See - Barber, Ada. "Life in the Lambeth Walk", *Picture Post*, 31 December 1938: 47-53.

¹³² This seems to be an odd but reasonably common affectation (along with some customers' preference for burnt pies) for which I can find no reason except perhaps a sensory preference for soaking the thicker upper crust in liquor for longer and making it softer.

¹³³ Some customers douse the entire plate of food in plain, non-brewed condiment vinegar (sometimes chilli vinegar) others use it only to season a cut-open pie. Often (white) pepper is additionally added to the food. These are traditionally the only condiments that are offered. Some customers 'open' their pie from the crust, others from the base. Some prefer - ask for and receive - pies that are blackened (slightly burnt).

most sensory inner being.” It was significantly for Marcel Proust not only the taste of the madeleine that evoked memories for Charles but also its aroma.¹³⁴ Indeed, the senses of taste and smell are interrelated in a ‘synesthetic’ dance and in this I use the word, following David Sutton (2001: 312), to define a unity of senses that work together to evoke something larger.

The sense of smell has long been associated with notions of moral probity and as a judgement on social rank (Largey and Watson, 1972; Low, 2005). As George Orwell ([1937] 1975: 112) ironically had it, “... the real secret of class distinction in the West [is that] ... *The lower classes smell.*”

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Henry Mayhew described the ‘smell’ of the working class that was the imprint of labour on the body and the olfactory residue of the herring that poor Londoners ate in huge quantities. These were doubtless the aromas that surrounded at least some of the customer base of the early taxons of the eel-pie shops that mingled with the warm, doughy breath of the baking ovens. The smell from bodies that knew hard manual labour and the warmth of sustenance.

The East end of London itself of course had for centuries been the site of polluting and foul-smelling industries situated far from the genteel western seats of power and influence. Dickens highlighted this nascent threat, neatly condensing the bourgeois fear of the vapours of the poor, their work and ultimately their humanity in a speech in 1851 when he suggested that “The air from Gin Lane will be carried, when the wind is easterly into Mayfair” (Fielding, 1960: 128). The wealthy were able to escape from the East wind: a situation that only recent gentrification in London has to some extent alleviated (Heblich, Trew and Zylberberg, 2021). During the nineteenth century, these progressive middle class migrations from the source of their wealth meant that on a very basic level, the olfactory textures of the city were no longer shared across classes and the sensual codes of common taste, still visible in Hogarth’s illustrations, were broken. Whereas once gentlemen like Egan’s Jerry Hawthorn might have eaten a street pie, his descendants would likely not have crossed the class threshold into a pie *shop*. The pie itself, its smell and taste, would

¹³⁴ In Proust’s drafts, the madeleine started life as toast and then *biscotto*. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/oct/19/proust-madeleine-cakes-started-as-toast-in-search-of-lost-time-manuscripts-reveal>. See - Proust, 2015 (the edition contains Proust’s early drafts).

still be enjoyed in different circumstances by different classes marked by an aesthetic delineation of taste and proximity: a culinary nod to a romanticised 'Olde England' but not one to be shared with the residuum. The working class pie, their arenas of sale and consumption were now zones of corruption and defilement.

At the start of the twentieth century, the East End still literally smelt of poverty. As John Sommerfield had it in his *May Day* ([1936] 2010:30), it was "... [a] zone of smells - stale cooking and wet washing, cats, old clothes, sweat and urine, the odoriferous motifs in a symphony of poverty." In James Curtis' *They Drive by Night* ([1938] 2008: 36) an inter-war London caff, certainly a historic taxon of the eel, pie and mash shop, is described in comparable olfactory terms: "Sweaty bodies, an open coke fire, cheap clothes drying from the rain, coarse, dirty fat used for frying eggs. Why, the joint smelt exactly like a cheap kip house." During the Second World War, the air-raid shelter was a salon of smells. In Robert Poole's *E1* ([1961] 2012: 169) Pinkie rankles at the suggestion she should sleep in one. "With everybody eating fish and chips and scratching all the time? No thank you."

In his *The Spiv and the Architect, Unruly Life in Postwar London* (2010: 3), Richard Hornsey describes the incongruity of the malodorous, fetid, almost unofficial working class side-street cafés that lingered as a response to the city's devastation. These were increasingly at odds with the post-war "collective moral project ... to (re)construct [London's] social stability." The cafes were seen as largely 'unsavoury' by the authorities: they had been hang-outs for spivs and black marketeers and were as disreputable as the mobile coffee stalls that they competed with. They were contrasted with the now almost 'staid' image of the eel and pie shop. Although inevitably catering to different sections of the London working class, the shops remained, largely I believe due to dynastic control, primarily a family-friendly space that sold hygienic and hearty food. The 'caff' spaces were delineated as much by the smell of the food as of the customer. Now extinct, some of these cafes mutated into the mid-century modernism of the Formica milk and coffee bars, early high street competition for the pie shops, that in turn have largely disappeared.

We might only conjecture what an historical eel pie shop, or more precisely what their customers, smelt like but the shops were always, and continue to be, judged by their (neo-Victorian) propriety that was partly dependent on cleanliness. The shops certainly smelt of the changing patina of London working class life. They smelt of the food and the people and their complex lives but were also the repositories of subtler aromas. Up until perhaps the 1970s, there would have been a definitive scent of smoke, smog-damp and coal fires. Personal hygiene has certainly changed in the last fifty years and weekly baths in working class homes or public baths have been replaced by daily showers and indoor plumbing. Men's clothing, from cheap gabardine to de-mob suits, worn until frayed or kept for Sunday best were always imbued with tobacco memories. Now the streets of inner London are more likely to be suffused with the spicy tang of curry houses, the spiky, oily piquancy of numerous fried chicken shops and the sickly-sweet stench of e-cigarettes.

Today, the Cooke's shop smells of baking, warmth and contemporary working class domesticity; a subtle whiff of pine disinfectant, a customer's slightly too-strong perfume and vaping residue on someone's coat. There is a nippy piquancy of vinegar that competes with an aroma of meaty gravy and an indistinct but definite grassy odour of the chopped parsley that goes into the liquor. There is none of the greasy smell of fried bacon from the market café opposite nor the slightly burnt hazelnut notes of the artisanal coffee shop a few doors down: commonplace, strong smells. The perfume of Cooke's is more nuanced and less familiar to the uninitiated, yet the pie shops are part of a long olfactory history of classed spaces within the city and the general consensus within epidemiology and the sociology of food is that class differences are still clear enough and that they flow from particular orientations grounded in possession of resources (Atkinson and Deeming, 2015). As Graham Poole, the heir to the Manze shops recalled.

My earliest memory as a toddler is opening the door to the kitchens at Tower Bridge and the smell that would come up... and I can still go into the shops now and I can still smell... it's just a lovely smell... it just reminds me of my

life... I've known nothing else... I've known no other constant in my life except the pie shop.¹³⁵

As Deborah Lupton (1996: 124) suggests, these sensoria and sensibilities are points through which “disparate cultural histories, and the bodies carrying them *potentially* converge” but the pie shops remain almost exclusively white and working class spaces, hyper-local and defended by opaque traditions and what might be seen as boring, plain food with the addition of exotic eel. Only so much of the modern world bleeds into the pie shops and the past is always near the surface.

The lunch-rush in Cooke's is over but people are still ordering pie and mash. Kim shouts to the kitchen to enquire if there's enough mash left. She does this in an indecipherable argot that is another ancient cockney *cant* known as 'back-slang'. Originally mentioned by Mayhew in 1851 it was definitively charted by John Hotten in his *A Dictionary of Modern Slang, Cant and Vulgar Words* (1860). The language utilises a simple reversal of letters in a word to frustrate the uninitiated. Although rare, back slang remained alive in (especially) London butchers' shops until perhaps the 1980s. It is now, as far as I am aware almost completely extinct outside of the Cooke's family shop.

Two teenage girls from one of the local estates, sit together on a bench, robotically scrolling through their smartphones whilst simultaneously spooning food into their mouths. Their colourful acrylic nails clack in a measured staccato that is echoed by their spoons cutting through their lunch. Although side by side, they ignore each other, their historical, human gestures in stark contrast to their rhythmic response to modern technology. These embodied, almost instinctive movements are sensual memories, not fixed as mere repetitive behaviours, but are a “transformation that brings the past into the present as a natal event” (Serematakis, 1994: 6). In a parallel of Edward Casey's (in Feld, 1996: 93) suggestion that “[M]oving in or through a given place, the body imports its own emplaced past into its present existence”, the digital messaging, the temporality of the immediate past relayed through technology, is

¹³⁵ Graham Poole owner of Manze's Pie Shop, Tower Bridge Road. Interview by author, 14 December 2020.

simultaneous with the corporeality of the experience of growing up eating this iconic food and the way in which one does so. These concurrent habitual movements, the modern and the traditional, are - or become part of - particular environments, “[T]hus, our experiences of place - and its social, physical and intangible components - are inextricable from the invocation, creation and reinvestment of memories” (Pink, 2015: 44). These memories are triggered by a “world filled with smells, textures, sights, sounds and tastes” (Stoller in Serematakis, 1994: 119).

As the teenagers are finishing their pies, Kelly, the shop girl brings a bowl of jellied eels to an elderly customer who has sat patiently at an adjoining table. Another woman and her friend who clearly know the man comments “I don’t how you can eat that mate... oooh, no...” and visibly shudders.

Turning, the man smiles and salutes them with a spoon full of quavering fish and aspic, grey in the afternoon light.

“Lovely” he says. “You dunno wha’s good fer ya...”

4.5 The Eel and the East Ender

Hunger is the best sauce in the world. (Cervantes)

Although the pie has immense gustatory and cultural significance for London’s working classes it was the eel that had been the staple of their food.

Eels had been caught for centuries in the Thames either by line or by eel-bucks (wicker baskets thrown across whole sections of the river), yet it was only in 1922 when Johannes Schmidt’s paper on ‘The Breeding Places of the Eel’ was read at the Royal Society in London that it was finally and definitively proved where and how this mysterious and secretive creature spawned (Fort, 2003: 209,103). As their immense popularity had mirrored the growth of London, local eels had eventually to be supplanted by imports. According to the Victorian naturalist, Frank Buckland (in Fort, 2003: 212), it was the Dutch that had largely controlled this lucrative trade. Eels were brought up the Thames in great quantities by eel *schuyts* from the Netherlands and

these were commended for helping feed London during the Great Fire of London 1666. Although their eels were seen by some as inferior to the domestic variety, the British government rewarded them by Act of Parliament in 1699 granting exclusive rights to sell eels from their barges on the Thames thus bypassing the notorious middlemen at the fish market in Billingsgate.

Malvery (1908: 74), writing of a turn-of-the-century eel-pie shop for *Pearson's Magazine*, describes the process of buying eels from the Dutch. As she recounts – “Nell says ‘We’ll git ‘em on the *Dutchman*...’ She hails a boat at the river’s edge and is conveyed to a Dutch boat at moorings ‘under the very shadow of London Bridge.’” From the bottom of the flat - but carefully perforated boat, Dutch crewmen use a wicker basket to weigh the eels from the hold. She takes twenty-eight pounds of eels “all alive” The two eel boats she visits “may constantly be seen lying off Billingsgate”.

According to Katsumi Tsukamoto and Mari Kuroki (2014: 7-8), the decree to allow the Dutch to sell directly to Londoners was in place until 1938 “when the last remaining barges packed up and left due to declining trade.”

If, by the mid-nineteenth century, the itinerant pie-man was becoming a rarity, eel sellers were not. David Badham, a Victorian curate writing in the book *Ancient and Modern Fish Tattle* (1854: 383) notes:

London from one end to the other, teems and steams with eels ... turn where you will and ‘hot eels’ are everywhere smoking away ... and this too at so low a rate, that for one halfpenny a man of the million ... may fill his stomach with six or seven long pieces, and wash them down with a cup full of the glutinous liquor in which they have been stewed. The traffic of this street luxury is so great, that twenty thousand pounds sterling is annually cleared by it. One million one hundred and sixty-six thousand eight hundred and thirty pounds’ weight, on average, are brought from Billingsgate every year by itinerant salesman, who cook and retail them on their different beats: customers are not entirely confined to the lowest orders; some of the inferior ‘bourgeoisie’ condescend to frequent the stands of the most noted retailers; and there are instances reported by some of these hawkers, of individuals coming twice a

day for months, and eating to the alarming extent of tuppence of time, or, in other words of devouring from 30 to 40 lengths of stewed eel, and decanting down their throats six or seven teacupfuls of the hot liquor.

Though our sellers of cooked eels have no disgraceful exemption to boast of, of unpaid taxes and city dues, like their ancient brethren of the same calling at Sybaris yet are they too men of importance in a small way and generally make a good thing out of this savoury calling.

It seems that at least the prosperous sellers even had a recognisable outfit. Badham recalls their outfit which included a “white hat with black crape [sic] round it, and his drab paletôt with mother-o’-pearl buttons, and his black kid gloves, with the fingers too long for him...” (Badham, 1854: 383).

An itinerant pie seller suggests that the poor would even eat the scraps of this popular fish; “... the boys often come and ask me, said an eel pie man ‘if I’ve got a farden’s worth of heads; now I don’t sell heads; the woman at Broadway, they tells me, sells them at four farden, and a drop of liquor; we chucks them away, for there’s nothing to eat on them - but boys though can eat anything” (Badham, 1854: 383).

It appears that what would become liquor in the eel, pie, and mash shops - the cooking liquid - served the same function as the liquid refreshment found at the coffee stalls. Badham sympathetically notes that “there can be no doubt that a warm cupful at early dawn, in a November fog must be a wonderful comfort to the working classes in London” (Badham, 1854: 384).

By the early nineteenth century however, the Thames was so polluted that it could no longer sustain significant eel populations and the Dutch ships had to stop further upstream to prevent their cargo being spoiled, “... first to Erith, then to Greenhithe, then to Gravesend” (Fort, 2003: 103, 215). Yet as Malvery’s earlier testimony demonstrates, some *schuyts* clearly continued to moor adjacent to Billingsgate in fouled waters.

Local lore suggests a Dutch trader, John Antink, sold fish, eels and perhaps pies from a makeshift shop at undetermined dates during the middle of the 1800s although *Kelly's Trades Directory* doesn't mention this business, situated at 331 Caledonian Road, until 1880 (Hunt in Hawkins, 2002: 16). In the same year another Antink, Elise Gerrard, almost certainly an immediate family relative, has a shop listed at 12a Kentish Town Road.¹³⁶ It seems that the Antink family certainly has a claim (albeit an unofficial one) in opposition to the Cooke's as progenitors of the eel and pie shops via their connection to the fish trade - although without further written proof, this remains conjecture. However, by 1898 the Antinks had bought an old fried fish shop at 74 Chapel Street (Market) in Islington and converted it to an eel and pie shop. They sold the lease in 1902 and the shop was re-leased with repairs and improvements (and conjoined with 73) by Luigi Mansi, a relation of Michele Mansi (of the Manze dynasty) who had also been involved in the eel and pie trade. This business (although no longer owned by the Manze family for some years) only closed in 2019.¹³⁷

Mayhew in 1851 had suggested that by the middle of the nineteenth century an estimated 932,340,000 tons of fish and seafood were sold by London street vendors each year. Although the eel had long been a popular and nutritious dish it was modernity that seems the driver for this extraordinary profusion of fish into the Londoner's diet. Changes to fishing boat design and propellers replacing sails and paddles meant that by the 1890s industrial amounts of seafood were being landed and transported by the new railways to the capital. These advances had certainly made many types of seafood plentiful and cheap, yet working class London does seem to be an outlier in its avowed taste for the sea. The Daily Telegraph in 1910 reported that "old superstitions die hard, and the poorer classes in England have long fostered a prejudice against fish, on the supposition that it doesn't contain anything like the amount of nutritive value as meat. The idea has been that there is

¹³⁶ *Post Office London Directory for 1880, Eel Pie Houses: 1721.*

¹³⁷ *British History Online*, accessed 19 March 2020. <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol47/pp373-404>.

"M. Manze closes: Chapel Market punters 'terribly sad' as historic pie and mash shop closes." *Islington Gazette*, April 30, 2019.

Currently, The Noted Eel and Pie House in Leytonstone is the last pie shop to store and slaughter eels on the premises. The owner, Peter Hak's great grandfather was a Dutch eel fisherman and married into the Newton pie shop dynasty around the turn of the twentieth century.

no strength in fish and that it is rather food for children and weaklings than for grown men” (in Oddy, 1970: 136).

It would seem however that the East End in particular did have a penchant for seafood. As Alex Rhys-Taylor (2020: 102) suggests of the now-closed but iconic Tubby Isaacs’ seafood stall in Aldgate, this account of a cockney craving for the fruits of the sea is seemingly “transmitted intergenerationally through the blood and culture of an ‘island race’, [only] interrupted by the city’s new global connections.” For the cockney, along with pies and mash, eels might be seen as a self-defined and so-called ‘cuisine of origin’ (Panayi, 2008) that are “specific flavours generated by environmental factors ... integral to the rituals that bind discrete communities of people together” (Martens and Warde in Rhys-Taylor, 2020: 102). More, these foods signpost how cultural communities are “‘sensed’ and experienced” within national and local mythologies (Howes and Classes in Rhys-Taylor, 2020: 102). Seafood in general as Rhys-Taylor suggests was a potent symbol for a London working class, co-opted into Empire that spoke of a clearly-defined island geography, imperial ambitions and a maritime tradition. Eels spoke also to a deeper, earlier colonial history of the high seas, ‘discovery’ and trade. This older chronology whispered by a preceding Catholic England that demanded fish on a Friday but also to the glories of Tudor sailing (and piracy) that had been “technologically and economically implicated in the advancement of the navy and the emergent colonial trade in commodities and humanity” (Loades in Rhys-Taylor, 2020: 106). It also spoke of the mediaeval commerce of the Hanseatic League that became enormously wealthy from, amongst other things, herring.¹³⁸

However, to relay Panikos Panayi’s notion of ‘cuisine of origin’ that suggests (specifically jellied) eels are quintessentially ethnically British fails to recognise the role of the migrant entrepreneurs (specifically the Irish and Dutch) and their food negotiations that were responsible for the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops.

¹³⁸ The Hanseatic League was a defensive guild-based trading bloc that at its height comprised 194 cities (including Kings Lynn and London) spread over 16 countries.

These negotiations have for many Londoners continued apace since the post-war period, increasing the diversity of foods and tastes available. The steep decline in contemporary eel stocks mirrors in some ways the dwindling appetite for the traditional cockney taste for seafood and eels in particular. Eel stalls, usually outside eel-pie shops and seafood sellers in pubs were a relatively common sight in London until perhaps the early 1980s when the forces of globalisation and immigration changed the food landscape of the capital. Robert Poole's novel, *E1* ([1961] 2012: 34) evokes this very well.

Outside the pie-shop near Bethnal Green Road, was a live-eel stall. They always stopped there for a few minutes so that Jimmy could watch the blue-black eels slithering round the pieces of ice in the shallow metal trays. You just picked out the eels you wanted and the vendor, dripping with blood and guts, chopped them on a wooden block into still-quivering two-inch sections.

The eel remains a re-occurring trope of the 'slippery' cockney. In Robert Westerby's *Wide Boys Never Work* ([1937] 2008: 189), 'The Eel' was a cockney criminal "who made a living out of phoney passports." Innumerable 'spiv' characterisations from popular culture exhibit this threatening, sometimes comic, sometimes lubricious, always deliciously unreliability figure. From Private Walker in *Dad's Army* to George Cole's Arthur Daly to any number of Ray Winstone's roles, the eel acts as an important metaphor in the shifting and unstable role of the historical cockney itself.

4.6 A Regime of Disgust

I'm not a great lover of cold things in jelly.¹³⁹

Although the eel was historically at least part of the bourgeois table, it was essentially a food of the London urban poor. Live, the creatures could be kept in puddles of water for extended periods, boiled and then jellied. With the addition of a common herb like parsley to its cooking juices, it could be served hot. In the Bourdieusian sense, the eel in this form was a 'food of necessity'. Indeed, Malvery

¹³⁹ Graham Poole owner of Manze's Pie Shop, Peckham. Interview by author, 14 December 2020.

(1908: 73) suggests that this food was “indulged in generally by sections of the poorer working classes.”

The decline in eel-eating since the end of the Second World War, but particularly within the last thirty-or-so years has been marked. Although most contemporary eel, pie and mash shops keep at least some stocks of jellied eels in their refrigerators (which can be easily converted into a hot dish by warming and the swift addition of liquor) according to Robert Kelly, “nobody eats it now” and it is reasonably rare to see it ordered.¹⁴⁰ The question is why?

It seems clear that by the 1960s what people meant when they talked about class began to change. The expansion of education, growing individualism, and the decline of deference meant that the axis of traditional class boundaries now appeared blurred (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2018). People increasingly saw themselves as ‘ordinary’ (Savage, 2005) and the subsequent Thatcherite hegemony conflated this with a panoply of middle class values. For the aspirational cockney this process was crucial in delineating a nascent individualism separating those in work from those on benefits and was synchronous with the final decline of its late nineteenth century incarnation. Essex became its spiritual home as a place for people who wanted to ‘better themselves’ and this seemed to engender “a privatised, as opposed to solidaristic civic culture” (Butler and Watt in Millington 2016: 275).

The gustatory de-centring of the eel was coterminous with this process linking a developing dynamic of taste within the London working classes with how they saw themselves. The decline in eel-eating I contend is encapsulated in what Stephanie Lawler (2005: 434) significantly suggests is “a decline in the *worth* of the working class itself.” The eel was a poor man’s food of necessity. Those that continue to eat eels are typically elderly or tend to be male and from a specific demographic that have a political interest in doing so. Many in the pie shops still call themselves working class (“I’m working class because I work”).¹⁴¹ However, this definition likely differs substantially in cultural (and sometimes economic) terms from that of their

¹⁴⁰ Robert Kelly. Interview by author, 15 December 2020.

¹⁴¹ David H. Interview by author, 14 April 2022.

Fordist parents' generations and for some, generally relies on solidarities that do not (largely) extend beyond their own ethnicity.

Whereas the pie is still popular as a moniker of a vague working classness, in general younger people, male or female, below the age of around forty will simply not countenance eating eel in any form. Much of that can be further evidenced by excavating the unstable sensory notion of disgust.

The eel appears to affect people on a distinctly *visceral* level and the gut itself - the viscera - has long been used as a metaphor to describe and gauge innate bodily thought processes: hence the notion of 'gut feelings' (Probyn 2003). In the cartography of the body, the mouth can be seen as a guardian and functions like a "safety chamber" (Rozin and Fallon, 1981).

For Mary Douglas ([1975] 2003), disgust - as evidenced through dirt or 'impurity' - was a cultural construct theorised from the Old Testament. The eel was an abomination because it came from the sea but had neither fins nor scales. The creature is encoded as a *moral* object of disgust - doubly so as it looks and moves like a snake, another Judeo-Christian symbol of sin. Of course, the basis for such 'socio-biological' explanations tends towards a 'common sense' idea that revulsion is inculcated in certain foods (or creatures) because they may be poisonous. Despite the fact that, as in the case of the eel, such ritually 'impure' foods may well be entirely nutritious (Fischer 1988: 285), this coding may easily result in feelings of disgust, revulsion and nausea.

The idea of 'uncleanliness' and morality combined within the Victorian bourgeois psyche with the discovery of the microbe and psycho-sexual hesitancy around bodily orifices. This axiom was decoded and interiorised by the proletariat themselves resulting in a self-policing hierarchy that inevitably valorised probity as a mark of their own respectability within capital. In a typical post to a private Facebook group about pie and mash shops, a customer reviews Maureen's in Crisp Street market with particular and favourable attention to its cleanliness.¹⁴²

¹⁴² The Pie Mash 'n' Liquor appreciation society, August 30, 2021. Accessed August 30, 2021. Maureen's is a popular pie shop opened in the 1950s by a husband and wife, Dave and Maureen and

This 'common sense' remains largely current within the eel and pie shop community with the valorisation of 'clean' British restaurant spaces and food as opposed to 'dirty' and 'brown' (potentially adulterated) immigrant food ("none of that foreign muck").¹⁴³

Food has the potential to corrupt the body according to Lupton (1996: 113) "because it passes through the oral boundary of the 'clean and proper' body; it becomes abject when its nature is ambiguous." More, as Lupton suggests, food, like sexual fluids occupy a sort of 'liminal' state in relation to the body's porousness. Food can be simultaneously exterior and interior and may be seen as threatening when its form is unclear and ill-defined thus threaten the integrity of the whole. Eels as both phallic and slimy, may represent this 'intimate fluid' analogy and Rhys-Taylor (2013: 234-235) further notes that the (cold) jelly surrounding the eel, and its ability to adhere to the skin, further limits our body's sense-boundary. This aspect does to some extent appear however to be highly culturally determined. As Michael Ashkenazi (1991) suggests, the Japanese appear to delight in the sticky and the slimy. Similar arguments are made for increasing hesitancy around the green liquor that is served over pies and mash and over hot, stewed eels. "My girl won't touch it - she says it looks like bogeys."¹⁴⁴

To some extent of course, we *become* what we eat by the simple act of the absorption of food into the body. Claude Fischler (1988) suggests however that it might be more correct to speak of 'incorporation' into the body and this has an ironic aspect to the mono-cultural cockney identity as the eel of course is multinational. The mouth, the symbolic gateway for bodily control is the ultimate arena for disgust and in an apposite allusion to the cockney's accent and speech pattern, Marion Halligan (in Lupton, 1996: 18) points out that the "... tongue names and the tongue tastes." What we do with our mouths, *how* we eat, is also significant. Constraints over methods of eating were, as Mennell (1985) suggests, slowly internalised as

was originally located in the East India Dock Road but moved to its current locale in Chrisp Street Market in Poplar in 1993.

¹⁴³ In the BBC series, *Till Death Do Us Part*, the cockney bigot, Alf Garnett often rails against 'dirty' foreign food as "foreign muck".

¹⁴⁴ Freedman, 2017: 212.

practises of self-control and moderation, based on emergent bourgeois notions of propriety. The eel was always a difficult fish to eat, and, in a recall of older table behaviours, bones were, as we have seen, spat onto the pie-shop floor. As a Victorian etiquette manual records, “eating is so entirely a sensual, animal gratification, that unless it is conducted with much delicacy, it becomes unpleasant to others” (Kasson in Grover, 1987: 125-126). In this way, discriminatory behaviour both about types of food and also the manner of its consumption was class-based and crucially progressed and confirmed distinction.

The humble eel and the eating of it is then an unlikely indicator of the formation and re-formation of change within the cultural sensibilities and tastes of the London working class. For the contemporary cockney, imbued with notions of social mobility, eel eating is generally identified with a squeamishness that links pastness and poverty. Simultaneously however for a very few customers, especially in Essex and within the ‘newer’ pie shops the continued eating of (especially jellied) eel as a ‘food of ordeal’ particularly as a pre-football match ritual has become a performative cultural re-enactment of a selective memory-scape based largely within the post-war 1950s and 1960s whose ‘white diaspora’ identities combine with localisms found in food (Floya in Watt, Millington and Huq, 2014: 124).

4.7 A Working Class Taste and Space

Perhaps in a nod to earlier forms of polite, communal working class eating, at the end of the meal pie and mash shop customers have traditionally taken their plates and cutlery back to the counter. In Cooke’s, this gives some of the customers a further opportunity to chat to Joe or Kim underlining the specificity of the space. These are pie *shops* or pie *houses* with their own class rituals and manners. “Be lucky... and don’t come back” says Joe laughingly to a former East End couple who regularly return to Hoxton from their adopted home in Essex to see friends and walk the old streets.

If, as Loïc Wacquant (in Skeggs, 2004: 28) suggests, it is “the location of the *cultural* practice within a system of objects and practices that define its social meaning and significance”, then for the owners and customers of the eel, pie and mash shops,

knowing the 'rules' of bourgeois society - how to 'behave', what to eat, how to eat, how to hold cutlery and to conduct oneself with 'refinement' in a restaurant space - is only half the issue. What actually matters is how these foods and practices are objectified and approved in relation to the dominant culture. And of course, they never can be. According to Bourdieu (1986: 511), the working class in the eyes of bourgeois culture will always lack "taste" and "the right ways of being and doing" - the result partly of their initial, denuded educational habitus, and more fundamentally of course because we "are born into unequal social relations."

For Marx ([1848] 1980: 44) the working class, and indeed, the very notion of class itself, is brought into existence by the bourgeoisie ("the special and essential product of the bourgeoisie"). This group was consolidated by its need for overtly political - and hence cultural representation - that Dror Wahrman (1995) evidences by the solidifications around the 1832 Reform Bill. Yet, "whereas the middle class were able to use the term 'class' to make claims on the state for recognition and to draw moral distance from the aristocracy, they depicted the working class as immoral and forced them to become accountable to the state" (Skeggs, 2015: 5). Skeggs suggests that one of the ways that the working classes were able to gain even meagre recognition as a group with an identity (as opposed to an amorphous mass) by the state, was appeal via welfare claims. To do this it had to 'perform' respectability in order to survive (Butler and Shusterman, 1999). The eel, pie and mash shop and its food are one of the very few remaining working class arenas (which additionally include football culture) that evidences this dual and complicated navigation around a relationship with propriety and virtue.

As Lawler (2005: 434) suggests, "An entire social and cultural system works to continue the constitution of white working class people as entirely devoid of value and worth." Yet, as Angela McRobbie (2002: 136) has it, "...even the poor and the disposed partake in some form of cultural enjoyment which are collective responses which make people what they are." Crucially, "working class culture ... has a different value system, one not recognised by the dominant symbolic economy" (Skeggs, 2004: 153). Indeed, London's traditional working class, as seen through the prism of their fading eel and pie shops "appears to have an alternative understanding of cultural judgement, seeing it as they practice it, as a group matter... They are not

in awe of legitimate culture and find no value in refinement (Bennett *et al*, 2009: 205).

Skeggs (2016: 5) echoes Bourdieu when she suggests that this classification “brings the perspective of the classifier into effect” and then captures “the classifier within the discourse.” Class and its allied notions of taste and acceptability depend therefore on who defines it. Ultimately, ‘working classness’ for the overwhelming majority of London’s working class is valued *more* than by London’s bourgeoisie. Further, I suggest, even for the eel-pie shops’ customers who consider themselves no longer working class in the sense of meritocratic success, this ‘essence’ of background, this vague but pertinent memorialization of the past, is vital in their self-definition and self-mythologising. That is one of the reasons why the shops still remain spaces that are significant (and more so in the current so-called, ‘culture wars’) and the food valorised. That is also why the middle classes in general, except for some vague notion of ‘heritage’, see the shops as irrelevant and their food - at best a neo-peasant cuisine and at worst - as a disgusting slop. There is simply no need for the middle classes to define their own culture in relation to it because it has no exchange value for them, is no threat and ultimately insignificant. More succinctly, the working class is marginalised from the channels of cultural engagement dominated by the middle classes and rendered invisible from them (Savage, 2000).

However, just because some working class people who use the shops can’t or are reluctant to talk in class terms doesn’t mean that they don’t recognise class, their position within capital or its signifiers. More, just because some working class customers of the eel and pie shops believe themselves to be middle class that “does not mean they stop being exploited by the capitalist class” (Skeggs, 2016: 3).

Class, more than simply an economic qualification is additionally an arena for competition around the uneven distribution of *value* that may be charted by delineating different symbolic matrices (for example, gender and race) that dispense fluid and changeable advantages (Skeggs 2004: 3; Savage, 2015: 22). The shops and the food evidenced within are a rare oasis where working class Londoners have been largely free of the historic legacy of the imposition of bourgeois meaning and accountability or at least have been able to negotiate its limits. Indeed, I would argue

that eel, pie and mash shops remain largely intimidating and exhibit the sort of reverse symbolic violence that Raymond Williams (1958) experienced in a Cambridge teashop where he was made to feel inferior to the 'cultivated people'. As Adam Boutall has it, "When you go into a pie and mash shop you've got to have an old East Ender behind the counter ... I think it'd seem weird otherwise if there'd be some posh person serving you ... all the staff look a bit rough-and-ready; you know what I mean? Every pie and mash shop I've ever been in there's someone in there that looks like they was born and brought up on it ... everyone's a bit rough ... but it's like the old pubs: it's like 'ooh, you wouldn't go in there.'"¹⁴⁵

In essence, the food and the culture that surrounds them are *differently* valued by the working class people that use them in different and unique ways to navigate a specific kind of culture. So, what might constitute an essential and authentic working class food culture represented by the London eel, pie and mash shops? Michel DeCerteau in his *Practice of Everyday Life: living and cooking* (1998: xxi) uses food as evidence of 'subordinate' people's resistance strategies. Within the contemporary neoliberal city working class food, and especially eels, pie and mash I conjecture, offer a refuge from the dominant forms of cultural production. The shops are essentially, hyper-local microresistances, "... which in turn form microfreedoms, mobilise unsuspected resources hidden among ordinary people, and in that way displace the veritable borders of the hold [of] social and political powers." In this vein, Paul Kelly recalls his childhood in the 1980s when the pie shops in Bethnal Green were local hubs where "everyone knew each other; people were talking across tables and there was a real good buzz... if they weren't down the pub, they'd be down the pie shop... you didn't have to be respectable, you could be half-pissed if you wanted to." The shops were "full of hooligans, rough houses, you know the type - what most people would say [was] an East Ender... and everyone was the same... everyone was trying to nick a pound note..." They were places "where someone's knocked over a butcher's van..." and would then try and clandestinely sell the meat.¹⁴⁶ The pie shops remain, as Greg Camp puts it, an arena "of ducking a

¹⁴⁵ Adam Boutall. Interview by author, October 19, 2021.

¹⁴⁶ Paul Kelly. Interview by author, December 15, 2020.

diving... a place to hear the banter; to hear the sounds - to know that you're socially with people..."¹⁴⁷

The shops, the sites of these resistances, are now perhaps in some ways closer to what Jukka Gronow, (2018) suggests are 'social worlds in themselves' - similar to Robert Bellah's 'enclave culture' (Bellah, 1985) and Michael Maffesoli's ideas of 'neo-tribes' (Maffesoli, 1998). Here, new forms of solidarity have emerged into a post-modern *sociality*. The Marxist model of a 'class-in-itself' may no longer necessarily be a 'class-for-itself', rather a more relational model is postulated that is more loosely formed through a series of external identifications. Individuals form overlapping, temporary subcultural (interest) groups that are based on taste, choice and everyday interactions - like eating. Cohen (2017: 114-115) suggests that collective identities associated with becoming working class, such as 'informal' apprenticeships constituted by family, school or workplace have become "decentred" into individual, atomised interest groups, grievances or desires/demands. In this way there is a sentimental nostalgia for past solidarities - but this is simply a "material sensation of mobility" that is "an evanescent momentum which mirrors an underlying socioeconomic stasis." The failure of these endeavours, however, often result in a 'centripetal' trajectory - where groups may reform to redefine themselves as the sole or 'rightful heirs' of these traditions through a performative habitus, that may appear as a stable point for "re-formatting working class identities" but remains "haunted by a sense of their social dislocation." The 'tribes', formed around groups within the London working classes - from so-called 'chav' to self-declared 'middle class' property-owning Essex 'refugees' - bond around "common filiations, fixed identities and more or less fictive kinships, as well as shared memoryscapes linked to local places of pride" (Cohen, 2017: 116).

The shops are also perhaps a living archaeology of some elements of what remains of the pre-capitalist conviviality, lost to the 'internal enclosures' of the mid-Victorian street-market clearances. These remnants in turn echo earlier, largely rural festivities that celebrated the season's changes. This fading reverberation flickered in the Pearlies' street parties before they were banned in the 1920s; it was re-kindled in the

¹⁴⁷ Greg Camp. Interview by author, October 5, 2021.

welcome of the Victorian coffee stall and lives still in the warmth of the steamy-windowed eel-pie shop.

The shops and their food are then portals to a certain past - but not a direct one. Bourdieu (2011) echoed Marx when he suggested that the social world is “accumulated history.” These are multi-headed gateways: different shops have different heritages and different shops and their locales evidence slightly different tastes and traditions. Much depends on their specific hyper-local history. Social media post about rivalries between shops reflects this and that history leaves traces on the actions of social actors - but also on the *context* of their actions so that the shops are also a palimpsestic negotiation with a disputed and reimagined authenticity “... *and* the lived traditions and practices through which these understandings are expressed” (Hall in Samuel, 1981: 26).

There remain the myriad inscriptions upon the working class so that one might be simultaneously a ‘cheeky, lovable’ cockney as well as an East End gangster. This dual projection has enabled the working class to “generate their *own* [my italics] use-value *and* to exist beyond moral governance, enabling a critique of the constraints of morality (Skeggs, 2004: 22). This duality is the basis for the anti-pretentiousness of the food and the culture within the eel and pie shops, simultaneous with music hall performers who (carefully) satirised the ‘snobs’ and the ‘affected’ bourgeoisie (Vicus, 1974). This notion remains a cover-all mechanism against the ‘posh’ and defends the ‘ordinary’: the home-cooked, the comfort and the warmth of a simple meal and a way to “de-value the valuers” (Skeggs, 2004: 114).

Anti-pretentiousness also remains an armour against conceit - a resistance against the “false consciousness bred into the bones of the workers” (Engels, 1953: 522-523). This is of course double-edged. In one sense it has somewhat insulated a working class movement yet has failed to articulate a resistance to capital which has kept the London working class entombed within and constrained by the acceptance of social hierarchy. Typical of this is the character of Jimmy’s mother in Robert Poole’s *E1* ([1961] 2012: 98) where, “She wished ‘e won the scholarship, but what was the good? They only got their ‘eads full o’ strange ideas and got too big for their boots.”

For all that, the pie-shop exhibition of the ‘piss-take’; the ‘having a laugh’ (and also the contemptable modern, ‘banter’, so often a cover-all for politically incorrect, micro-aggressions) remain a way to reject authority. Paul Willis (in Skeggs, 2004: 114) suggests that this kind of humour isn’t just about getting through the monotony of the working day but a kind of ‘doubling’ where the real is simultaneously taken to be fictitious but also “as a practical cultural form in which the variable and ambiguous nature of labour power is articulated.” Oddly, these ‘micro-resistances’ may have reshaped contemporary cultural capital in that the form “now takes cosmopolitan and ironic forms that appear to be pluralist and anti-elitist (Savage, 2015: 51). In this sense the identification of class as evidenced in working class spaces like the eel and pie shops is part of a process of evolution. For Skeggs (2004, 117), this “is central to understanding contemporary class relations. The significance of representations lies in the way in which they become authored and institutionalised through policy and administration, how they produce the normative, how they designate moral value and how they are positioned by negative and pathological representations are both aware and resistant.”

So, the accrual of taste, even within different circles of the working classes themselves, is ascribed by middle class values that are enforced within a reproducing power relationship to differentiate themselves and attribute value. For example, to making oneself ‘tasteful’ through judging other people as ‘tasteless’: this is *exactly* the process that is aimed at people from Essex described as ‘vulgar’ and unmodern. Yet, working class culture is *differently* valued amongst itself, and the eel, pie and mash shops offer a rare glimpse into a realm of space, taste, freedom and relaxation that are at least a negotiation with the hegemonic culture.

Conclusion

Food is a universal signifier for membership, solidarity and belonging. As Falk (1994: 70) remarks, “...members of the same culture eat the same kind of food.” Within this contemporary framework, pie, mash and eels are simultaneously ‘the London ambrosia’, a legitimate and proud working class institution as Michael Collins (2021) has it, and a living gustatory link with an early-capitalist past and a gastro-nationalist present.

If the eel, pie and mash shops and the food they serve are anything, they are arenas of security. They are one of the few places where working class people are not silenced both literally and metaphorically. The shops are a foci for lived bodies that are framed by cultural practices in which identity is performed through a sensual inscription that constitutes “a realm of shared intelligibility” (Charlesworth, 2000: 17). This freedom, exhibited through palimpsestic gestures and gustatory taste, is held in the physical body of the customers through a sort of ‘comportment’ as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (in Charlesworth, 2000: 17) suggests where the body goes through a kind of “postural impregnation” sensing and ‘feeling’ signification. This is a classed experience of place and taste: the body relaxing when it enters a space apposite to its class background evidenced by the changed, ‘classed’ behaviour of the customers. In this way, the physical landscape is inscribed by working class bodies and the working class bodies are inscribed by the space and the food (Bourdieu, 2000: 141).

I suggest that the food literally ties the East Ender to the ‘terroir’ of the London street with its complex notions of cleanliness and anti-pretension but gives us a unique insight into what the convivialities of a closed, almost secretive heritage of traditional working class culture in late capital actually looks like. This simple, historical dish, built from ‘foods of necessity’, is a prism through which an urban proletariat and a decamped suburban diaspora dispute authenticity and originality in an ironic Appadurain dual over a dish that no-one is interested in appropriating because it is unable to travel outside its ‘field of exchange’ (Bourdieu, 1997).

In conclusion, I suggest that the shops are a living archaeology of early capitalist conviviality, the remnants of Victorian feeding stations and a successful taxonomic descendant of London’s first popular working class eating houses. In the contemporary neo-liberal city, they offer an insight into a private ‘working classness’ that is a negotiation with, and a micro-resistance to, the hegemonic culture memorialised within a largely insular, conservative cockney culture infused with a local patriotism (Tuan 1974) that signals to the contemporary ‘culture wars’ around issues of immigration and gentrification.

The eel, pie and mash shops show us a glimpse of a different way to live and a different way to taste.

5. The cockney saudade

Introduction

“Walking through streets that were memories of streets, correct in some details, quite wrong in others, down through Bethnal Green and Whitechapel...” (Sinclair, 2004: 112).

In this chapter, I explore the contemporary landscape of the eel, pie and mash shops and their concomitant interrelated cockney identity through the different types of memories and nostalgias that are performed within them.

The memories that breathe and multiply within the present day shops are linked to the historical specificity of London and their unique but largely overlooked place within British gustatory and political culture. The current memorialisations partly derive from the primary source of the largely invented Victorian music hall character of the cockney. The shops also simultaneously embody earlier, potentially antecedent capitalist notions of conviviality as well as the cultural repercussions of nineteenth century class privation and defeat that led to them as zones of consolation (Stedman Jones, 1974).

The memories of the shops are further entangled and complicated within the simultaneous memorialisations of a separate owner and customer class. The former, largely the historical product of an ideology of the small masters concomitant with notions of Radicalism and individualism has melded with an entrepreneurial proletarianism. This group valorises working class culture, largely sharing customs and language but is generally economically superior. The latter is a customer base that currently comprises of a white, proletarian precariat clinging to their traditional hyper-localities against a backdrop of globalisation, immigration and gentrification. They are further enjoined by a diaspora of re-located Londoners and their descendants found mostly within Essex and the Medway towns who are (generally

but not exclusively) conservative and Conservative in their culture. It is this group, self-defined as the heirs of past class solidarities through re-imagined performities and shared, hybrid memoryscapes linked to historical hyper-localities (often via football team loyalties) that remain “haunted by a sense of their social dislocation” (Cohen, 2017). These tangled, interrelated and often contradictory memorialisations increasingly encounter and compete with each other on (especially) social media and I refer to them as ‘polyphonic’.

The cockney is by nature an essentially nostalgic and sentimental creature. From its humbled, primary incarnation as a rebellious horde of the abyss to its rebirth as a theatrical, largely loyal hostage-servant of the elites within early modernity, it was made to perform respectability to gain even meagre welfare claims (Butler and Shusterman, 1999; Skeggs, 2016), being remembered and forgotten concomitant to its usefulness to capital. Throughout its numerous incarnations it has always looked backwards, yearning for a better time and valorising its privations as central to its integrity and spirit. Each episodic memory epoch, from the jingo of ‘Arry to the brave cockney of the Blitz has contributed a palimpsestic layer to its nostalgic self-remembering and testament.

Memories of cockney and the shops were, I contend, historically mediated by each generation apposite to their own context but largely congruent with their predominant contemporary hegemony. This confluence begins to break down by the 1990s and I argue that the present reimagining of cockney and recent valorisation of the eel, pie and mash shops was initially provoked by the cultural ruthlessness of New Labour’s embrace of globalisation and its acceleration of neoliberal reforms which further undercut the traditional structures of working class life.

I argue that the contemporary cockney memory scripts being performed and reinscribed are those of a largely ageing post-war generation confused and bitter at the ending of the gains of the *Trente Glorieuses* - an ending for which as enablers of, and a conduit to, an initial neoliberal embrace via Thatcherism, they hold part responsibility, the culmination of a sort of working class death drive. These confrontations coincided with an established melancholia around the loss of the fantasy of a British omnipotence crystallised as a post-colonial nostalgia.

These were the underlying causes of the Brexit vote, the alleged turn to populism and the contemporary so-called culture wars. In this chapter I trace the contours of this contemporary memory epoch and thereby simultaneously examine the changing nature of the twentieth-first century cockney.

I take as my starting point the “slippage of terms from the personal to the cultural” (Radstone, 2010) to consider how personal memorialisations of a humble but ritualised food impact on a wider culture that identifies through what Yi Fu Tuan (1974) refers to as a ‘local patriotism’ with a national referent. In this way I move from the personal to the political. First, I trace the context of, and what I identify as, the trigger for the contemporary anger of London’s white working class.

5.1 “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.” (Brillat-Savarin, [1825] 1970: 13).

In the 1970s as Wolfgang Streeck (2017) has it, capital had begun to seek expansion and flow outwards from the protected markets of the recovering post-war economies turning “nation-states into markets”. As an antidote to economic stagnation and the growing power of workers, what was to become known as neoliberalism came to be seen as fundamental to the reimposition of a capitalist hegemony. The role of food and diet, undertheorized in this historical context, was a small but significant arena that was part of the social landscape of neoliberal change. Initially, and concomitant with the ‘relative’ decline of a national agriculture policy that mirrored a growing internationalism of imported food, the eating habits of an increasingly affluent working class remained broadly unchanged (Edgerton, 2018: 479). Especially true of what would become known as the ‘non-aspirational’ working class, people invariably ate a version of what their parents had eaten. These were the meals that Douglas (1975) had explored and charted, the configuration and rhythm of which had remained largely consistent for a century or more. By the Thatcher era, the food landscape had begun to alter significantly. Local markets had been largely superseded by supermarket conglomerates and so-called ‘fast’ and frozen foods began to affect the footfall around the eel, pie and mash shops. Diet, like the pace of life itself, was becoming increasingly based on speed of preparation

and 'sophistication' - an idealised, cosmopolitan vision that mirrored the aspirational, hegemonic striving of the 'competitive individual'.

The everyday food landscape of the London working class had always differed slightly from national norms in that it included large immigrant communities whose diet inevitably spilled into its culture and onto its plate. In that sense, and because of what patronisingly might be called the valorisation of 'ethnic food' by the gentrifying middle classes, the Londoner's palate was by definition slightly more diverse. The entrepreneurial cockney, from the Victorian 'counter-jumper' to the Mod of the 'Swinging Sixties', always had a taste for 'the finer things in life' that might be found in abundance not far away, 'up West'. However, whilst family-focussed communities in the East End remained, the traditional cultures of greasy-spoon 'caffs', dingy, smoke-stained pubs and eel, pie and mash shops lingered on in the ever deepening penumbras of old ghost markets and crumbling, neglected council estates.

At the tail end of Thatcherism and the during the Major interregnum, a complex nostalgia centred around this 'traditional' way of life flowered and was simultaneous with a partial bourgeois colonisation of popular culture. By the end of the 1990s this revived valorisation of 'ordinariness' would feed into the larger political phenomena of the so-called 'Third Way' to become the dominant cultural motif of the era adjacent to the ideas of the End of History (Fukuyama, 1992) and the collapse of the Soviet Union. This was an era where a generation traumatised by the failure to find an alternative to a seemingly never-ending Conservative polity disavowed politics and embraced culture: a rebellion against the seriousness and allegedly dour 'worthy causes' of the 1980s. The Blair years were marked by an initial and expedient but ultimately deceptive cultural convergence with the symbols of working class life. Its re-joining to an authoritarian populism (Hall, 1978) was, I argue, ultimately at the root of current disillusionment with much of the contemporary political process.¹⁴⁸ As Stuart Hall and Martin Jaques (1998) would suggest, Blair embodied "...the ultimate pessimism - that there is only one version of modernity, the one elaborated by the Conservatives over the last 18 years."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Dahrendorf, 1999: 13–17.

¹⁴⁹ Stuart Hall and Martin Jaques on Blair quoted in Harris, John. "Marxism Today: the forgotten visionaries whose ideas could save Labour". *The Guardian* 29 September 2015

During the early Blair years, and led predominately by the style press, there was a brief and complicated colonisation of some of the textures of proletarian life, its food and its locations. Set largely in the fading, physical detritus of the post-industrial city, they were used as props in editorial features but also as a marker of ‘authenticity’ for the young and hip.

As far back as 1912, Thorstein Veblen had recognised that class distinction could be quantified through conspicuous consumption and during this period what became known as ‘poor chic’, an inverted appropriation of “multiple symbols traditionally associated with working class and underclass life” (Halnon Bettez, 2002: 503) became a significant trend. Celebrities affected what might be called a “lower class masquerade” of impersonating poverty in what Karen Halnon Bettez (2002: 516) suggests was a “rationally organised type of class vacationing” which treated poverty as a destination to visit that temporally (and safely) objectified the fear of downward mobility. One might encounter the ‘heroin chic’ of Corinne Day’s models posing in a fish and chip shop or Blur, a British band that partly came to symbolise the era, photographed initially as “dandyish fops” and then “streetwise casuals” lounging in a greasy spoon cafe, their lead singer affecting a ‘mockney’ accent (Maconie, 1999). This further pointed to a convenient cultural appropriation of popular modernism which the cockney youth of a previous generation had, in their own way, authentically embraced but in whose 90s iteration Mark Fisher (2014) would later presciently describe as ‘the slow cancellation of the future’. Not for nothing would Blur’s second album be titled *Modern life is rubbish*.

Chris Clunn, a working class photographer shooting mostly music in this period saw his chance however and managed to publish the first book about the (then) fast disappearing pie and mash shops in 1995 with the help of the Museum of London who briefly saw the shops as an object of heritage. “In hindsight” he recalls, “I think they might have taken it on because it was a novelty ... something that they didn’t know about.”¹⁵⁰ However, the shops made no real imprint on lasting bourgeois

¹⁵⁰ Chris Clunn. Interview by author, 17 February 2022.

consciousness unlike London's decaying 'caff' scene having little exchange value apart from their novelty amongst an increasingly gentrified landscape.¹⁵¹

The 'New Lad' phenomena which segued into Britpop and Blair was almost entirely retrogressive and sought comfort in the cultural ephemera of its devotees own 1970s teenage years.¹⁵² It celebrated a retrenchment of sexual stereotypes and sought (alleged) alliances with a long-established and largely conservative proletarian culture from which its parents had emerged and challenged. It was acquisitive and once again danced to "the joyous ringing of capital's cash tills" (Blackwell and Seabrook, 1986: 10).

Football, a corresponding and traditionally central feature of London working class life and identity, historically linked to the rituals, memorialisations and masculinities within the eel, pie and mash shops, also experienced a significant cultural colonisation by forces of capital. Dogged by hooliganism for decades, both the Taylor Report (1990) and the launch of the Premier League (1992) marked turning points that meant the sport was no longer to be regarded as simply a part of what Stedman Jones (1974) had referred to as a 'culture of consolation' but as a reborn arena of distraction around the middle class dinner table. Nick Hornby's memoir, *Fever Pitch* (1992) concomitant with the capture of the television rights by Rupert Murdoch's BskyB and the developing internationalism of the game made football a palatable dish for the chattering classes - a bone of contention that continues to rankle with working class fans to this day.

These allegedly class-transcending notions were almost all however, according to the critic Andy Medhurst, invented personas created by those on the fringes of the cultural industries. "Loaded, Fantasy Football, Men Behaving Badly [were] all created by middle class men with degrees. This celebration of working class culture is an assumed identity" (Turner, 2012).

¹⁵¹ For an exploration of the resurgent interest in London's post-war modernist café culture, see Maddox, 2003.

¹⁵² The term 'New Lad' was coined by Sean O'Hagan in *Arena Magazine* in 1993.

By the dog days of the Major administration there had also begun the framing of a long delayed cultural contestation around the notion of Englishness itself. Blair had situated himself apart from the former premier's invocation of "long shadows on county grounds, warm beer [and] invincible green suburbs" by draping his party in the Union Jack.¹⁵³ New Labour, utilising both Elgar's *Nimrod* and *Land of Hope and Glory* in party political broadcasts, unashamedly sought to reclaim the flag. As Peter Mandelson had it, "[I]t is restored from years as a symbol of division and intolerance" (Davey, 1999: 11). Indeed, despite a furore around the singer Morrissey's lyrics ("England for the English...") on songs like *The National Front Disco* and his appearance against a backdrop of skinheads at Madstock in Finsbury Park 1992, the iconography passed into passive acceptability with Oasis and the Spice Girls appropriating it as an 'ironic' nod to the Carnaby Street 'Swinging' 1960s. Hywel Williams writing a leader piece for the *Observer* around the fiftieth anniversary celebrations for VE-Day in 1995 drew a line from Blair's walk down a flag-festooned Mall to Atlee's post-war landslide as the creation of "a seductive, subterranean folk memory" (Turner, 2013: 304). Yet this patriotic renewal would grow deeper roots, not only in the gathering pace of (at this point largely irrelevant but growing) Euro-sceptic sentiments on the fringes of the Conservative Party but also in the generational angst about masculinities and fatherhood combined with an invocation of nostalgic military pride of a generation untested in combat. This was the first era in which those in politics or public life had not directly fought in a war but ironically in an age of 'liberal' interventions subsequently started several very significant ones.¹⁵⁴ John O'Farrell's *The Best a Man Can Get* (1997) and Tony Parson's *Man and Boy* (1999) largely echo the sentiments of Gary Sparrow, a character in the BBC sitcom *Goodnight, Sweetheart* (1993) who journeys back in time to the East End Blitz and reflects how, "Our fathers, they did national service... experiences that marked their shift into manhood". The show, interesting in itself by its use of condensed temporalities around the character of the cockney, articulated gendered fears that masculine purpose like the 'stoic' East End itself was disappearing - "fading in the light of late capitalism" (Millette, 2017: 127). At the Labour Party conference in 1997, Blair suggested that he wanted to make Britain "pivotal" in the world and "to use the

¹⁵³ John Major. Speech to the Conservative Group for Europe, 22 April 1993.

¹⁵⁴ For the context of these neoliberal conflicts see - Ali, 2015.

superb reputation of our armed forces, not just for defence, but as an instrument of influence.”¹⁵⁵ This salute to an overt militarism would inhabit the next decades eventually genuflecting towards a crude racial reductionism, a resurgent British nationalism and an anti-immigrant polity which would once again find favour within the white working classes of the East End and Essex.

By this time, “...some of those creators of this culture were starting to have their doubts, concerned that what had been a nuanced retreat into the security of a middle class adolescence was now little more than an ill-educated caricature”. As Simon Nye had it, “I do feel like I’ve created a monster... I despise job culture” (Turner, 2012: 54-55). As it gathered momentum, the culture grew less ironic and started to appeal to a younger, more proletarian audience. This moment was however profound for Britain’s working classes as within a couple of years the notion of the ‘chav’ would enter into the class lexicon to describe “those who behaved like lads without the income or education to justify their conduct” (Turner, 2013: 55). ‘Chav’ became a new orthodoxy in the language of class and went well beyond Orwell’s much quoted line about the working classes as either objects of pity or comic relief. This, a revitalised distinction through contempt as if the ‘popular’ gains of the 1960s and 1970s had never happened was deployed against a backdrop of increasing poverty and declining social mobility marking the passage of appropriation of working class culture to its overt demonisation.

In the first few years of New Labour, and despite the denigration of the terminology of class in favour of ‘inclusion’ and ‘social mobility’, food and indeed working class corporeality re-emerged as a main arena of social distinction (Cheng, Olsen, Southerton and Warde, 2007). The term ‘obesogenic’ became current to describe social and environmental factors that pointed to what in 1995 the UK Low Income Project Team described as ‘food deserts’ where poverty led to diminished access to sources of healthy food (Colas, Alejandro, Levi and Zubaida, 2018: 197). Indeed, Will Atkinson and Christopher Deeming (2015: 878) suggested that it was clear within the contemporary sociology of food that not only “particular orientations [continued to be] grounded in possession of resources” but that for a large section of

¹⁵⁵ Accessed at <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=203>

the community - and despite Richard A. Peterson's (1992) suggestion of a growing 'omnivorousness' - "[T]he heavy, the substantial, the functional, the cheap, the sugary/salty ... [were] most closely associated with the dominated class, indicating a prioritisation of matter over manner rooted in particular conditions of existence..." (Atkinson and Deeming, 2015: 878, 886). In an ironic reversal of Gilray's satirical cartoons from the late eighteenth century, it was the working classes that were now likely to be fat but the attachment to a behavioural and especially moral perspective of this was still prevalent. Once again, the working class culture and body, regardless of circumstance, was perceived as deficient.

The Blair years increasingly saw within culture a retrenchment of 'ironic', politically incorrect satire that mercilessly parodied the working classes. These drew on much older stereotypes of criminality, fecklessness and miscegenation and came to re-project bourgeois disgust back onto an 'ordinariness' that only a short time before they had culturally valorised. Its widescale application might be seen as a class revenge on the gains of proletarian popular culture of the previous two decades. Imogen Tyler (2008: 31) succinctly points to the role of laughing at the poor as "boundary forming" to situate them as 'lower' and 'othered'. Food and its signalling was a prime battlefield.

Whilst the New (Labour) Establishment ate at Granita and the River Café ("... a very expensive restaurant where you eat peasant cuisine and drink out of cheap beakers"), it proclaimed meritocracy and equality of opportunity.¹⁵⁶ For the neoliberal managerial and corporate classes that now held cultural ascendancy across the political spectrum, those that concentrated on "getting fed" and focused on the "here and now" were deemed insufficiently aspirational (Atkinson and Deeming, 2015: 878). Within this formulation and Blair's advocacy of a 'European café culture', middle class denial was contrasted with "working class excess... [that was] represented through vulgarity" (Skeggs, 2004: 102).

Congruent to this language, the celebrity chef Jamie Oliver, perhaps the era's epitome of 'Cool Britannia', lambasted parents, who, for whatever reason, failed to sit

¹⁵⁶ De Lisle, Leanda. "New Labour, same old snobbery" *The Guardian*. July 8, 1999.

around a table to eat dinner as "what we have learnt to call 'white trash'".¹⁵⁷

Anticipating the contemporary so-called 'culture war' by two decades, Oliver linked the economic choices of millions to a moral judgement. As Katie Beswick (2020: 82) has stated, these crude representations of working classness became "totalising narratives" increasingly damning those whose identities had been formed around, for example, pie and mash shops and the original communitarian culture they represented.

The broad brush strokes of derision painted by a Third Way bourgeois evangelism however failed to articulate a London-specific context of an increasingly global city with its concomitant cultural transmission where a cockney might well now not be white nor simply the clichéd shaven headed 'white-van man'. More, it failed to articulate the delineations (and indeed confusions around definitions) within and around the London working class itself. It was not uncommon and remains the case as Nicola Ford suggested of the pie and mash shop where she works in Harold Hill, that one might see "a Jag or a Roller" parked outside a pie shop, it's owner revisiting his (or her) past food heritage.¹⁵⁸ Robert Cooke regularly sees in his Chelmsford pie and mash shop "... bricklayers from Brentwood... wearing Rolexes"¹⁵⁹ Indeed, the owners of both the Cooke's and the Manze's dynasties always had a penchant for expensive cars and large houses, emblems of their extraordinary wealth.¹⁶⁰

Cockney was always about, as Dick Hobbs (1988) has it, "entrepreneurial proletarianism" and some had done as Ian Dury sang, "very well". It wasn't that the cockney working class was necessarily antithetical to contemporary gustatory fashion (or 'posh food') rather they relied on a memorialisation and self-valorisation of a food that was based on comfort, and which held within it its origin story. Indeed, initially Blair as an heir to Thatcherism had largely carried the conservative, aspirational working class cockney, historically suspicious of the state, expounding dreams of home ownership, enhanced individualism and financial opportunity. The

¹⁵⁷ O'Neil, Brendan. "Roasting the Masses" *The Guardian* 27 August 2008.

¹⁵⁸ Nicola Ford. Interview by author June 12, 2022.

¹⁵⁹ Robert Cook. Interview by author, September 10, 2021.

¹⁶⁰ Graham Poole. Interview by author September 16, 2021. At his prime before the Second World War, Michael Mansi, the founder of the Manzi dynasty had fourteen businesses and a collection of Italian cars.

image of the 'welfare scrounger', a well-designed folk devil as articulated by Stuart Hall, was (and remains) very appealing to the cockney working class. Here potentially was a place where 'Mondeo Man' and 'White Van man' could meet. However, the (alleged) initial championing of working class culture and its subsequent demonisation was, I argue, an early trigger point for the beginning of a rebellion against the project of what became to be seen as an over-educated, remote, metropolitan liberal elite. As Streeck (2017: 10) succinctly puts it, however this was "a cultural struggle of a special kind, one in which the moralisation of a globally expanding capitalism goes hand in hand with the demoralisation of those who find their interests damaged by it."

When Blair declared the class war over in 1999, a statement confirmed by subsequent Conservative governments, he accelerated a de-coupling of class and vote and indeed ushered in the emergence of "class non-voting" (Evans and Tilley, 2017: 193). Here perhaps was a start of a nostalgia for a pre-globalised world, a disillusionment and rage at what became to be seen as 'cartel parties', succinctly noted in an Essex pie shop as "...all these pricks, the politicians... [with their] ... general elections and fucking bye-elections and all the rest of it... fuck 'em they're not worth it."¹⁶¹ Here perhaps were the hazy beginnings of a polity that opposed so-called 'experts' that would lead eventually to an age of 'post-factual politics' (Katz and Mair, 1995).

For the cockney, distinction, the denigration of class habitat and a cuisine of comfort was entirely significant: it meant that despite the fact that many had become wealthy during the previous decades, they were still largely unable to join the 'respectable' table. The cockney East End turned increasingly to Essex down the A13 carrying with it a "freight of memory" (Sinclair, 2004: 58) that would become "a key political signifier in contemporary British culture" (Dave, 2006: 152). Here it would combine and synthesise with older, reimagined, fluid but contested polyphonic memories of what cockney culture was and 'should be' creating an odd simulacra of that which Sinclair (2004: 95) suggests "used to be jellied-eel London."

¹⁶¹ Ken, (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 20 May 2022.

The sustained attack on working class corporeality, food and wider culture that began under Blair but continued under successive Conservative governments was in no small way a starting point for both the contemporary indignant populism evidenced amongst some sections of the London working class and its allied, multivalent, reinscribed and performative nostalgias. This populist anger saw its fruition in the vote for Brexit.

The Brexit narrative significantly correlates to the constituency of reactionary populism that can be found within the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops, especially in Essex. As Danny Dorling (2016) has conclusively shown, only 24% of social classes D and E and voted to leave the European Union giving lie to the statement that Brexit was simply a cry from the economically impoverished, 'left behinds'.¹⁶² Rather the vote united two significant contemporary trajectories congruent to a modern cockney identity.

The first was an Empire nostalgia valorised largely amongst an ageing post-war demographic birthed within the security of a national economy that significantly ignored (or more succinctly I suggest, were never taught) the projects' colonial past (Virdee, Satnam and McGeever, 2018). The second, the result of a continued cultural demonisation of the working class and the politics of austerity following the 2008 crisis, led to the resurrection of a dormant, racist Powellite English nationalism framed within the politics of white working class victimhood (Ware, 2008). This had (very long) roots within a significantly earlier inculcation of a racialised national identity by the elites within the working classes that started after the defeat of Chartism. This had been periodically deployed over generations by the State through one of the many subsequent cockney identities as the 'defensive trench' of Empire. This fusion of a 'whitened' working class into an Imperial Britain was historically a Conservative project but had been sustained by a Labour Party historically loyal to the State. When Thatcher declared that there was no such thing as society, let alone class, a new social contract predicated on race had to be built to consolidate the nation (Barker, 1981; Gilroy, 1987). Now,

¹⁶² The National Readership Survey classifies social classes D and E as the unskilled working class and the non-working (state pensioners, casual low-grade workers and the unemployed claiming benefits).

race became the modality in which class [was] lived, the medium through which class relations [were] experienced, the form in which it [was] appropriated and 'fought through' (Hall, 1980: 341 in Virdee, 2014: 163).

Significantly, the defeat of traditional working class political structures, including those of anti-racism during the 1980s, led to a realignment of the forces of the nationalist right that seeped across mainstream political parties and the press to form an emergent consensus.

After the 2001 riots, largely framed as racial, Maurice Glassman's Blue Labour faction, in pursuit of 'traditional', largely right-wing Labour voters, championed the social conservatism of 'flag and family' against the now Muslim 'other'. This was aligned with a growing discourse against multiculturalism, the nebulous 'political correctness' and for immigration controls (Virdee, Satnam and McGeever, 2018). After the 7/7 bombings in London, a narrative grew that "Muslims were the beneficiaries of a weak state and a misguided liberal multicultural policy" (Rhodes, 2010). In 2007, the Labour MP for Barking, Margaret Hodge deployed the language of the BNP to decry "the legitimate sense of entitlement felt by the indigenous family overrides the legitimate need demonstrated by new migrants."¹⁶³ The following year the BBC screened the notorious 'White Season' that in part reintroduced and 'beatified' the ideas of Enoch Powell (Bourne, 2008). This was as Bottero (2009) suggests, nothing less than the construction of a new and excluded 'cultural' minority - the white working class.

Between 2005-2010, despite the financial crisis, immigration was deemed a priority by the electorate (Evans and Chzhen in Sobolewska and Ford, 2020: 163). The concomitant national 'sovereignty' narrative, confined so long to the fringes of the Euro-sceptic Right, re-emerged within the mainstream of the Conservative Party. Indeed, "[I]n domestic elections UKIP was mobilised in the same kind of voters, with the same kind of concerns, as the BNP" (Ford and Godwin in Sobolewska and Ford,

¹⁶³ Hodge, Margaret. "A message to my fellow immigrants", *The Observer*, 20 May 2007.

2020: 167). This trajectory was adjacent to Nigel Farage's allied UKIP rhetoric around the elite's benefit from neoliberal globalisation against the 'common man'.

In 2005, David Cameron an old Etonian married to an Astor had become the leader of the Conservative Party. Formerly the Director of Corporate Affairs at Carlton Television, Cameron fitted well Farage's subsequent populist jibe about voters being "fed up to the back teeth with cardboard cut-out careerists in Westminster".¹⁶⁴

Cameron, at heart a social liberal, attempted to steer his party away from its growing libertarian right wing and the burgeoning grassroots Eurosceptic insurgency of UKIP. These he had previously described as "fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists".¹⁶⁵ On becoming Prime Minister in 2010 as part of a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats, and despite his attempts to mollify the right of his party with plans for a new immigration and asylum policy, Cameron found it increasingly difficult to quieten Farage's triangulation of identity politics, patriotism and working class opposition to globalised mass immigration.

In 2013, to placate his Eurosceptic backbenchers and win back Tory defectors to UKIP, Cameron promised an 'in' or 'out' referendum on membership of the European Union if he won the next election. This did not entirely appease his distrustful backbenchers nor UKIP voters whose "primary demand was immigration control" (Sobolewska and Ford, 2020: 185). Re-elected in 2015 with a Conservative majority he selected the 23rd of June 2016 as the date for the referendum on whether the UK should remain within or leave the EU. Cameron campaigned for Remain with 'Britain Stronger in Europe', a cross-party lobbying group whilst Boris Johnson, a populist politician, journalist and former London mayor recently returned to the Commons, became one of the figureheads of the Vote Leave campaign. The subsequent slim victory for Leave led to Cameron's resignation. He was replaced by Teresa May whose 'hostile environment' strategy became the cornerstone for ongoing immigration policy. Her premiership, dominated by the Brexit withdrawal agreement was ended after a vote of no confidence in her negotiations with Brussels. She was succeeded by Johnson in 2019 with the populist mantra 'get Brexit done'. His victory

¹⁶⁴ Accessed at <https://www.ukpol.co.uk/nigel-farage-2013-speech-to-ukip-conference/>

¹⁶⁵ Carlin, Brenden. "Off-the-cuff Cameron accuses Ukip of being 'fruitcakes and closet racists'". *The Daily Telegraph*, 5 April 2006.

symbolised the annexation of the Conservative Party by a libertarian faction wrapped in a flag of xenophobic nationalism.

What became known as Brexit did not however happen overnight but was rather a culmination of decades of coalescing forces. Growing public distrust of a political class recruited increasingly from a professional, managerial background was felt especially (but certainly not exclusively) amongst older, less well-educated working class communities. In addition, a re-racialisation (Schwarz, 1996) of British politics from the immediate post-colonial era had been revived in an age of neoliberal precarity. Apparently ‘Enoch was right’ after all. This focussed working class anger especially onto recent Eastern European immigrants and the murder of Arkadiusz Jozwik in the Stow shopping centre in Harlow, Essex in 2016 “encapsulated the febrile summer of the European referendum” (Cowley, 2018: 128). Much of this was articulated by the radical right’s UKIP messaging of ‘Brussels plus’. This succeeded in channelling the deep post-war racial disaffection of a generation that had additionally lived through the legacy of deindustrialisation and saw a memorialised way of life slowly fading. In this sense, the EU simply “came to represent all of the ills of modern society” (Ford and Godwin, 2014: 275).

Reflecting largescale demographic changes around class, income, education and ethnicity, 59% of London voted to remain in the European Union.¹⁶⁶ Two of the UK's five districts with the highest percentage of people which backed Brexit were in Essex.¹⁶⁷ London had irrevocably changed for the cockney who nostalgically identified with a mono-racial, post war landscape. For some who had made the Great Trek eastwards, Essex was now a place for those like ‘Brian’ where “We've got our own kind down here... and you do try to hang on to it.”¹⁶⁸ Eels, pie and mash had increasingly become a comforting link to a mythologised East End past.

¹⁶⁶ <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/elections-and-referendums/past-elections-and-referendums/eu-referendum/results-and-turnout-eu-referendum/eu-referendum-results-region-london>

¹⁶⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36617396>

¹⁶⁸ Brian (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 14 May 2022.

5.2 “Nothing tastes as good as the past” (Serematakis: 1996: 1)

“Sometimes emotions are stirred into food and become what you feel.”¹⁶⁹

As the anthropologist Daniel Miller suggests in *The Comfort of Things* (2008) the objects that we value help form a bridge between ourselves and the people we love. Food is one such object and it is central to understanding how the eel, pie and mash shops and wider cockney culture are memorialised. For some this is simply a meal that reconnects them with their past, their family traditions and historic geographic location. For most people like Tommy B, “pie and mash was the food you went for because you couldn’t afford to go and have other stuff... it sort of encapsulates everything about the East End.”¹⁷⁰ For John Bradley it remains a central part of a cockney identity and “about the people that are here, you go to the shops and ... you can hear the [cockney] voices.”¹⁷¹ For others however it has, concomitant with the rise of identitarian politics, become a symbol of -

“... an ordered past in which they were exploited and pauperized, but nonetheless knew who they were [rather than] to a chronically chaotic present in which even those limited certainties have been stripped away by the new corporate mandate of interminable, regressive change.” (Gilroy, 2005: 109).

Pie and mash for some I contend, conveys well the linkage of the personal to the political (Radstone, 2010). Its humbleness evokes the melancholy of a romanticised poverty and the rituals that surround it speak to the soothing but unreachable routines of mid-century working class life. It’s eating is a comfort for an imagined past that can never be recaptured. This absence is the cockney saudade.

Indeed, food, and the eating of it, is rarely just about the food itself. What we eat, how we eat it and crucially how we remember it is, as Lupton (1996:6) proposes, “... mediated through social relations ... [and] a thick layer of meaning is accreted around every food substance, and a physiological dimension of food is inextricably

¹⁶⁹ Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight’s Children*. Mehta, Deepa. 20th Century Studios, 2012.

¹⁷⁰ Tommy B. Interview by author 25 March 2022.

¹⁷¹ John Bradley. Interview by author 25 May 2022.

intertwined with the symbolic.” These cultural ‘meanings’, these ‘interpretations’ of the truths of the exterior world, are however primarily experienced as involuntary and largely invisible sensory perceptions through the biological body.

For C. Nadia Serematakis (1996: 5-6) this is a reciprocal and dialogical process between the individual’s “inner states... [and] the socio-material field outside of the body... [where] sensory interiors and exteriors constantly pass into each other in the creation of extra-personal significance.” What she calls “social aesthetics” are “embedded in, and inherited from, an autonomous network of object relations and prior sensory exchanges” which are beyond language and crucially fluid so that sensory memory is not “mere repetition but [a] transformation which brings the past into the present as a natal event.” This exchange with what Rhys Taylor (2017: 4) calls “wider cultural significations” likely results in the ‘performance’ of gestures and embodied acts which are “elicited by externality and history as much as ... from within.” Serematakis (1996: 9) further offers that each sense perception is rendered as a “re-perception” - the result of the activity between “co-implicated sensory spheres” and material objects which further places memory within time. The prosaic eating of a plate of eels, pie and mash is in this way an extraordinarily powerful sensory mnemonic experience for the cockney because it contains a multitude of sensory meanings overlaid in a matrix of culturally and temporally mediated transactions that is crucially (if subtly) flexible and changing.

Memory is the landscape of the sensory cultural transmission of food between the personal and the political. The plotting of the co-ordinates of its flexible conductance will enable us to chart both how it is memorialised and subsequently why. I identify three central sites on which this transmission takes place. The first is childhood.

As Maureen Mahoney and Barbara Yngvesson (in Lupton, 1996: 58) suggest, the child engages in a process of creating meaning with its primary caregivers. This predates language and rests on the bond between (usually) mother and child whereby intimacy triggers emotions via sensory touch, smell and sound. Here, it becomes clear that food memory is more often than not principally located within gender. Lupton (1996: 39) notes that it is the woman’s primary (expected and traditionally socially normative) role in the nuclear family to provide some sort of

emotional stability for the group and acculturate children into appropriate behaviour including the conventions of their eating habits. More, women are largely responsible for feeding and nourishing infants and in this way throw a kind of “*cordón sanitaire*” around the infant mediating what is allowed into (and policing what comes out of) the child’s body (Murcott in Lupton, 1996: 40). As Holtzman (2006) attests, the collective memories that pass through these arenas are inevitably “quintessentially gendered” and cockney culture is, as both Young and Willmot (1957) and Cohen (2013) suggest, matrifocal and matrilinear.

Within this panorama, the family kitchen is a central location for nurturing, and according to Carol Counihan (2013) a place where memories are stored. However, the externality of the East End street also provided an arena for the development of the child and the concomitant historical absence of cooking facilities also likely meant that the eel, pie and mash shop became in some senses an expedient and proxy ‘home from home’ further solidifying significant memorialisations. Even in the contemporary period this ‘homely food’ is brought into the house as a substitute for home cooking.

It was like one of those foods when your nan says ‘I can't be bothered cooking’ ... me Great Nan ... I used to take her pie and mash on a Saturday morning... I was only like five or six ... they give me the pie an’ the mash and the eels (from the shop) sent me round her house. We used to have like, half a lager and lime together and I was only little, so I was out me nut... and we used to watch the films on Saturday afternoons...”¹⁷²

The space of the pie shop remains subject to similar restrictions as the domestic home: a rule-based hierarchy of manners often ‘overseen’ by a (usually) male figure that sets a ‘tone’ for service, language and indeed atmosphere. Both casual and formal, the shops are a microcosm of a domesticity where men are almost always the central artisanal figure and women take on a largely service role.¹⁷³ It is in this

¹⁷² Johnny Griffiths. Interview by author, 5 December 2021.

¹⁷³ Of all the contemporary pie shops, I can think of no woman cooking, and the only female owned shop is Harrington’s in Tooting. The Cooke’s shop in Hoxton Market does employ a female cook but she is largely supervised by the owner, Joe Cooke.

way that Sarah Pink (2015: 44) concludes that "... experiences of place - and its social, physical and intangible components - are inextricable from the invocation and re-investment of memories." People expect the shops to be gendered in this 'traditional' way. "... normally when you go in it's like 'hello darling, all right?'... they're like that with everyone and they've got time for people and that adds to the atmosphere ..."¹⁷⁴

Within this context it is almost a rite of passage for a cockney child to be weaned in a pie shop by his or her mother on a combination of either blended pie and liquor or simply liquor and mashed potato. As Nicola Ford recollects, "... my mum couldn't wait to spoon feed it to my babies - literally - I remember her pureeing [it]... the pie and mash and feeding it literally ... [it] put the smile on her face."¹⁷⁵ Johnny Griffiths concurs that "Me nan says it was the first thing you cut your teeth on, a bit of pie - like a pork bone."¹⁷⁶ Rita Arment similarly recalls the pie shops of the 1940s and 1950s which "in those days had a 'baby bowl' - that was 4d - mash with liquor over it and babies seemed to love it."¹⁷⁷

Lupton (1996: 6) links the memorialised bond between mother and child as a symbiosis of sensual pleasure from infancy because of the close human contact with the food provider; the maternal link of bodily security a seedbed of memory. "[T]he bodily warmth, the touch of the other's flesh, their smell, the sounds they make - and the emotions and sensations aroused by this experience." Some mothers chew pies and spoon tiny pieces of it to their infants whilst others will test the heat of the dish with their own tongues before giving it to their babies. Visser (2015: 312) has suggested that "already chewed food, mixed with saliva is polluted... [and] is an anathema in polite society." However, Serematakis' (1994: 24) account of her own grandmother's feeding ritual is instructive.

¹⁷⁴ Adam Boutall. Interview by author October 19, 2021.

¹⁷⁵ Nicola Ford. Interview by author, 6 June 2022.

¹⁷⁶ Johnny Griffiths. Interview by author, 5 December 2021.

¹⁷⁷ Rita Arment. Interview by author, 20 November 2020.

Grandma used to mash with her fingers carrot, potato, macaroni and feel it with her lips and even her tongue and then give it to the child... When the food was hard, such as a bread crust, the old women would soften it with their saliva.

The sharing of food and saliva can, in this way stow within the child a “sensory acculturation and the materialization of historical consciousness” (Serematakis, 1996: 37).

The Taiwanese film *Eat, drink, man, woman* (in Lupton, 1996: 49) features a character who suggests “my memory is my nose” linking the olfactory sense to the eliciting of memory. Sutton (2005: 304) has it for the Greeks of Kalymnos that even “[A] flowerpot of basil can symbolise the soul of a people better than a drama of Aeschylus.” For Londoners, the smell of eels, pie and mash or indeed the odours of the shops themselves can bring to the fore a cacophony of memorialisation. As Rhian Atkin (2020: 83) suggests of the Portuguese *refogando*, its meaning “is contained in its smells and the memories that smell evokes.” For Rita Arment, the “lovely warm smell” reminded her of walking into her husband-to-be’s pie shop in 1957.¹⁷⁸ For Anthony Bradley, “the smell of the meat pies ... and the stale penny cakes we used to buy afterwards” every Saturday growing up on the Hackney Road is a direct path to his childhood and his late older brother.¹⁷⁹ The food is a memory pathway that cuts backwards in time and can recreate past experiences and resonate with different levels of consciousness.

However, not all children were socialised into eel, pie and mash through weaning and their senses appear to have compensated with memorialisations from different memory periods. Anthony Bradley who has eaten the food all his life was sent off every Saturday morning in the late 1960s with his brother to a (long gone) pie and mash shop on the Hackney Road. He recalls that his mother “never had it ... no idea why ... she was born in Bethnal Green ... I don’t remember me Dad eating it either. I dunno why us kids started eating it because normally you eat what your parents give you...”¹⁸⁰ His memory script involves the food *in spite* of weaning experiences.

¹⁷⁸ Rita Arment. Interview by author, 20 November 2020.

¹⁷⁹ Anthony John Bradley. Interview by author, 25 May 2022.

¹⁸⁰ Anthony John Bradley. Interview by author, 25 May 2022.

Eileen Errol went to school in Leytonstone in the early 1960s but lived in Hainaught and started eating pie and mash in her teens with friends. Hers was a classic act of rebellion against her family's ideals. "... [We] moved to Hainaught because my Mum said that she heard that people (in Dagenham) kept coal in the bath".¹⁸¹ As Lupton (1996) reports, this classically disaffected behaviour may occur when a child's feelings, in the context of eating, are embodied. This appears, according to Julia Brannen *et al* (1994), to be a more prevalent behaviour amongst young women than men as they may have fewer arenas in which to exhibit frustration. Indeed, even now Errol says she cannot mention pie and mash to her sister who sees it in very negative terms. "My sister is like Hyacinth Bucket (a working class snob who featured in a BBC TV sitcom). They've gone up in the world and she would *die* if I ever mentioned pie and mash [and] how lovely it is... they're a bit fine dining... they've worked very hard..."¹⁸² Ken, an ex-docker born in 1938, came from a family who were "a little unusual in the East End as they had an upstairs bathroom." He ran away from his parents and married at 19. His wife's family were 'on the stones' (casual dockworkers) and because dock work was almost entirely hereditary, he entered the profession with their help. He also encountered eels, pie and mash from his wife's family which became a "life-long habit".¹⁸³

These memorialisations based within sensory artefacts give an intriguing insight in the micro-class divisions within London's proletariat throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. More, they situate the dish within previous memories of the very poor and of a casual, largely unskilled working class. These memorialisation are themselves a likely reverberation of early Victoriana with regard to notions of propriety, manners and who valorised the food as both fuel and comfort.

Eels, pie and mash are also memorialised and remembered through the everyday rhythm and ritual performances of working class life. Paul Connerton (1989: 4, 25) implies an *incorporating memory* within ritualised ceremonies where a kind of 'sediment' is generated via what he refers to as "habit memory". These ritual performances are psychologically encoded and can be both verbal, visual or beyond

¹⁸¹ Eileen Errol. Interview by author, 22 October 2022.

¹⁸² Eileen Errol. Interview by author, 22 October 2022.

¹⁸³ Ken, (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 20 May 2022.

language but leave behind traces that are perceptible to the senses. In the pie shops, one might mention the accretion of meaning around *evolving* human interactions, performative gestures or slang but also the worn floors, the chipped tiles and the dented utensils. In the newer shops (for example) in Essex, the physical environments wait expectantly for memories to accrue in the materiality of new tiling, pristine kitchens and spills and scuffs on the unspoiled floors where “prescribed bodily behaviours” and the “choreography [of] an identifiable range of repertoires” automatically implies continuity with the past” (Connerton, 1989: 44, 74).

The challenge for these contemporary shops, as what one might euphemistically be called ‘traditional’ is articulated by Connerton (1989: 51) in his idea of “historical position”. Here, ritualised behaviour is not necessarily understood in isolation but in affinity to past events and “thus [crucially] susceptible to a change in their meaning”. Indeed, although Sutton (2001: 19) is critical of Connerton and his “fairly inflexible” approach where these “limited gestures” have to be repeated exactly “like a spell”, this is entirely apposite to the process of ossifying “formalised” ritual meanings into the new generation of eel, pie and mash shops away from their historical geographic and class roots.

Luce Giard (1998: 183) suggests that eating as an everyday practice “solidifies particular modes of relations between the person and the world that form the foundations of landmarks in space-time.” Indeed, although the ways people behave in the newer shops are a “cognitive memory of a communal lexicon” that lexicon is within a subtly changed material and temporal environment.¹⁸⁴ Largely gone are the childhood memories of mothers coming together with their children after a lengthy march around almost disappeared hyper-local street markets enmeshed in a matrix of known, formal and informal obligations. Increasingly (for example) Essex eel, pie and mash shops are sites for more general meetings and partially sketchy remembrances of how a previous generation might have acted or ordered or eaten. They form and will continue to form in their more recent guises, future memorialisations in the “constructions of [newer] worlds” (Sutton, 2001). They are the site of overlapping temporalities creating hybrid memory.

¹⁸⁴ Connerton, 1989: 88.

Lastly, we might gauge how memorialisations of the eel, pie and mash shops are formed through this temporal focus analogously to how Serematakis (1996) describes the role of coffee as a *sintrofia* (a friendly companion). She narrates how the taking of a Greek villager's coffee is essentially a pause in the day and how it "generates a moment of meta-commentary in which the entire stenography of present and past social landscapes are arrayed..." (1996: 13). Eels, pie and mash and the spaces that serve them also have narratives that are "frequently non-synchronous with the immediate continuum of socially constructed material presence and value" (Serematakis, 1996: 12). The shops in this way become a similar temporary portal (Serematakis would describe them as "islands of historicity... in stillness") that can act as an interruption and an interval in the everyday through which the cockney can breathe within his or her own evolving culture. Like the villagers' coffee sips, the pie shops and their food in this way might be seen as a temporary intermission on a neoliberal street "where micro-practices leak through the crevices and cracks of official cultures and memories"(1996: 13).

Increasingly however as the shops, both traditional and contemporary, are by demography, age and fashion themselves slowly divorced from long-established patterns of work, leisure and usage they are increasingly used for non- and neo-traditional purposes but still act as an (imperfect) aide mémoire to a partially invented historical past.¹⁸⁵ It is within this space that the cockney, like the Greek villager, may experience the mixing of temporalities, where the present and past meet in experiential, performative and sensory dialogue. The food of the pie shop is like the partaking of this Greek moment in that as a 'friendly companion' it generates, in its consumption, a conversation and commentary on for example, the weather, the family, how the local football team are faring and often, via social media and reminiscence, 'ways of doing things'; how London 'used to be'. Within this interlude and within the recent past, an extraordinary gustatory nostalgia has evolved around the eel, pie and mash shops. As Hasia Diner (2009: 366) has suggested, "as hungry people found food within their reach, they partook of it in ways which resonated with

¹⁸⁵ Some shops become bars at night and the Cooke's shop in Chelmsford regularly becomes a comedy venue. Older, more traditional shops are frequently used as backdrops in films or editorial photoshoots.

their earlier deprivations. How they remembered those hungers allows us to see how they once lived them, and how they then understood themselves in their new home without them.”

It is to those formulations and crucially nostalgic re-constructions of the eel, pie and mash shops in a critical political sense that I now turn.

5.3 Don't mention the War...

“Memory is ... a complex cultural and historical phenomenon constantly subject to revision, amplification and ‘forgetting. Memory is, therefore, a construction.”
(Bromley, 1998: 1)

There are now only a handful of eel, pie and mash shops that remain within the traditional cockney areas of inner London, but pie and mash is currently thriving with many new shops opening in the zones of white working class diaspora (especially) in Essex and the Medway towns. As these exodic memoryscapes, themselves the result of previous palimpsestic remembrances, travel beyond their original locations they merge with older solidarities and memorialisations brought with earlier decampments.

The worn wooden benches of London's oldest remaining shop, Manze's on Tower Bridge Road might evoke the memory of mid-Victorian class comradeship, itself buried beneath a trace of Victorian music hall cheerfulness. More likely, the memory of a meal savoured in gratitude after an air raid all-clear might still be experienced within the touch of the shops loose brickwork.

As Aleida Assman (2010: 97) suggests, each generation stands on the shoulders of its predecessors whose “... knowledge they can reuse and reinterpret.” Yet these new incarnations of the traditional shops and the culture that they signal to are contested and reveal fault lines that disclose less about the historical past and much more about the contemporary cockney identity.

In spats fought largely within closed networks on social media, seemingly trivial but essential debates centre around location, the rituals and intricacies of how and what the shops serve and what those memories mean. The central question for this dichotomy is whether the new shops are an extension of the original establishments, a simulacra or part of a new culture? This is really a struggle over whose memories will define the future of the shops and how the cockney as both a character and an idea will maintain. More, they signal to a larger contested narrative of white working 'classness' that perceives itself to be in existential crisis.

Joe Cooke's eel, pie and mash shop in Hoxton market is, as he unswervingly puts it, "absolutely traditional" and he sees himself "as very much a sort of a caretaker of a dynasty, or a culture and a tradition... that is a big part of the history of London and of the East End."¹⁸⁶ Although the actual shop was refashioned from a Victorian bank in the 1980s the styling and the menu are exactly as his great grandfather would recognise. Cooke's panorama of wooden benches and marble tables is as Bromley (1988: 4) suggests, "a coded sentimentality [that has a] "stabilizing and conciliating function." As Cooke sees it, it is impossible for eel, pie and mash shops to be anywhere else than the East End of London because they are so intimately tied to that city's past and cartography. As Phil Baker (2012: 279) suggests, "The feeling of place is inseparable from the meaning of place, often within personal cartographies that have their own landmarks."

For Johnny Malone however, an Essex native who has just opened a pie and mash shop in Southend, this isn't strictly true. Malone used to be a bricklayer but a shoulder injury at work meant that he was looking for something new to do. He had "sometimes" eaten pie and mash and admired the "... humbleness of it... it's a simple food that fed a lot of people back in the day, when it was tough, for not a lot of money."¹⁸⁷ His knowledge of the culture came to him largely from "the memories of me great nan and grandad... they were original Londoners...from Hackney." He admits that for him, "there's a few [personal] memories of it [but] what I got from my great Nan was a glimpse ... there'd be people out in the streets playing a piano ... it

¹⁸⁶ Joe Cooke owner of F. Cooke Pie Shop, Hoxton. Interview by author, 16 September 2021.

¹⁸⁷ Johnny Malone owner of Brickie's Pie Shop, Southend. Interview by author, 15 June 2022.

was a different world to what we live in now.”¹⁸⁸ Malone caters to working class people, many who have emigrated from London or who have visited in a traditional ritual to the seaside on holiday. He says that his shop is full of the stories of these people reminiscing about their own pasts and their favourite London pie shops – “...someone came in yesterday with a story and that’s what I love about it... With some of these Eastenders... you’ve still got a nan that’s telling a story.”

Jan Assman’s (2010) two-fold concept of memory is useful here. He defines a ‘cultural’ memory of rites and texts crystalizing collective experience that reacts to, and dances with, a ‘communicative’ memory, limited to a more recent generational past, encapsulating the informal transference of autobiography. Yet between these two is what Vansina (in Erll, 2011: 28) has called a “floating gap” (originally theorised through oral remembrances) that moves with the passage of time and between generations. For the pie shops, the contestations around what they are and will be is contained within this gap: an interregnum where the stories of Malone’s customers crystallise and become accepted and foundational to the modern cockney community. Indeed, although memories appear to change by ‘consensus and canon-building’ it’s more likely that they change by moulding along social fractures engendered by this volatile gap (Olick, 2003). The fissures are in part the work of hegemonic memory groups invading and capturing the memory landscape by selectively narrativizing and reconstructing their past (Bell in Bond, Craps and Vermeulen, 2016: 3). Because the cockney identity, especially its manifestation within the eel, pie and mash shops is largely absent from mainstream cultural texts it has been relatively straightforward as much as through a process of omission and exclusion to reify certain aspects of the culture and denigrate others. Sometimes these changes to ‘common sense’ are part of internal community machinations and sometimes they are responses to external pressures and ‘programming’. Either way, historically these ‘social fractures’, like the cockney character, have emerged parallel with, and reactive to, the passage of modernity itself (Legg, 2005).

The contemporary transmission of the cockney identity and the concomitant history of the eel, pie and mash shops are in a large degree, captured by these social

¹⁸⁸ Johnny Malone owner of Brickie’s Pie Shop, Southend. Interview by author, 15 June 2022.

fractures. Today, remembrances of the shops are, within living memory, significantly constructed via the memorialisations of a post-war generation that recall as children the legacy of wartime privation, mass colonial immigration and the turn towards post-Fordism. Fundamentally, this thesis argues that it is this generation's sketchy memorialisations and political framings of the Second World War - of which they played no significant part - that holds the key to much of the structure of contemporary politics and by extension, the identity of the cockney and the eel, pie and mash shop.

The seeds of this re-memorialising of the Second World War were sown a generation or more ago. Apposite to Hall's (1973) notion of encoding/decoding (especially in terms of the cockney identity construction in music hall), Bromley (1988: 17) suggests that the Thatcher government "selectively plundered" the conflict to lever a "romantic nationalism" based upon a "selective revival of particular symbols... constructed specifically from 'stories' of war and the interwar period." As Wright (2009: 41) added several years later, war had been declared again, but this time against the post-war settlement. Paul Gilroy (2004: 96-97) points out that the reappearance of the War, the Blitz and rationing were all "obsessive repetitions... anxious and melancholic" - part of a "need to get back to the place or moment before the country lost its moral and cultural bearings".

For obvious reasons, these wartime valorisations were especially resonant to a cockney audience soaked for several generations in a military nostalgia of the dying embers of an Imperial state - these notions seamlessly complementary to the background noise of war films, TV situation comedies and children's comics during the *Trente Glorieuses* and of a generation 'playing soldiers' in the schoolyards of a 1970s East End and new town Essex. These constructions around the Second World War (and later the Falklands) and its colonisation within popular memory had, to echo Gramsci, become something that had 'always' been there. The flag became adjuvant to working class support for a Conservative government that lauded the proletarian entrepreneurship of the cockney whilst simultaneously selling-off the council housing that supported the solidarities of the white working class in London. A decade later, Blue Labour attempted to use the flag in an appeal to memory whilst seeking white working class votes by using the Blitz to beguile the 'forgotten tribe' of

white cockneys (Collins, 2004) whose NHS and Welfare State was being 'swamped' by immigrants.¹⁸⁹

Yet pie shop customers would recall in bitter terms the moment when the formerly heroic cheerful Tommy had become an impediment to 'progress' when "white working class communities had become an embarrassment to New Labour" (Beider, 2015: 18). As Andreas Huyssen (2003: 3) says of this period, "... the 1990s seemed to be haunted by a trauma as dark as the underside of neoliberal triumphalism." Once awakened, this military zombie of English identity within cultural memory has refused to die. Its recent resurrection in contemporary reactionary politics that surround Brexit where the war and contestations of empire are central have become as Peter Mitchell (2021: 66) suggests, a "metonymic stand-in for whiteness, patriarchy and a generalised national chauvinism."

The memoryscapes that coalesce within both the London and Essex pie shops are numerous and I refer to them as polyphonic. I suggest that the pie shops in both locations hold simultaneous memories that are distinct but synchronous: all playing - like the cockney barrel organ - at the same time. These are the partial reminiscences of a marooned, largely elderly precariat who still inhabit the dwindling stock of social housing in the fading penumbras of traditional cockney areas of London. They are also the exodic transmitted and transmuted memories of their contemporaries and scions in the pioneering townscapes of Essex and beyond. Within these voices are captured innumerable and incalculable modifications; other palimpsestic memoirs of individualised personal memory epochs largely valorising a lost landscape of a post-war period of gain and stability. They are legion but not simply a "matter of personal recall" (Bromley, 1988: 4). They all however point to a predominantly white, monocultural and inevitably 'better' past and share a 'geography of belonging' (Hodgkin and Radstone, 2003: 169) with a melancholic and often furious sense of loss.

¹⁸⁹ The term 'swamping' in relation to immigration was first used by the Far Right in the 1970s then repeated by Margaret Thatcher, first in a Scottish television interview and then on *World in Action* in 1979. Thatcher, Margaret. 27 January 1978. *World in Action*. Granada Television. <https://www.margareththatcher.org/document/103485>

That sense of loss was apparent to Pierre Nora (1989: 7) who has suggested that we now speak of memory so much because “there is so little of it left.” For Nora, we no longer live within a previous (utopian) era of *milieux de mémoire* (‘environments of memory’) and within modernity, its attendant democracy, mass society and more recently, globalisation, that there now remain only, “... *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory.” He postulates these symbolic sites, these *mnemotechnics*, capture in a shorthand, necessary ideas and memories. For Nora these sites can be “geographical locations, buildings, monuments and works of art as well as historical persons, memorial days, philosophical and scientific texts, or symbolic actions” (Erl, 2011: 3). Here, “memory crystallises and secretes itself” (Nora, 1989: 7). They could be a plate of warm eels in liquor, the tang of white pepper on a pie all condensed in the steam of a pie shop window.

The traditional eel, pie and mash shops in London can themselves be seen as *lieux de memoire* but crucially in a dual sense. For the very few historical ones that endure, they encapsulate a physicality. They are both a sanctuary and a place of excursion that is only reinforced by their sensoriality; their ability through gustation, to imprint upon the bodies and senses of those that eat there. Additionally, they encapsulate a dimension where, through the rituals contained within them and the slang spoken around them, they exhibit what Nora (1989: 19) refers to as a “symbolic aura”. In this way, the shops, as structures of feeling are an articulation of a ‘classness’. They contain symbolisms that break “a temporal continuity” by reaching backwards and forwards within memorialisations to both the past and the present (Erl, 2011: 24). These structures are unstable yet “collectively constructed and reconstructed in the present rather than resurrected from the past... the product of mediation, textualization and acts of communication” (Rigney 2008: 13-14).

Because the pie shops are de-facto working class arenas and because for very specific historic reasons there is scant scriptural memorialisations around them, the memories evoked by them I suspect are more able to be moulded to the present notions of what the past was. In this way certain memorialisations become more consequential for specific groups. Indeed, Ann Rigney (2008: 346) implies that Nora’s *lieux de memoire* are part of a mnemonic process where memory sites are

being constantly reinvested with memory and become a “self-perpetuating vortex of symbolic investment.”

In recent years these symbolic investments have been calcified in a very specific way through innumerable biographies that have sought to chart and celebrate the difficulties of London’s post war generations. Located in the laudable New Left tradition of ‘history from below’, titles like Gilda O’Neil’s *My East End: Memories of Life in Cockney London* (1999), Sally Worboyes’ *East End Girl: Growing Up the Hard Way* (2006) and Melanie McGrath’s *Pie and Mash down the Roman Road* (2018) have narrated a specific sentimentality, largely without wider contexts, that have tried to entrench an orthodoxy of a particular East End that speaks to conformity and the change between the individual, the emergent neoliberal state, manual labour and the challenges of a working class divided by precarity. This has much to do with a “post-war reconfiguration of the built environment that ruptured everyday patterns of life” (Waters, 1999) and can be seen as an attempt to “...slow down information processing, to resist the dissolution of time in the synchronicity of the archive... [and] ... to claim some anchoring space in a world of puzzling and often threatening heterogeneity, non-synchronicity and information overload (Huysen, 1995: 7).

More prosaically though, they can be seen as part of an overtly political reconstruction of ‘ordinariness’ since the mid-1970s came to view the social memory of the ‘other’ in terms of the ‘undeserving’ poor. Crucially as Ben Jones (2012: 124) suggests however, these historical accounts, “were the work of men and women whose own mobility rendered problematic their relationship with the communities they had left behind.” This as much as anything reveals the contestations between working class memory groups within the eel, pie and mash shops not only between London and Essex but between an inter-class division of those who have ‘made it’ and those who have not. More however they have become part of an archive of conservative emotions and patriotic signifiers. Raphael Samuel (2012: 163) conceded as much when he suggested that the project of history ‘from below’ might have actually spurred on the ‘whimsy’ of austerity.

The memorialisations that enmesh the eel, pie and mash shops have sought to mediate and set the agenda for future acts of remembrance within society (Erlil and

Rigney, 2009: 3). This is part of an active process of recollection and retrieval that is largely dependent on the aims of the dominant, hegemonic memory group.

Crucially this might mean that other less influential memory groups, those that for example remember eating with knives (as opposed to spoons) or more presciently those that have more varied multicultural memories of the shops might learn to identify, as Halbwachs (1997: 35-37) has suggested, with the memories of others if that is expedient. These days it is a brave soul that might question the online bullying that surrounds contestations of say, South London's best shop or whether the liquor served was how an emigre to Essex might remember it from his childhood ("I wouldn't serve that to my dog"... "only with a fork and spoon"... "not proper"... "you're not a real cockney").¹⁹⁰ As Robert, a fifth generation Cooke and the owner of the recently opened F. Cooke in Chelmsford, Essex explains if "someone was to come up and say in person 'you've got to turn your pie over' [to eat it]... they'd probably get a slap in the face... my family's been going one hundred years and my granddad never taught me that... it's ignorance... He's probably not from the East End, his Dad probably took him to West Ham, and he's probably been to Maureen's once, right?"¹⁹¹

In this way Rigney (2008: 346) indicates that that once a site has emerged as a focus for remembrance it pulls in a great deal of allied memories. Yet this may still not be enough to heal the rupture between that past and the present and into this void rushes the spirit of nostalgia.

5.4 We've had our jellied eels and our glass of beer

"We escape the trauma of history we happen to be living through by entering the mythic time of the history we didn't." (Mitchell, 2021: 23)

¹⁹⁰ This reproduces the bitter sense that many messages within several Facebook groups evidence around contemporary experience.

¹⁹¹ Maureen's pie shop now associated with West Ham football fans after the demise of Nathan's that was close to the old Upton Park ground.

In the late seventeenth century, a Swiss physician sought to classify and medicalise an affliction that had struck down, amongst others, Swiss mercenaries fighting far from home. Johannes Hofer joined two Greek words, *nostos* (to return home) and *algai* (a painful condition) to give a name to a longing for home that no longer (or perhaps had never) existed (Davis, 1979: 414)

Svetlana Boym (2001) suggests that this 'medical' condition of nostalgia was linked to a changing conception of time itself. Those afflicted by this nostalgia were caught between a largely personal, local conception of time that obeyed the rhythms of the natural world and an imposition of a universal capitalist time that signalled to a teleology of progress. Within modernity, the 'past' became for the first time a quantifiable notion that was "unrepeatable and irreversible" (Boym, 2001: 13). Nostalgia was a mental pause or even retreat from the acceleration of this new temporality.

By the close of the eighteenth century the notion of nostalgia had been overlaid by Romanticism. Here, the emotion of the individual and a cultural longing for nature was set against the dawning of the rapacious machine age. By the middle of the following century, the bourgeoisie had colonised and relocated the centre of this yearning from the individual to the nation and in doing so codified appropriate emotional responses to the extraordinary temporal changes that capitalism had attended. It achieved this partly by parasitically assimilating the pre-industrial *weltanschauung* of the peasantry (and its partial adoption by the landed elites) into an expedient ideology of *real politik* thus colonising and regulating the past as heritage (Boym, 2001: 14). In this way, Trollope ([1875] 1992: 64) could have Mr Cadbury lament that "... we belonged to a newer and worse sort of world." Tennyson however could engage simultaneously in a melancholic nostalgia within a fantastical, folkloric British history and concurrently valorise the achievements of a ravenous, brutal and mechanised Empire.

As the century progressed, one section of the ascendent bourgeois (as one half of the schism within British liberalism) came to view this nostalgia as an impediment to progress, part of a wider degeneracy associated with "defeatism and anti-modernity" (Pickering and Keightley, 2006: 920). The other, what might be called the 'peace,

economy and reform' section of Gladstonian liberalism appeared more sympathetic to the plight of the toiling masses. The character of the largely music-hall constructed cockney identity was partly captured within the divide of this framing. Its historical precursor, the violent abyss figure of middle class alarm, both of the atomised criminal and swarming mob, was reimagined as a cheerful and resilient casualty of inevitable class structure, the collateral damage of the machine age. This notion of nostalgia, coetaneous with modernity and now largely adjacent to the idea of nation was also crucial to how the cockney viewed itself and continues to do so.

Here was a community of largely self-employed, proletarian entrepreneurs striving to scrape a living against a backdrop of brutal poverty and destitution. Inevitably inward-looking, the cockney community had their own largely obscure, selectively hidden customs and traditions but were partially accommodated within capital as reward for their fealty. The archetypal late Victorian cockney was therefore a figure of both pity and (self) respect but also a creation transmuted into a patriotic servant of Empire. This was how the malnourished slum-coster could simultaneously be roused to fight the Boer with a rendition of "Goodbye Dolly Gray" (1897) and weep at the sentimental truth of their own inter-war destitution, "Underneath the Arches" (1932), without necessarily connecting the political linkage behind both that concealed, to paraphrase Fisher (2009), 'the horizons of the possible'.

Loss was always a central motif of the cockney. From the mid-nineteenth century clearing of the streets to *fin de siècle* waves of precarity and the 'moonlight flit' to the destructions of the Blitz to *Steptoe and Son*, the cockney was always a cultural foci for both spatial and temporal deficit. The fragmentary telos of modernity left few spaces for dealing with this loss but nostalgia like a remedial salve, was there to offer comfort. Nostalgia, not always the contemporary saccharine meme could also be an interruption to the present where "memories of past belonging can be used to create a sense of belonging *in* the present if not *to* the present" (Pickering and Knightley, 2006: 921). It could also be called upon in a curative sense to "... provide what the present lacks" (Bal, 1999: 72). It could be found in the singing around the pub piano, the cheer of the football crowd and in the warmth of the pie shop. It can still be found for Mark Wincott who uses the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops

when he's feeling fragile for "... a bit of banter ... talking shit for an hour with other people." ¹⁹²

Cockney nostalgia is realised well within Stuart Albert's (in May, 2017: 402) notion of a 'temporal comparison process' which moves back and forth through time to create "a culturally appropriate sense of a coherent self." In this way, the cockney might find consolation in multiple, palimpsestic nostalgic temporalities: the Victorian father-figure, the wartime Tommy or the sharp-suited Mod. Here, as Stuart Tannock (1995: 456) suggests, nostalgia functions as a search for continuity.

Nostalgia could also map a cockney cartography of the city in a particular and secure way. This was the metropolis invisible to most but layered with glimmers of personal landmarks in a similar way that Georges Perec's 'Places' describe locations in Paris associated with a former girlfriend thus imbued with hidden meaning. These, like the sites of closed pie shops, gentrified pubs and now privately owned council flats, "turn[s] the city into a personalised memorial" nostalgically commemorating what Perec refers to as "dead places that ought to survive" (Bellos in Baker, 2012: 277).

Yet nostalgia is also manipulative, reinforcing the romantic assumption that the cockney's lot was inevitably to suffer. This was the cockney fatalism of the Blitz or the low horizons that some still valorise as part of their heritage. As David H. suggests, "We know what we like, we know what we're used to ... there's not normally anything wrong with tradition, it's when they try to change it..."¹⁹³ In this way the cockney remains simultaneously nostalgic but also trapped by the forces of a nostalgia which had historically viewed it as either a Mrs Mop or a Kray twin cliché. These were the days when you could leave your door open or control "the bad behaviour of children simply through knowing who they were and where they came from" (Watson and Wells, 2005: 26). Yet these were also the days when people often kept their cultural and political preferences hidden for fear of ridicule or ostracism.

¹⁹² Mark Wincott. Interview by author 16 May 2022.

¹⁹³ David H. Interview by author 14 April 2022.

This community nostalgia is shaped by what Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer (2002: 256) call 'postmemory', that is a nostalgia-mediated link to, in Stefan Zweig's (1942) phrase, a lost "world of yesterday" largely transmitted from their parents. Although their work concerns memory traces and nostalgia within the Jewish diaspora after the Holocaust their note that children of exiles and refugees "have very peculiar relationships" to the places from which their families were removed is entirely apposite to the exodic parental transmission (culturally and sensorially) of the landscape of the contemporary eel, pie and mash shops.

In that sense the present-day cockney has been historically marooned between their traditional London and diasporic identities because modernity leaves little room for how the past may "*actively* [my italics] engage with the present and future" (Pickering and Keightley, 2006: 920).

Boym theorises and distinguishes two types of nostalgic tendencies. Firstly, a *restorative* nostalgia which emphasises *nostos* and "recreates the past as a value for the present" (Boym, 2001: 49) and secondly, a *reflective* version which abides in the longing of *algia*, lingering over "... ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time" (Boym, 2001: 41). Whilst the latter points to whimsy within individual (and cultural) memory, the former signals to political action. The latter is painfully captured by Collins (2017: 7) who tells of journeying back to the Southwark streets where he grew up and now walks like an 'ex-pat' to seek out "familiar relics on return trips... to remind ourselves we once existed on streets we now walk as ghosts."

Collins' traditional white working class cockney London has not declined as such, but it has migrated. South London now extends to the Kent coast and The East End stretches far into the bucolic countryside of Essex and sometimes to the flatlands of Norfolk. This displacement has created a real sense of what Tuan (1974) referred to as a rich 'topophilia'; a strong love of place that is imbued with and crucially, reinscribes a cultural identity. Cohen's (2014) interrogation of this cockney diaspora evidenced a dual class trajectory; the 'upward' a 'self-made' entrepreneur who has 'escaped' from the working class by his own volition and the 'downward', exhibiting

what a 'poor whites' syndrome' both valorising with the East End with its former glories.

These diasporic nostalgias are now largely recited in both physical and psychic pilgrimages to sites of former East End life largely buried within the landscape of the neoliberal city which John Clarke (1976) presciently referred to as a "magical recovery of community." The most significant pilgrimage is via that other great consolation of Victorian proletarian life, football. Here, fans travel back into former class territories and visit places affiliated with their club, be that pubs or cafes or eel, pie and mash shops. This is, as (Fawbert, 2011: 181) suggests is community persisting as "communion" through performative re-enactments of cultural tropes like pie and mash before the game.

Ronald Ranta and Yonatan Mendel (2014) submit a group identity may be constructed both around the foods of a particular diet and "the manners and methods, in which [that] food is prepared, commodified and consumed..." The eating of eels, pie and mash as a pre-match ritual has become performative cultural re-enactment of a selective memory-scape based largely within the post-war era, both an historic nod to Bourdieu's 'food of necessity' and, especially with jellied eels, as a 'food of ordeal'. Millwall fans generally congregate at Manze's on Tower Bridge Road and, as did their forefathers, still serenade their team onto the pitch with, "We've had our jellied eels and our glass of beer..." Eels, pie and mash here are revealed as what might be described as a 'local patriotism' (Tuan, 1974: 101) with a national 'referent'. They are of 'Enger-land' but they remain specifically of 'London' - although not necessarily the London of gentrification nor the tastes of multiculturalism in the same way that Catherine Palmer (1988) suggests food cultures can also articulate the boundaries of groups in opposition to the nation in competition to the dominant group. Here, the cockney is cast as a sort of Ulster Unionist in that they on the whole *desire* to be part of the national narrative, continue to evidence their uniqueness and historic loyalty to the nation but remain largely irrelevant to elite culture and the approbation and recognition that may bring.

This trend could be initially evidenced in the violence of West Ham hooligans known as "The Pie and Mash Firm" in the 1990s amidst and against the first flourishings of

the multicultural, managerial, 'audit society' politics of the first Blair government (Power, 1998). Their ironic calling cards advertised their meted-out violence to rival fans as 'liquoring'.¹⁹⁴ This pie and mash iconography built on earlier recruiting by the National Front in the 1970s and the British National Party in the 1980s on the terraces of football grounds across the country. This was evidenced as "... a deep racist sentiment... partly borne from a sense of grievance and perceived betrayal of post-war local authority promises, particularly with regard to housing policies" (Fawbert, 2011: 181).

For some, whiteness had become a badge of a true cockney and "conferred some sort of guarantee and entitlement" (Ware, 2008). Recently fascist groupuscules like the so-called 'Pie and Mash Squad' claim the meal and its surrounding culture as an appellation of whiteness.¹⁹⁵ Birthed from an earlier incarnation of violent football supporters known as Casuals United, they arose as a response to perceived Muslim 'extremists'. More prosaically, 'pie and mash' is a well-known phrase in so-called cockney rhyming slang for 'fash' - fascism. Whilst the vast majority of those that eat and work in the pie and mash shops are certainly *not* racists, it is undeniable that the shops themselves have been associated with and sometimes symbolically arrogated by those who are.

In this way, cockney memory has situated eel, pie and mash within the frame of what DeSoucey (2010: 433) termed, 'gastronationalism'. This was originally theorised as state-level lobbying against a globalising food policy but has also come to signify a grassroots opposition to the forces of gentrification identified by their victims as being "associated with foreigners or out of touch liberal elites who not only do not understand, share or respect local culture and traditions" (Ranta, 2018).

Mennell (1985) suggests that 'national cuisines' coincided with the formation of nation states in the late fifteenth century and the key ingredients of the foods that the eel, pie and mash shops serve have both a national and international perspective. The importance of British beef allegedly goes back to at least the sixteenth century

¹⁹⁴ These calling cards are essentially business cards left with or on the body of a beaten victim. See - <https://www.instagram.com/p/CPJJmwvDezm/?hl=en>

¹⁹⁵ See - <https://www.searchlightmagazine.com/2017/06/a-second-warning-for-antifascists-thousands-on-the-streets-of-london-as-far-right-reorganises/>

and the beef in pies was and remains a nostalgic motif: a connection with the *terroir* of British soil (Rogers, 2003). Menno Spierling (2007: 35) suggests that beef was about “Protestant honesty and simplicity” yet it was also tied to “war, sacrifice and liberty.” These significations became entangled with bourgeois concerns of freedom and in this way, beef could be interpreted by all classes as a coded if ‘banal’ nationalism (Billig, 1995).

This has become so ingrained that, as Jon Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss (2008: 540) contend, “... most of the time, the nation is not something ordinary people talk *about*; rather, it's something they talk *with*.” For the customers of the eel, pie and mash shops it's something that they talk *through*.

The shops were always a foci for displays of cockney loyalty with images of royalty, but this trend became increasingly evident through the years of the Cameron government's policy of austerity with the increasing ‘mundane’ patriotic flowerings of the Union flag and allied symbols of national patriotism (‘Help for Heroes’ badges and poppy collection boxes). As Joanna Tidy (2015: 224) has suggested, this tendency rehabilitated the British military through a “nostalgia that encompassed war, domesticity ... through the commodified discourse ... for all things vintage”.

Indeed, the shops and cockney itself have since this period become situated within a more undisguised narrative of right-wing populism: the food valourised on social media as simultaneously British and London-specific. Online advertising for takeaway delivery from the eel and pie shops with events like St Georges Day and the Queen's Jubilee link opportunities to perform the ‘local’ nation.

5.5 The pie shop archipelago

“Fantasies of the past determined by the needs of the present have a direct impact on the realities of the future. (Boym, 2001; xvi)

As a continuing response to the 2008 financial crisis, the coalition governments of 2010-2015 implemented severe economic austerity policies that had a devastating

effect on public services and the standard of living for most working people (Lupton and Burchardt, 2016).

Owen Hatherley (2016) characterised the attendant cultural response to this as an 'austerity nostalgia' which sought to reclaim post-war privation as an aesthetic liniment to the neoliberal economic assault. This was a partial repetition of the "coded sentimentalities" (Bromley, 1988: 4) of the Second World War used by the Thatcher administrations to anchor the country to an alternative historical reality where the struggles of class, whiteness and empire had never developed. Yet the memories valorised were not simply of the Blitz nor the misty nostalgias of the post-war baby-boomers but those of their parents or even their grandparents. This surreal reconstruction of the hardship of those years was made to 'haunt' the present, deployed as a non-synchronous temporality obscuring a modernity in what Fisher (2014) had referred to as the "return as rupture". Television shows like *Downton Abbey* and *Call the Midwife* extended the Thatcherite siren-call of *Brideshead Revisited* in celebrating even more distant eras where the working classes knew their place.

These yearnings were in a sense a more successful replay of the battles between *The Movement* and *The Angry Young Men* generations within British's pre-and post-war culture. This was a conservative revenge for working class gains during the *Trente Glorieuses* and was, for the cockney, a character desperately unsure of its role within modernity, akin to a "nostalgia for the state of being repressed" (Gilroy 2004: 96-97). The paternal, pubic-spirited authoritarianism of 'we're all in it together', was entirely attractive to the stoic cockney as a historically utile conduit of capital.¹⁹⁶ Adaptive slogans such as "keep calm and eat pie and mash" increasingly appeared to chime with a re-remembered cockney 'common sense' that valorised its own precarious historical frugality and drew a direct (but entirely inappropriate) economic line between 'prudent' domestic budgeting as a patriotic act and national spending.¹⁹⁷ Online advertising for takeaway deliveries coinciding with events like St Georges Day linked opportunities to perform the 'local' nation.

¹⁹⁶ Cameron, David. "Full text of David Cameron's speech". *The Guardian*. 8 October 2009.

¹⁹⁷<https://twitter.com/GoddardsPies/status/1240566210724540416?s=20&t=2bLFygfYhQ0gG372FLP> Sg.

In this reading the eel, pie and mash shops could be seen as reassuringly traditional, cheap and simultaneously patriotic - revived palaces of identitarian comfort and consolation for cockneys steadily relocating to Essex or the Medway towns - an archipelago of East End encampments on the capital's borderlands.

The regressive aesthetic was further simultaneous with a genre of reality television shows like *Benefits Street* that continued to demonise precarious sections of the working class with an increasing moral priority that welfare should be the responsibility of the self-sufficient individual or family, not the community. These notions taken together began to form what Mike Savage, *et al* (2010: 612) had presciently recorded as "... a remaking of British national cultural preferences."

Continuing austerity might also have been seen within the continual necessity of cost-cutting, an enduring narrative of loss. This was a loss of hope, a feeling that had been growing for decades that the political establishment had converged ideologically and no longer spoke to ordinary peoples' experience. This was a vicious circle where "...disenchanted voters become even more cynical about politics and... ever more reliant on markets, debt and the audit to undergird social life" (Davies 2020: 17). Into that void started to drip "volatile forms of political identification" (Flemmen, Magne and Savage, 2017: S235). The form of this was a populist 'common sense' and an insular conservatism predicated on ethnic identity and race.

Historically, as Ruth Levitas (1986) had suggested, the right, unable to access Powellite repatriation had accepted assimilation through the idea of unchanging Englishness. In the 'Seventies this was an imperfect but largely 'bottom-up' process for example, political 'blackness' and grassroots Trades Union activity with social solidarities taking deep roots within popular youth culture. As an interviewee in his 70s who moved from Deptford to Essex recalled about West Indians, "... you got used to 'em because they're with you and I've grown up with 'em... If they treat me alright, I'll treat them alright".¹⁹⁸ Those social structures were broken by the politics of

¹⁹⁸ Name withheld on request. Interview by author 15 May 2022.

the right in the 1980s, replaced by a different kind of top-down multiculturalism more concerned with 'managing' communities rather than shared political struggle (Hall in Proctor, 2000). In the London exit polls for the European elections in 2004, UKIP won two and a half million votes on a platform that Britain was 'full' and 24 per cent of respondents said they might vote for the BNP (John and Margetts, 2009).

After the 2011 (London) riots, the Conservative Prime Minister, David Cameron claimed that multiculturalism as a state policy had "failed".¹⁹⁹ The following year, Theresa May, the Conservative Home Secretary told a newspaper that she wanted to create a "really hostile environment" for irregular migrants.²⁰⁰ This policy, championed by an increasingly emboldened right wing populist press, essentially deputised immigration control "by erecting barriers to healthcare and undermining equality and social cohesion through encouraging xenophobia and racism" (Griffiths and Yeo, 2021; 538). This shifted the conservative discourse of 'race as culture' to 'race as cultural identity' and increasingly fixed all Muslims as the new 'enemy within' (Kundani, 2012). By 2016, nearly four out of ten voters would name immigration as one of the key issues facing Britain (Blinder and Richards, 2016).

Against the global backdrop of the 'War on Terror', *The New East End* (2011), a book based on the classic yet problematic *Family and Kinship in East London* [1957] was published by a New Labour Think Tank. It took the simplistic view that the white working class was being 'bred' out of their traditional home by Bangladeshi Muslims. It was a view that was widely accepted. According to John G. who now eats his pie and mash in Essex, "... they took Bethnal Green and Whitechapel off us... we was the last line."²⁰¹ David H. similarly suggested that he moved to Essex during this period "... because of the blacks... [they] was all moving in and fucking taking over... They were a noisy lot... they smelt and whatever... that's why we wanted to get out."²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ "State Multiculturalism has failed" *BBC TV News*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12371994>

²⁰⁰ Kirkup, James and Winnett, Robert. "Theresa May interview: 'We're going to give illegal migrants a really hostile reception.'" *The Telegraph*, 25 May 2012.

²⁰¹ John G. Interview by author, 5 December 2021.

²⁰² David H. Interview by author, 14 April 2022.

This policy tack sought to tap into a growing populist right conservatism that had allowed Collins (2004) to talk of a ‘forgotten white tribe’ still largely defined by accent, taste and tradition. Whilst the spatial and temporal confusion of the white East Ender, pushed and squeezed by the forces of late capitalism, may have been understandable, it ignored the colonial legacy of migration and the everyday convivialities (Gilroy, 2004) that continual immigration had brought to London (which included the Irish to whom many cockneys trace lineage). It also ignored large-scale, white middle class gentrification of the area, partly the result of Eastenders selling their council homes to move to London’s borders. More, it re-imposed a hierarchy of belonging and the contestable notion of ‘tolerance’ (Wemyss, 2006) that could be withdrawn at any time by the white working class that remained.

Crucially the process started to reinforce a homophily: a connection to cultures that look like ‘us’ and turned a national gaze from Europe to an Anglophone version across the Atlantic (Savage, Wright and Gayo-Cal, 2010: 612). When Teresa May in 2016 spoke about powerful “citizens of nowhere ...in thrall to international elites... who take on cheap labour from overseas...” she conflated conspiracy and immigration and showed that the New Right had understood and used working class frustration.²⁰³

The mood also played into a growing English obsession with Europe posited in a metaphoric phagophobia (fear of swallowing) that surrounded British food identity. Spierling (2007: 44) charts how the EU had allegedly been ‘chipping away’ at British food and recounts regular scare stories in the popular press about Brussels bureaucrats attacking ‘traditional’ British ‘fry-up’ breakfasts with regulations, so “...the Englishman is no longer eating but being eaten (Spierling in Wilson, 2007: 44).” In this way the nostalgic cockney was used as a bulwark against European bureaucracy but also to make sense of white loss and “phantasms of home” (Boym, 2001: 13).

However, it needs to be stated that some of the East End, specifically Bethnal Green as well as Shoreditch and Stepney, had historically been the centre of “racial

²⁰³ <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/full-text-theresa-may-s-conference-speech>

exclusionism” and a “laager” mentality in the form of earlier antisemitism directed towards “alien costermongers” (Husbands: 1982). From the British Brothers League in 1901 to the National Front in the 1970s, the area uncontestedly demonstrated a lineage of far-right vigilantism because it always had been a site of ‘super-diversity’.²⁰⁴ These areas were generally the most deprived in East London and for workers the most precarious with any additional labour at the behest of a changing capital, undercutting wages. They were also areas with large unofficial economies and coster social structures that were relatively weak in the traditional architecture of political, though crucially not cultural, solidarities.

As James Malcolm (2014: 654) suggests the area had become a site of memory “as ‘practice’ - as opposed to memory as fact or essence - history” ignoring the process of colonial whiteness and the fictions of autochthony that blended the Blitz and morality. These palimpsestic nostalgias for a ‘golden age’ traced over each other forming a diasporic memory that continues to link the East End to Essex in a self-perpetuating closed conversation of ‘how it really was’. One of the contemporary sites of those conversations are the new eel, pie and mash shops relocated to the capital’s edges. Here some, but certainly not all, residents talk of how their ‘old’ East End has been ruined by European regulations or how “all the original butchers shops, oil shops, pie and mash shops all got pushed out because of the Asians.”²⁰⁵

By the twenty-tens several simultaneous national processes also converged within the cockney landscape. Firstly, the changing age demographics that were starting to emerge across Britain began to de-link those that were born before the 1970s who grew up with an absence of tertiary education from those who grew up later and who were “dramatically more highly qualified and ethnically diverse” (Sobolewska and Ford, 2020: 22). A further separation was evidenced by a post-war generation with pensions and property who eulogised their own meritocratic rise at a time when the attempts to link economic inequality to neoliberal ‘striving’ had started to degenerate.

²⁰⁴ The BBL had 45000 members stretching from Hackney, Bethnal Green, Shoreditch, Stepney and significantly, Roydon in Essex. For figures see - Husbands, Christopher T. "East End Racism 1900-1980 Geographical Continuities in Vigilantist and Extreme Right-wing Political Behaviour." *The London Journal* 8, 1, 1982: 7.

For ‘super-diversity’ see - Vertovec, 2019: 125-139.

²⁰⁵ Ken (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 20 May 2022.

Against these seemingly intractable differences, one of the few frames of reference for many of the older white working class was a nostalgic return to the securities of the Empire (Satnam and McGeever, 2018). This was now additionally aimed against the free flow of migrant labour from Eastern Europe, allegedly ‘swamping’ and abusing the NHS and Welfare State. This narrative was the result of what might be called identity competition and as Gilroy (2020) would suggest, this particularly post-empire English anxiety stemmed from a realisation that they no longer knew, “... culturally speaking who they are.”²⁰⁶ Brexit, the political machinations to ‘remove’ Britain from globalised influence and re-establish a world that looked very much like the mythologised memories of the generations of the 1950s, became the context of all of these issues. The landscape of this for the cockney was Essex.

For a section of the populist Right, desperate for its vote, Essex became a symbol of an allegedly ‘left behind’ proletariat and indeed every area in Essex voted ‘leave’ and sixty-two per cent of the county backed Brexit.²⁰⁷ Yet, the reality of a singular Essex working class is more complicated. The Essex cockney diaspora is actually evidenced by a dual class trajectory. The ‘downward’ as Cohen (2008) suggests, exhibits the ‘poor whites syndrome’ negatively symbolised by the stereotype of the ‘chav’ and ‘the Essex girl’. The ‘upward’ is the ‘self-made’, self-employed entrepreneur who has ‘escaped’ from the working class by ‘hard work’.

However, for the Essex cockney, these classifications were a contradiction. In May 2019 The Campaign to End Child Poverty calculated that in ten Essex towns almost half of children lived in poverty and in 2020, Basildon was the joint fifth most unequal town in the UK.²⁰⁸ ‘Working class’ was simultaneously a memorialised badge of honour even for the new wealthy whose East London palimpsestic memories gave their own lives and rituals (like eels, pie and mash) validation yet additionally for those ‘who had made it’ (and even some who hadn’t), a mark of shame associated

²⁰⁶ Wade, Francis, “Whiteness just ain’t worth what it used to be,” *The Nation*, 28 October 2020, <https://www.thenation.com/article/culture/paul-gilroy-interview/>

²⁰⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36617396>

²⁰⁸ [https://www.basildon.gov.uk/media/10297/Basildon-Council-Draft-Economic-Growth-Plan-BEGP-2020-24/pdf/Basildon_Council_-_Draft_Economic_Growth_Plan_\(BEGP\)___2020-24.pdf?m=637395816147700000](https://www.basildon.gov.uk/media/10297/Basildon-Council-Draft-Economic-Growth-Plan-BEGP-2020-24/pdf/Basildon_Council_-_Draft_Economic_Growth_Plan_(BEGP)___2020-24.pdf?m=637395816147700000)

with cultural atrophy and welfare. As Gareth Millington (2016: 273) notes, Essex was historically London's "dark place" where the media's fear of an unrestrained, brutish capitalism could be observed and satirised. Here were Simon Heffer's 'Essex Man' caricature of the neo-Neanderthal City boy and Marks and Gran's simpleton consumers, Sharon and Tracey.²⁰⁹ In that sense, Brexit's 'Basildon Man' was simply the latest iteration of that as a ventriloquising of the middle classes' darkest fears. Constant signalling over decades and the hegemonic cultural enveloping of Essex eventually made this myth, compounded by the growing urban deprivation of the New Towns, into reality for many Essex people themselves. This was an acceptance of Brexit within the framing that the cockney had been abandoned by the 'educated elites' and might as well vote in spite; an echo of David Low's 'Churchillian' "Very Well, alone" cartoon. As 'Brian' reported, "We never thought we'd get ... out for all the posh bastards and all the government... but the working man came through."²¹⁰

The myth-that-became-reality was also signalled by the way in which class had been re-interpreted during the 80s and 90s across a post-Fordist, increasingly 'de-aligned' landscape. This led to a growing self-ascription of class (Savage, 2015) within an increasing framing of emotion and morality crucially "marked by memory, place and experience for each generation in a particular moment" (Biressi and Nunn, 2013:16). The Essex cockney largely valorised his 'working classness' within a culture that was defined to a large extent by a whiteness predicated on the created nostalgias of the monoracial East End. During the Brexit campaign, which contrary to assumptions, was not largely a working class revolt (Dorling, 2016), the media used the Essex cockney as "the mechanism by which a defence of nation could be spoken" (Biressi and Nunn, 2013: 148). This was a valorisation of Brexit by the Essex cockney as a popular revolt against 'multiculturalism'.

Here, in the narrative of a popular uprising, 'the people' were "a monoracial singularity" (Begum, Mondon and Winter, 2021: 223). In fact, Essex although still largely white, it is increasingly home to ethnic populations migrating from London.

²⁰⁹ Heffer, Simon. *Sunday Telegraph*. Heffer, Simon. "Maggie's Mauler: profile of Essex Man". *Sunday Telegraph*, 7 October 1990.

Marks, Laurence and Maurice Gran. *Birds of a Feather*. BBC TV, 1989-1998.

²¹⁰ Brian (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 14 May 2022.

Yet as Stephanie Lawler (2005: 430) has suggested, the working class has become “*emblematically* white even if this is contrary to its lived complexity.” In this reading non-white members of the working class are valorised by the “liberal, cosmopolitan elite (Hobolt, 2016) revealing a “deep sense of a loss of prestige” (Virdee and McGeever, 2018: 1811) amongst the *indigene*. This increasingly underpins claims of white victimhood (Begum, Mondon and Winter, 2021) evidenced by ‘Tony’ from Romford who “has worked my whole life, so if anybody tells me I’m privileged, I’ll just spit in their eye because it’s...woke nonsense.”²¹¹ As ‘Ken’ attests of Wickford where he has lived for twenty years since moving from the East End, “We’ve got our own kind down here... We’re probably trying to recreate what we had. Without all the blacks and all the others spoiling it.”²¹²

The borders between the East End and Essex are fluid: many people who now live in Essex commute into the capital to work and may have relatives who still live in their areas of origin. Some towns like Basildon though are, as Mark Wincott who still lives in Poplar observes, “...third generation Essex... pie and mash is a comfort for them [and] the only time they have it is when they go [to] West Ham.”²¹³ This is cockney identity based on a “simultaneous presence and absence” (Watt, Millington and Huq, 2014: 127). The diaspora cockney, I assert, is created through a kind of ‘call and response’ (Gilroy, 1993) where identity can be lost and found again and eel, pie and mash forms part of what calls *adhaan*-like from that lost re-imagined land.

These however are not totalising narratives: most white people in the East End or Essex are certainly not racists but the politically expedient narratives created around them fix them in ways that they are defined by their ‘lack’ (McKenzie, 2015). Most, like Jean in her 70s in her Bethnal Green flat *do* bemoan that “everything down Brick Lane is all Bengali” because it is historically a repository of poor immigrant communities that is culturally different to hers. But of her Bengali neighbours, she says, “You know, they’re really nice... when it was Ramadan, they was always

²¹¹ ‘Tony’(real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 25 May 2022.

²¹² ‘Ken’ (real name withheld on request). Interview by author, 20 May 2022.

²¹³ Mark Wincott. Interview by author 16 May 2022.

sending food in and everything”.²¹⁴This is the real ‘conviviality’ of modern London in which different metropolitan groups might dwell in diverse contexts (Gilroy, 2004).

This emergent contemporary conviviality is however increasingly and inevitably modifying the language of cockney itself. According to Paul Kerswill and Eivind Torgesen (in Hickey, 2017), until the late nineteenth century, most migration had been from the south of England and linguistic changes resulting from contact were difficult to find. According to Eva Sivertson (1960), even mass Jewish immigration around the turn of the century did not much disrupt the cockney dialect, merely adding some additional Yiddish words. Yet, post-war immigration, largely from former British colonies like Jamaica, meant that by the 1980s, a discernibly new street sound was evidenced and “young Afro-Caribbeans [like the artist Smiley Culture] could clearly code switch between patois and local English. The local English itself ... [was] ... very much of its time, a mainstream *variety* [my italics] of cockney” (Sebba in Cheshire 2011: 160).

Linguistic adaption however has accelerated enormously in the intervening thirty years. Traditional cockney areas for example, Hackney, largely as the result of immigration from the wider Developing World, is now home to speakers of at least eighty-nine different languages.²¹⁵ In areas like this where there is a large linguistic pool to draw from language changes and mutates constantly.

Sali Tagliamonte and Alexandra D’Arcy (in Cheshire, 2011) suggest that it is the late adolescent age group that selects and edits language in a largely informal way according to their friendship groups often “using forms resulting from their imperfect learning of the target language.” Certainly, the resulting linguistic patchwork owes much to black youth culture evidenced through commercially successful genres of rap and hip-hop and is referred to by sociolinguists as Multicultural London English (MLE).²¹⁶ As Jenny Cheshire *et al* (2011: 164) have it, “the vernacular baseline has changed from one which was largely cockney in the 1980s to a variant of MLE today.” Indeed, Paul Kerswill (2013: 133) suggests that London children do not

²¹⁴ Jean Sanchez. Interview by author, 17 May 2022.

²¹⁵ <https://hackney.gov.uk/knowning-our-communities>

²¹⁶ See - Fox, 2015.

“straightforwardly acquire the localised ‘cockney’ vernacular, even if their parents might be speakers.”

Recent research (Cole, 2021) into phonetic variation in the Essex town of Debden, site of the original relocations from Bethnal Green, has indicated that cockney, as a speech pattern, has become less popular among the children of the Thatcher generation. According to her study, older Debden residents still largely ‘speak’ and identify as cockney whereas younger people see the identity as geographically rooted in *East London*. Crucially, they consider their accent to be ‘Essex’. The author suggests that this is potentially because of cockney’s association with “low social status” and that ‘improper’ speech has been seen as an impediment to “social evaluation[s] and... greater social mobility” (Cole, 2020: 259-260). This would indeed be congruent to an increased valorisation of a specific modern Essex character that takes its cue largely from celebrity and consumerism. My own interviews, specific to eel and pie shops across both London and wider parts of Essex would seem to indicate a more mixed picture yet undoubtedly, there is a conflict around the notion of what cockney, both as a linguistic form and an identity, currently signifies; what it was and what it will become.

The axis of that is certainly age and amongst younger people, a partial turn from whiteness and a partial re-identification, after the 2008 financial crash and widespread gentrification, with the idea of class.²¹⁷ Indeed, in a recent video for his latest single, *Blessings*, the cockney rapper Tommy B, 25, is seen performing in the newly opened F. Cooke’s pie and mash shop in Chelmsford, Essex. In it, he woos a mixed-race girl with a cockney peppered by (largely) Caribbean patois inflections common to contemporary, *Grime* music. He is also seen (ironically) at the wheel of the iconic three-wheeled van from *Only Fools and Horses* accompanied by a stereotypical ‘Essex girl’. For him, as a young, modern cockney, age, class and race are linked.

²¹⁷ For a discussion of the re-evaluation of class in contemporary politics amongst the young see - Milburn, 2019.

I think that our generation is totally different. If one of my pals is being racist, I'm like, that's just backwards... it's outdated, it's expired... for me I realise that I have much more in common with a black boy that's come from fuck all than with fucking 'Sebastian' who is white and has grown up with a great life. Same thing with the Eastern Europeans or the Asians... and they're all working class people.²¹⁸

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to show how the personal, sensory memorialisations of the cockney have become synchronous with larger cultural and political ones. Always meaningful as *de facto* working class spaces of pride and community, their role in the past few decades has changed concomitant with the cockney's problematic procession into modernity.

Through its historic demonisation by New Labour and growing rage at its long, slow cultural disintegration the traditional cockney, for so long the loyal hostage-servant of the elites, has come to represent what Gilroy (2005: 132) noted at the tail-end of Empire were the "widening fissures in British society".

The eel, pie and mash shops have become both a sanctuary and anchorage for their culture and a key signifier for memories deeply entrenched in the East End subconscious. These spaces for the ritual invocation of working classness are uniquely powerful because they rely on personal sensory memorialisation of a food based on comfort which holds within it the cockney's origin story.

The shops have become a palimpsestic enticement for multiple and myriad memories of London working class life whose contestations into a living, performed script change and settle according to the needs of the contemporary memory epoch.

Currently, this landscape is largely dominated by the memorialisations of a post-war generation whose cultural compass is fixed to a nostalgic embellishment of wartime

²¹⁸ Tommy B. Interview by author, 25 March 2022.

austerity concomitant with a hegemonic signalling of a particular kind of monocultural conservatism. Some of these memorialisation are fabled within the mythscape of a multi-era cockney from the registers of a 'jellied eel London' (Sinclair, 2004). They are rosy depictions of poverty from unreliable autobiography and the confluence of "glimmers" of working class authenticity (Beswick, 2020) found in kitchen-sink dramas and gangster films.

These problematic recollections have been re-created throughout the cockney diaspora in pie shop simulacra's that are, in effect, *lieux de memoire* (Nora, 1989). Here a new cockney is being birthed, fed from memories from simultaneous temporalities with contestations around multiculturalism and age within the neoliberal city.

6. Conclusion

“Nothing becomes romanticised so much as memories, both individual and collective, about food and drink” (Mathias, 1967: 17)

6.1 Overview

This thesis has for the first time explored and examined the unwritten history of London’s iconic but fast-disappearing eel, pie and mash shops and additionally interrogated their cultural conduit, the changing and concomitant notion of the cockney identity. In doing so I have addressed an absence in research around these spaces and the communities that use them who, in turn, have been largely forgotten or ignored but whose contested memories and identity I argue have great contemporary political and cultural resonance in an age of populism and Brexit.

My work has excavated a tracing around these absences in historical literature, synthesising existing scholarship and applying new research to extend their relevancy. I have utilised memory theory, sensory ethnography and semi-structured interviews to explore the shops and those who use them as temporal anchorages within the neoliberal city and the Essex hinterlands. This thesis has contextualised the shops’ development, not within any contemporary family dynasty as is commonly held, but as part of a much earlier historical process centred around the greater mobility of labour during early modernity, concurrent with the ideological and cultural accession of a bourgeoisie whose rise was a synchronous dance with an emergent London proletariat.

6.2 Summary by chapter

My first chapter proves that these enterprises were part of an earlier, established trade than previously recorded. I link for the first time within them a simultaneity to suggest that they were synchronous to both the dying breath of an older, popular

street culture, of which the roving pieman was part, and to the withdrawal of the middle classes from areas that came to be dominated by the urban poor.

The exact fare and presentation of these early shops remains somewhat unclear, and I argue that they became increasingly defined by the class-demotion of their clientele that mirrored the changing cartography of the city. By the mid-nineteenth century the pie shops were no longer places that gentlemen might frequent. Rather, depending on their hyper locality, the shops were feeding tradesmen, the petit bourgeois and some of London's market-adjacent poor. By the turn of the twentieth century the now pie and mash shops have become a cultural cornerstone of those who almost exclusively identify themselves as working class.

In describing this process, I have employed the biological notion of a taxon to illustrate their evolution in tandem with other lower class eating places as increasing responses to hunger, precarity and the changing work-discipline of industrial capitalism (Thompson, 1967).

I argue a new London working class culture, defended within dual notions of freedom and respectability and centred largely around unofficial markets and desperate resistances to poverty, came into conflict with bourgeois attempts to physically and ideologically control the capital's streets. It was these populations, contributing to the emergence of a distinct and unique London character that became integral to the customer base of the emergent eel and pie shops. By the early twentieth century the (now) eel, pie and mash shops had become numerous but, I suggest, were confined within largely matrilineal, hyper-local social solidarities based around micro-class divisions of work and codes of propriety that remained largely impenetrable to outsiders.

My second chapter defines the eel and pie shops through the contested evolution of the character that became known as cockney. I trace its pre-modern roots to suggest that it became a metaphor for the interplay between the powerful and the powerless.

During early Victorian modernity, I argue the performativity of the cockney was both an escapist pantomime that simultaneously aped, celebrated and satirised the

appearance of the elites and a dramatic identity informed by street commerce (Jankiewicz, 2014). This identity I suggest was a consolidation of an older, carnivalesque street culture and a new London-specific working class personality, re-inscribed as both comic and criminal within the moral framework of bourgeois morality. I relate the fascination and fear of this character within the twin nodes of Victorian liberalism that sought to meld the potentially revolutionary cockney of the 'abyss' into a figure of imperial incorporation and suggest additionally that the eel and pie shops became central to a hyper-local and largely shielded culture of working class consolation (Steadman Jones, 1974). I utilise Hall's (1973) work on hegemonic messaging to clarify the creation of a particular type of 'ordinariness' through a bourgeois theatrical ventriloquising of the coster community and this I argue continues to be periodically valorised according to its usefulness to capital at times of political stress.

My third chapter continues to chart the trajectory of the cockney and the culture of eel and pie shops beyond the rubble of the Blitz but returns to the era of New Imperialism to contextualise the cockney identity within the notion of whiteness and empire. I argue that the reframing of the nation as a racial singularity (and the eventual franchise extension) marked a fundamental shift by the elites from overt repression to a more consensual vision of hegemony. Further, I suggest this signalled to subsequent 'entitlements' of East London's white population (especially) around the gains of the Welfare State and a national economy. I argue that these entitlements are memorialised in the contemporary imagination of a largely mono-racial, hyperlocalism to which the eel, pie and mash shops are, to a large extent a spiritual refuge.

I link the destruction of traditional cockney territoriality by zonal redevelopment, gentrification and exodus to the allied decline of social structures simultaneous to the identity's contested relationship with modernity. I further argue that housing and its allocation was central to the *ressentiment* towards mass immigration and the hastening of the transmission (and simulacra) of the cockney identity outward towards (especially) Essex and its 'dual class trajectories' (Watt, Millington and Huq, 2014). The delineations of these I suggest are central to cockney's internal, inner-

world contradictions and negotiations between its working class and petty bourgeois nodes.

Rather than the suggestion that the cockney disappeared in the post war period (Stedman Jones, 1989), I argue that the identity simultaneously continued its role as a nostalgic conduit to capital but evolved multiple valences that spoke to an increasing emphasis on popular culture, age, choice and individuality (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2018) further complicating its continued existence as a palimpsestic construction.

My fourth chapter examines the sights, sounds and smells of a contemporary eel, pie and mash shop utilising a sensory ethnography.

I clarify the shops as a unique site of hyperlocal, working class territoriality that utilises ritual as a zone of resistance to the modern neo-liberal city. These rituals I suggest have, through the senses, become mythologised and coded and part of the 'true archives' (De Certeau, 1998) of the remnants of a working class city. They link hospitality, conviviality and memory which have been inscribed within and upon and the bodies of the customers (Connerton, 1989).

I argue that the formulation of the food served in the shops is unique and antithetical to the 'rules' (Douglas, 1975) of a British working class meal and that the eel is now largely the object of demographic, age and class-based notions of disgust relevant to the changing notions of cockney which sees its limited consumption as a 'food of ordeal'.

My thesis suggests that the shops are arenas of a specific and historic working class respectability and a temporary refuge from dominant forms of cultural production. I argue that the shops contain and generate their own notions of taste and are a negotiation with the hegemonic culture. I offer that the shops are a unique insight into the changing notions of taste, class and inter-class contestation within the convivialities of a closed, almost secretive heritage of proletarian culture.

My final chapter interrogates the complex memories that populate the shops and the communities that use them.

I suggest that these memorialisations are myriad inscriptions that partly derive from the historic specificity of London and potentially include early capitalist notions of conviviality as well as the faint cultural mnemonics of nineteenth century working class privation, defeat and accommodation which led to them as zones of consolation. I argue that the shops and their memorialisations are additionally complicated within the simultaneous remembrances of a separate owner and customer class which meld around a notion of an entrepreneurial proletarianism. This includes a largely white precariat who valorise their historic social solidarities within a hyper-local cartography against a backdrop of immigration, globalisation and the forces of gentrification. In addition, these accompany the re-imagined, performative and simulacra-like memorialisations of the so-called cockney diaspora (largely) within Essex. I refer to these multiple, simultaneous and competing memories as polyphonic. The memory scripts that are performed within the eel, pie and mash shops, allied to the palimpsestic cockney identity and its cultural and geographic dislocation, are overwhelmingly nostalgic and melancholic. I argue that these narratives and reconstructions of the past are and remain concomitant to the needs of capital.

Currently, I suggest, these scripts fall between a cultural and communicative memory (Assmann, 2010) of a post-war generation that dimly recall as children the legacy of wartime privation and mass colonial immigration. It is, I argue, this generation's sketchy memorialisations and political framings of the Second World War, that now sit with a melancholia around the loss of the fantasy of a British omnipotence crystallised as a post-colonial nostalgia. Here, I offer, a bitter confusion at the ending of the *Trente Glorieuses* (and the part enabling of a neoliberal embrace via Thatcherism) and a monocultural conservatism reified as a 'common sense', hold the key to deciphering much of the structure of contemporary 'populist' politics, the contestations of Brexit and the so-called 'culture wars'.

6.3 The unseen

“There are certain areas of London that I suspect retain their integrity and beauty only by becoming invisible” (Moorcock, 2000: 180).

Underlying this thesis has been the question of why these spaces and the culture contained within them been rendered near historically invisible. I have in the introduction, suggested that part of that unseeness is the result of both the class positioning of those who have tried to tell the story of London’s working class but also a defensive habitus which surround the shops, the result of historic cultural repression. Elsewhere, I have also pointed to what I suggest is a lack of exchange value in the shops and their fare for a gentrifying bourgeois audience which contrasts to the treatment of spaces like public houses (so-called gastro-pubs), the upmarket selling of dishes like fish and chips and also the ‘traditional’ comfort food and décor of re-imagined ‘working man’s’ cafés. All of these have been concomitant with either renewed historical interest or re-mapping of these enterprises to suit more middle class tastes. The eel, pie and mash shops, often linked with insular communities associated with unfashionable attitudes to cultural change and historically demonised in mainstream culture have, however, remained unassailable and untranslatable outside of their class habitat.

This unseeness may also have its partial roots in the evolution of the cockney communities themselves. The shops and their food, long associated with proletarianism, parents and pastness, increasingly sat uncomfortably with an upwardly mobile, aspirational generation ironically birthed within the working class modernity of the ‘fifties, ‘sixties and ‘seventies who became (partly) valorised by the neoliberal retrenchment from the Thatcher project onwards. In that sense, the shops retain something of the comic, performative origins of the Victorian cockney often reproduced in mainstream culture as an object of anachronistic derision. I argue that for many to whom the shops were an inevitable class heritage, these factors combined to form a kind of complex embarrassment.

More, the shops and the food were historically contained within a distinct collective habitus formed through historical work forms and associated patterns of community

life that have been largely destroyed. The melancholic valorising of this is a central contradiction at the heart of the cockney identity.

In recent years, largely synchronous with the privations of austerity, the notion of class has strongly reasserted itself within Britain. This has been additionally concomitant to a 'populist' political reaction against both a breakdown of a two-party class-aligned political system and a managerial-professional class largely associated with 'progressive' values centred around the EU and 'centrist' politics.

For many, the pie and mash shops that held traditional class allegiances have become somewhat of a symbol for opposition to this hegemony and have been increasingly celebrated, via selective memorialisation, especially on social media, as arenas of reasserted, traditional 'working classness'. Whilst the ascriptions, subtleties and confusions around those who claim to be (historically) working class are beyond the scope of this work, it is incontestable that as the handful of London's traditional pie and mash shops fade and close, the numbers relocating or indeed appearing for the first time in Essex and other places of London diaspora as simulacra, are multiplying.

6.4 The palaces of comfort and consolation

This thesis has argued that the eel, pie and mash shops are a crucial but historically unexamined arena of London working class life.

These spaces I have argued, remain an unmitigated, unpretentious, authentic loci of a culture born of the need for sustenance and conviviality; the food served within, a code for a complex but contested ordinariness.

Central to these spaces is the allied but equally contested identity of the cockney recollected through what I have referred to as polyphonic memorialisations. These I suggest are not merely palimpsestic in a linear sense but rather the result of multiple junctures of memory and identity traces that may be usefully illustrated by Michel Serres' (1995: 60) concept of the handkerchief. This speaks analogously to an image of 'pleated time' - a multi-temporality of history where an ironed handkerchief, once

flat (representing definite and stable historical co-ordinates) is crumpled rendering historically distant points "... close, or even superimposed". In this way cockney, by the mid-twentieth century, consisted of (amongst many others) mediaeval notions of urbanity, eighteenth century assumptions around developing petit-bourgeois ascendancy, nineteenth century Irish immigrant entrepreneurial anti-authoritarianism and late Victorian propaganda around race and empire.

The contemporary cockney, no longer defined by a traditional territoriality, race or even necessarily dialect is, I offer, a reservoir of identities. These might be mixed and matched according to personal need, historic cultural obligation or contemporary political requirements.

The polestar of this identity, especially for the diasporic cockney, remains a recently reinvigorated cultural symbol: the final taxon of a nineteenth century feeding station, frozen in time, hidden in plain sight and largely forgotten. A space inscribed by responses to hunger, conviviality and early working class notions of respectability forged in a culture of consolation.

In this way, cockney is now I propose more akin to a structure of feeling, an affective but contested landscape of emotion and evolving cultural signifiers caught between past certainties of a largely monoracial, national identity and the challenges of a globalised world.

This is a complex identity, perilously mapped. It is culturally working class but increasingly held in tension with an aspirational, interstitial and precarious petty bourgeoisie respondent to the nostalgic populism of a reimagined post-war landscape.

Cockney is an identity haunted by a melancholy and phantasms of a time which has passed, its eel, pie and mash shops are as Cynthia Cruz (2021: 58) suggests, "filled with the aura of what previously defined them".

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Appendix

Fig.1. Shepherd, Frederick Napoleon. "View of building in Fleet Street, with Blanchard's premises and figures on pavement".

Fig.2. Olive Malvery serving in a cheap coffee house, early 1900s.

Fig. 3. Kennington, Eric. "The coster mongers" 1914.

Interviews

Name	Location	Position	Date of Interview	Location of Interview
Arment, Rita	London	Pie shop owner	20/11/2019	virtual
Arment, Roy	London	Pie shop owner	16/11/2019	virtual
B, Tommy	London	Customer	25/03/2022	virtual
Boutall, Adam	London	Customer	19/10/2021	virtual
Bradley, John	Essex	Customer	25/06/2022	virtual
Burrows, Tim	Essex	Author/Customer	15/06/2022	in person
Brian (alias)	Essex	Customer	22/06/2022	virtual
Camp, Greg	Essex	Pie shop owner	10/05/2021	virtual
Clunn, Chris	Wales	Customer	17/02/2022	in person
Cole, Amanda	Essex	Academic	05/04/2022	virtual
Cooke, Chris	Warks.	Pie shop owner	17/11/2020	in person
Cooke, Joe	London	Pie shop owner	01/03/2020	in person
Cooke, Kim	London	Pie shop owner	07/03/2020	in person
Cooke, Robert	Essex	Pie shop owner	10/09/2021	virtual
Errol, Eileen	Essex	Customer	22/10/2021	in person
Ford, Nicola	Essex	Pie shop worker	12/06/2022	virtual
Furnham, David	Sussex	Director	21/02/2022	virtual
H, David (alias)	Essex	Customer	14/04/2022	virtual
Kelly, Paul	Essex	Pie shop owner	15/12/2020	in person
Ken (alias)	Essex	Customer	22/06/2022	virtual
Malone, Johnny	Essex	Pie shop owner	15/06/2022	In person
O'Carroll, Steven	Essex	Customer	22/06/2022	virtual
Poole, Graham	London	Pie shop owner	16/09/2021	In person
Sanchez, Jean	London	Customer	25/10/2022	virtual
Sanchez, Johnny	Kent	Customer	01/11/2022	virtual
Wincott, Mark	London	Pie shop owner	05/11/2022	virtual

