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Teddy Boys and Girls as Neo-flâneurs in Postwar London

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Abstract: 'Teddy Boys and Girls as Neo-flâneurs in Postwar London' examines Britain's 'first youth subculture' and adult reactions to it through a variety of contemporary media: street photography, police reports and newspaper articles of the 1950s, and films and popular novels of the 1960s. Teddy Boys and Girls emerge as passionate spectators of urban life who incorporated aspects of the Baudelairean dandy with a more vigorously embodied relationship to the city. They situated their youthful rebellions against the urban spaces of London streets, parks and bombsites, and presented themselves as sartorial exclamation points in the postwar debates over urban renewal, consumerism, and evolving gender and class identities.

Keywords: Teddy Boys and Girls, youth culture, fashion, crime, photography, films, pulp fiction, Ken Russell, Roger Mayne, Sidney J. Furie, Ernest Ryman, Guy Cullingford

The 'Teddy' Boys and Girls of early 1950s London were Britain's first youth subculture, the beginning of what art critic Kenneth Courtts-Smith called 'a working-class bohemia' (1970: 140). Usurping the Savile Row-sponsored neo-Edwardian style of young aristocrats in the late 1940s, 'Teddy' style also combined the fashion of wartime 'make- do- and mend' customisation, 'spiv' gangsters, American 'zoot' and East End 'cosh boy' youth gangs. Confident, brash and striking, the Teddy subculture was a complex postwar reaction to austerity, rationing and National Service measured against a nostalgic vision of the English past. This essay will explore Teddy Boys and Girls as neo-flâneurs, passionate spectators of urban life who incorporated aspects of the Baudelairean dandy and a more vigorously embodied relationship to the city. They appropriated not only upper-class neo-Edwardian fashion, but also a privileged relationship to the city which emphasised consumer pleasures rather than work. Teddy Boys and Girls situated their youthful rebellions against the urban spaces of London streets, parks and bombsites, and presented themselves as sartorial

exclamation points in the postwar debates over urban renewal, consumerism and evolving gender and class identities.

Flâneurs and the Rebuilt City

Teddy Boys and Girls appeared in a 1950s London that was in the midst of a radical spatial, social and political reconstruction. Although constrained by their lower disposable income and work responsibilities, postwar working-class youths had more freedom to explore urban spaces and cultures than had their parents. Teddy Boys and Girls represented innovative ways of moving and acting in the city, echoing the archetypal modern urban figures proposed by French poet Charles Baudelaire in his *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne*, or *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863). In these essays, published in newspaper *feuilletons*, Baudelaire tried to capture emerging contemporary modes of urban experience and link them to the revolutionary transformation of Paris during France's Second Empire. Within six months of his 1852 coup d'état, self-styled Emperor Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte had hired Baron von Haussmann as Prefect of the Seine to oversee the reconstruction of Paris. Haussmann's ambitious reforms aimed to rationalise, modernise and monumentalise the space of city, creating new public works, housing, parks and public monuments. The most visible and contentious aspect of this modernisation was the razing of older working-class areas of the city and the construction of new wide boulevards which, as Marshall Berman argued in *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (1988), made rich and poor newly visible to each other in the streets, in glass-fronted cafés, in stores and restaurants. The reconfiguration of Paris led to a new kind of atomised urban life, 'transient, ephemeral and contingent' (AlSayyad 2006: 2), and the emergence of the flâneur, the detached urban spectator. The modern city provided the flâneur with the perfect backdrop for his own observations and self-fashioning: 'For the perfect flâneur, for the passionate observer, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and in the infinite' (Baudelaire 1964: 9). The flâneur embodied the contradictions of the modern city: removed from restraints of tradition, entitled to 'the inestimable, and paradoxical, privilege of moving about the city without losing one's individuality' (Ferguson 1994: 81), but also exiled from the functional efficacy of modern rationality (Clarke 1997: 5), and at odds with larger urban communities. The flâneur was the embodiment of modern ambivalence: an urbanite proximate in physical space but distant in social space. The gaps in emotional experience coloured the flâneur's perambulations with a melancholic nostalgia for a lost or impossible world, a lost city not as-was, but as was-wished-to-be (Clarke 1997: 5). As Ian Walker has argued, the flâneur's dual imaging of the street as a site of mystery and pleasure, threat and invitation, influenced artistic expression in the twentieth century in all the great cities of Europe: London, Vienna, Berlin and St Petersburg, and by the 1950s, the new cities of America (2002: 31).

London after the Second World War was experiencing a period of structural and social upheaval similar to Paris eighty years earlier. Prewar slum clearances had been augmented by the German bombing raids to create a city with large areas reduced to rubble and huge shifts in population. During the war one and a half million Londoners

were made homeless and over eight million people, or 40% of London's population, left their neighbourhoods, in many cases permanently (Porter 1995: 342). As in Paris, urban planning was central to postwar political reconstruction. Planners offered an optimistic possibility of a reformed London, a 'prescriptive notion of ordered civic life' (Hornsey 2010: 2) that would dominate social policy until the late 1950s. Patrick Abercrombie's vision in his *Greater London Plan* of 1944 aimed at resettling the inner London population into a number of distinct, self-sufficient communities connected by an improved network of circumferential roads. While post-revolutionary Paris made affluent and poor classes visible to each other, the increasing suburbanisation of postwar London meant that these the more affluent Londoners moved to the suburbs as the population of Inner London (the LCC Area) dropped from 4 million in 1938 to 3.2 million in 1961 (Inwood 1998: 837). Deeper class divides in the city led to 'the emergence of a different form of *flânerie* in the second half of the twentieth-century, devoid of class encounter; instead each class has created its own city within a city' (AlSayyad 2006: 13). Teddy Boy and Girl culture appeared in working-class neighbourhood strongholds struggling to assert their importance in the postwar reconstruction of the city that had been such an important symbol of civilian wartime resistance and postwar reconstructionist ideals.

Teddy Boys and Girls

Teddy Boy and Girl culture was first expressed sartorially and through movement and action in the city, leaving only the records of observers (and a few memoirs) for posterity. Newspapers first reported on the distinctive dress of working-class neo-Edwardian youth in 1952, though the term 'Teddy' did not appear until the sensational 'Teddy Boy Murder' newspaper headlines of 1953. Early Teddy culture was captured with the most immediacy in street photography, most notably in the photographs of young freelance photographer and future filmmaker Ken Russell in 1955 in Notting Hill, and photographer Roger Mayne in 1956 and 1957 in North Kensington, Battersea and Petticoat Lane. Postwar street photography, as noted by Ian Walker, 'had its genesis in the *flânerie* of nineteenth-century Paris' (2002: 31) and shared similar conventions: a backdrop of paved streets and walls providing visual contrast to the movement and expressiveness of the people captured within the frame (Brooke 2014). Street photographs provide tiny hints of the lived experiences of Teds which were subsumed under generalised delinquent stereotypes in newspaper articles and films reflecting middle-class adult moral panic. What seemed most disturbing to adult observers was the combination of the flâneur's detachment with the collective aspect of Teddy culture, making the Teds both highly visible and anonymous in their similar clothing. Subsequent academic interest in the Teddy Boys, notably the 1970s sociological studies by Dick Hebdige (1979) and Tony Jefferson (1976), considered Teddy Boys and other youth subcultures as symbols of collective class resistance rather than individuals (Williams 2011: 28). The 1970s Ted revival, symbolised by the 1971 opening of Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood's shop 'Let it Rock' on the King's Road, also promoted nostalgic images of Teddy Boys without considering Ted culture's complex gendered and spatial urban relationships. Re-examining Teddy Boy and Girl culture through glimpses of lived and embodied experiences in the space of

the postwar city reveals its similarities to Baudelairean modes of modern urban life. Like the flâneur and the dandy, Teds used clothing, leisure pursuits and sometimes violence as tool to puncture the visual, aural and social fabric of city.

The annals of fashion history, and the *Tailor and Cutter* magazine, reveal that the neo-Edwardian suit was promoted in the late 1940s to the young aristocratic man by a group of Savile Row tailors. The new style consisted of a long, narrow-lapelled, waisted jacket, narrow trousers and a fancy waistcoat, generally worn with a slightly longer hairstyle (Jefferson 1976: 69). By 1951-2, neo-Edwardian masculine style had migrated from Mayfair, probably via Soho, to South London and the working-class youths of Elephant and Castle and Lambeth. As the style began to migrate to other working-class London neighbourhoods to the east and north, the sartorial fashion was modified by the bootlace tie, thick crepe-soled shoes, or 'creepers', tighter trousers, or 'drainpipes', and brighter coloured and straighter jackets with velvet or moleskin collars. Hair was worn much longer and with the help of Brylcreem was encouraged into a quiff at the front and combed into a 'Duck's Arse' or D-A at the back. The most extreme style was the dramatic 'elephant's trunk', a sausage curl on top of the head which dangled down somewhat obscenely onto the forehead. Neo-Edwardian fashion was also influenced by the exaggerated patterns and cuts of the demobilisation suits of the 'Spiv': a postwar runner or contact man who brokered criminal endeavours in places like the black market 'Loot Alley' in Cutler Street, Houndsditch, a blitzed cul-de-sac near Liverpool Street Station. While Spivs were men in their thirties, forties and fifties, their position outside system of work combined with their flashy sartorial style influenced Neo-Edwardian fashion, as did the 1940s 'zoot suits' brought over by African-American GIs and Jamaican migrants.

Teddy Girl fashion is difficult to define with as much precision, as no contemporary fashion writers catalogued the fashion, and there was much less mainstream interest in the feminine aspect of Ted culture. According to existing photographs, Teddy Girl fashion was androgynous, improvised and customised, qualities associated with later punk movements of the 1970s. Photographs show a pastiche of nostalgic Edwardian fashion, including the characteristic tailored jackets with velvet collars and masculine jackets, combined with flat shoes and rolled-up jeans or full skirts. Photographer and filmmaker Ken Russell was one of the few to focus on Teddy Girls. He was introduced by his future wife Shirley to fellow fashion student and Teddy Girl Josie Buchan, through whom he met the Teddy Girls who became his subjects in the photo essay: 'The Last of the Teddy Girls' in *Picture Post* (4 June 1955). Bombsite rubble, graffiti walls and high metal fences and stairwells provide visual contrast to the Teddy Girl's playful posing and preening. One set of photographs focused on Iris Thornton and Pat Wiles, seventeen-year-olds from Plaistow, posing against bombsites, graffiti and other visual textures redolent of postwar rubble. They wear a distinctive combination of wide-brimmed hats with netting in the style of late 1930s, echoing the much larger and more elaborate hats of the Edwardian era, scarves tied high on the neck, long duster coats and Grecian sandals. Somewhat incongruously with their footwear, they each carry the vital Teddy Girl accessory and symbol of the dandy: an extra-long umbrella. The Teddy Girls in these photographs stare directly at Russell's lens, often with a challenging glare. The photographs of fourteen-year-old Jean Rayner are the most striking example of this.

In Russell's most famous photograph of the series, Rayner is posed in front of a group of Teddy Boys lined up on a fire escape stair, wearing tied-up curly hair, a masculine jacket, skinny neck scarf and rolled-up jeans. 'She had attitude by the truckload', Ken Russell recalled in a 2010 interview. 'No one paid much attention to the teddy girls before I did them, though there was plenty on teddy boys. They were tough, these kids, they'd been born in the war years and food rationing only ended in about 1954—a year before I took these pictures. They were proud. They knew their worth. They just wore what they wore' (O'Hagan 2010).



Figure 1. Teddy Girls. Used with permission of Topham Picturepoint

In this photograph (Figure 1), Elsie Hendon 15, Jean Rayner 14, Rosie Hendon, 15 and Mary Toovey pose for Russell on a bombsite in Southam Street, North Kensington, West London. Three of them wear huge smiles and all display confident body posture. Jean is the only one not smiling, staring at the camera with the same insolent glare she displayed in other photographs in this series. Her head rises above the others, and she is the only one holding a cigarette and standing straight-legged, suggesting her authority in the group. Yet her slight turn away from the camera and

her protective arm around her friend also suggest a wariness and suspicion of the photographer. This image reveals the Teddy Girls' commitment to a neo-Baudelairean feminine dandyism, and a homosociability more often associated with Teddy Boy culture. Their flat shoes, masculine tailoring and tied-up hair symbolise their streamlined freedom of movement, though Russell chose to frame them against the backstreets and in bombsites hidden from the main view of the city. The backdrops of railings and walls in the series suggests their continued constraint and the lack of access to the more public sphere inhabited by the Teddy Boys. The Russell photographs were also aesthetically influenced by 1930s documentary photography, and the wartime photographic Gothic genre and its visual iconography of ruined cityscapes. Posing Teddy Girls against bombsites created a symbolic contrast; like the Parisian flâneurs, their ambiguous relationship to the city marks them as 'in' but not 'of' their urban surroundings.

Another young street photographer, Roger Mayne (2001), documented Teddy Boy and Girl culture in various working-class areas of London in the late 1950s. In a photograph taken in 1956 in North Kensington, a group of 22 Teddy boys, and one girl, spread themselves across a main street, demonstrating their authority and confidence through their domination of the sidewalk and the street. Not restricted to bombsites or back streets, the North Kensington Teddy Boys act out older masculine postures of neighbourhood ownership. Like Jean Rayner, they glare challengingly at the camera, while the youngest boy in the centre of the frame holds a stick menacingly. Another photograph taken of two Teddy Girls at the Battersea Fun Fair in 1956 shows a more sexually provocative pose than displayed in Russell's earlier series, as Mayne framed the girls in their knotted shirts and pencilled eyebrows arching suggestively next to the pleasure arcades. The photograph links the pose and clothing of the girls explicitly to consumer culture and commercialised leisure. Mayne's final Teddy photograph focuses on a couple in 1957, seemingly surprised by the camera as they move along a narrow alleyway in the Petticoat Lane market. Their expressions are surly rather than confident, and the photographs frame them as tightly constrained by the pressure of the crowd around them. One of the few early photographs showing Teddy Boys and Girls inhabiting the same frame, here the two have been reconciled to heterosexual coupledness to the extent of sporting matching quiffs. This photograph in particular demonstrates Ted self-fashioning as a visual puncture in working-class tradition, as all other people in the frame have their faces hidden beneath flat caps or turned from the camera.

Teddy Boys and Girls as Neo-Flâneurs

Teddy Boys and Girls represented new ways of moving and acting in the city, and are echoes of the Baudelairean figures of the flâneur and the dandy, defined by their aesthetic and emotional distance from the crowd that surrounds them. The flâneur maintains an inner detachment, and the dandy creates a new and distinct aesthetic credo against current fashion, in which appearance is an outward display of the pursuit of happiness. Like the dandy and flâneur, Teddy Boy and Girl identity is embodied in their movement through urban space. The photographs capture a momentarily static portrait of their embodied movements: walking, dancing, laughing,

conversing and gesticulating. Similarly, nineteenth-century dandies and flâneurs embodied the city 'in the staring eyes, idle hands, moving feet, casual touches of walls, an expansive surveying of shop windows' (Küppers 2010: 63). Teddy Boy and Girl culture expressed the lived physicality of the city in their movements and in their outward appearance. The visual detachment of Teddy Boys and Girls in the streets, markets and pleasure parks shown in these photographs also testifies to their social distance from others who also inhabited these spaces. Teddy Boys and Girls projected identities which were sartorially and socially separate from the rest of working-class London culture during a moment of transition in postwar London and working-class identities. According to Baudelaire, the dandy and the flâneur appear at moments of political as well as social transition: 'when democracy is not yet all-powerful, and aristocracy is only beginning to totter and fall' (1964: 28). The photographs of the Teddy Boys and Girls against the postwar rubble echo the wartime propaganda photographs of the Royal Family touring the Blitzed areas of East London; here the new collective sartorial aristocracy of Teddy Boys and Girls point in their turn to a different kind of postwar survival. Their appropriation of the Edwardian dress as a symbol of class privilege was a literal embodiment of the freedoms such a privilege conveyed. Their sartorial visibility underscored this freedom and their ability to navigate the city in ways previously reserved for their elders and betters.

Teddy Boys and Violence

While the nineteenth-century flâneur was secure in his class and economic privilege, Teddy Boys had to assert it more vehemently. Violent acts on the streets and in public spaces, mostly in isolated incidents of gang fights and cinema seat slashing, were aimed to increase their visibility and lay claim on urban space. Teddy Boy violence was a literal inscription, both on the person carrying the weapon, a flick knife, cosh or bicycle chain, and the body on which it was inflicted. The phrase 'Teddy Boy' was itself coined by the *Daily Express* in the media frenzy which surrounded the 'Clapham Common' murder of 1953. On the evening of 2 July 1953, a fight broke out at the bandstand between four young men from another area and five members of a local Teddy Boy 'gang' who called themselves the Plough Boys. The fight ended with two of the visitors trying to escape onto a number 137 bus, with seventeen-year-old John Beckley being pulled off and attacked on the sidewalk, dying of stab wounds. Both the prosecution and the press emphasised the link between the distinctive dress of the Teddy Boy attackers and their violent behaviour. Suspects were asked if they had a narrow trousers and a jacket with a slit down the back. The prosecutor, Mr Derek Curtis-Bennett, QC, described Clapham Common as an 'Edwardian dress-parade' and the main witness for the prosecution, Miss Mary Frayling, claimed to have seen from the top of the bus a dark-haired youth put a gaudy tie in one suit breast pocket and a bloody flick-knife in the other ('Edwardian Suits, Dance Music and a Dagger' 1953; 'Murder of John Beckley by Michael John Davies at Clapham Common 1953-1967'). Frayling almost certainly exaggerated what she had seen, since the dusk light was uncertain, the bus was turning and the windows were small, and a formal identification parade was never held ('Murder of John Beckley by Michael John Davies at Clapham Common 1953-1967'). No other witness could identify the final

attacker, no blood was found on any suspects' breast pockets, and no weapon was found. But the association of Teddy Boy suits with crime and knives helped to convict Michael Davies of murder after a jury deliberation of just two hours. The difficulty of identifying individual perpetrators in violent crimes, despite their distinctive dress, added to the adult anxiety about Teddy Boy culture. Newspapers, in headlines such as 'Flick Knives, Dance Music and Edwardian Suits' (1953), reported with relish on Teddy Boy gang fights, robberies and cinema vandalism. Teddy Boys represented both a sartorially visible scapegoat and anxieties about young people's new urban freedoms. It was primarily the urban freedoms enjoyed by the young, according to 20 teenage interviewees of the *Daily Mirror* in 1956, which underlay the adult hatred of Teddy Boys and Girls. According to Mark, a nineteen-year-old labourer, 'I think the older generation have got the needle. They're always saying they worked for the younger generation to have better times than they had in their young days. Well, we've got that better time and they've got the needle because we are happy' ('Youth Hits Back' 1956: 11). Sixteen-year-old Jane, a dress-factory machinist, echoed this, commenting, 'Women say, "When I was young, I couldn't do this or that, and I hadn't your money." They're jealous' ('Youth Hits Back' 1956: 11).

Violence was for the Teddy Boy a way to puncture the claustrophobia of urban space, and its very visibility gave it added meaning. As George Melly observed, 'The fights and cinema riots, the gang bangs and the haphazard vandalism were themselves produced by a claustrophobic situation' which included the imposition of middle class moral standards, the older generation who 'used the accident of war to lay down the law on every front', a system of education which denied any creative potential, dead-end jobs, military conscription, all adding up to 'a grey colourless shabby world where good boys played ping-pong' (1970: 38). This claustrophobia is eloquently rendered in the attempts of the characters in the film *The Boys*, discussed in the next section, to escape dull jobs, cramped flats and adult disapproval. Journalist T. R. Fyvel also linked youth rebellion to a lack of space in rebuilt London. He describes the view from his flat facing a new estate tower block, which was clean and functional, but anonymous, cramped and featureless. Fyvel recalled:

For some years, each Saturday and Sunday, towards dusk, I used to witness a curious procession. From my distant window I could see the small dark figures of boys and half-grown youths drifting off in twos or three or larger groups, all of them, it seemed to me, wearing the identical Teddy Boy suits. All of them, as if drawn by a magnet, also made of in the same direction, towards the main streets beyond the big railway stations, an untidy area of converging streets and crowded traffic, of shops, cinemas public houses and bright lights, aesthetically a god awful wilderness but to the boys obviously representing life with a capital L. (1961: 14)

Their social wasteland was bordered on the north side by rows of nineteenth century slum-housing with bomb gaps, mostly condemned and waiting for demolition. For these boys this had been their parent's homes and were now 'harshly degraded... a whole world of working class memories now shattered' (Fyvel 1961: 14). The high street was the only place where teenagers could escape from the claustrophobia of the new estates and the old Victorian terraces and where they could experience

cheerful optimism in shops which sold new furniture, record players, televisions, radios and tape-recorders and records, and teenage conviviality in dance halls, cinemas, pubs and late-night cafes with blaring juke-boxes. Like flâneurs, Teddy Boys and Girls lived and surveyed the culture of the street, at home, according to Fyvel, in the increasingly materialistic streets of London. The Ted's visibility asserted his independence and offered him, as part of the first youth subcultural collective, a shared freedom to enjoy the pleasures of the city and participate in urban culture.

Teddy Boys in Films and Novels

Filmmakers and novelists in the late 1950s and 1960s expanded on the themes of youth cultures, urban freedoms and sartorial visibility, fictionalising Teddy Boy culture and framing it in other postwar anxieties. Filmmakers were able to explore perspectives unavailable to photographers and to represent the movement of Teddy Boys through the city and through the film's plot. Though films such as *Rock around the Clock* (1956) found an avid Teddy Boy following, films about Teddy Boys were aimed at an older audience. The film *Cosh Boy* (1953), based on a 1952 West End play, set out the adult anxieties that would become associated with Teddy Boys. Sixteen-year-old Roy Walsh heads a gang of youths who assault and rob women. Most of the action takes place in bombsites, where the gang meets, where lone women are targeted and where Ray seduces and possibly rapes Rene, the sister of a fellow gang member. The film ends with Ray receiving a belt thrashing from his new stepfather as the police wait to arrest him and the neighbourhood gathers outside to listen approvingly to Ray's screams. The film's moral messages and the near-hysterical performance by the main actor James Kenney set the tone for the anxieties over Teddy Boys which would emerge in the wake of the Clapham Common murder later that year. The film also firmly situated the young male delinquent in the postwar ruins of the city. While the Ealing comedy *Hue and Cry* (1947) had shown bombsites as arenas of youthful heroism, by the 1950s this optimism about postwar youth had been replaced by suspicion and unease. The Teddy Boy was a symptom of postwar moral decay; according to D. W. G. Sinclair in 1955, Vicar of Bognor, the Teddy Boy's distinctive dress and bad behaviour were due to a lack of Vitamin C—C for Christianity ('The Teddy Boy Lacks Vitamin C' 1955: 8). While the Baudelairean flâneur's detachment was social, the Teddy Boys and Girls were seen by concerned adults as ethically and psychologically detached as well.

Filmmaker Sidney J. Furie fleshed out these stereotypical images of youth subcultures in London, presenting Teddy Boy characters as comedic stereotypes in *The Young Ones* (1961), and Teddy Boys in *The Boys* (1962) as vulnerable young men who are frustrated by their low-paying jobs and lack of social mobility, and who are used and despised by the adults around them. Both films are set in London, and feature young protagonists, soundtracks by the Shadows, and actor Robert Morley. *The Young Ones*, a light-hearted musical film, opens with a crane shot panorama of London surveyed from a rooftop under construction. The camera pans downward in the first musical number, 'Friday Night' young people converging on a youth club on a Friday night. Shot in hyper-real 'Eastmancolor', the bright costumes of young characters and their vibrantly decorated club signify their optimism and innocence.

The film's plot centres on the battle between the youth club and property developer Hamilton Black (Robert Morley) who wants to build a high rise on the site. Black dismisses the club as a haven for 'adolescents in leather jackets with bicycle chains', who spend all of their time 'polishing their coshes'. However his son Nicky Black (Cliff Richard) is a committed member, and the youths hatch a plan to put on a show to raise money to extend the lease. A later-era Teddy Boy appears with a D-A hairstyle and winkle pickers, now augmented by the imported American styles of varsity jacket and a bolero tie. He and his friends try to kidnap Black but are defeated by a reconciled father and son, who leave them unconscious on the floor of the club and race back to the theatre to finish the show. The film presents the victory of the property developers and the propertied classes, as the club's rock-and-roll rebellion is reduced to a tame music hall revue with the father and son lightly tripping across a Victorian stage. Teddy Boys appear as comedy villains, the only members of the youth club to cross the boundaries of wholesome fun and descend into inept and easily-neutralised crime.

The next year Sidney J. Furie directed a much darker film that is almost the mirror image of *The Young Ones*. Shot in black and white instead of exuberant colour, *The Boys* is a tense courtroom drama revolving around four Teddy Boys put on trial for the murder of a seventy-two-year-old night watchman in a West End garage for a cashbox with fifteen shillings in it at a garage in 'Perth Street' in the West End. The first half of the film sets out the case for the prosecution, in which the prosecutor Victor Webster (Richard Todd) describes the boys on the evening of the attack as 'four hooligans on a rampage in the suburbs and in the West End...[who] left their homes in "Wharf End" in East London and scandalised, intimidated and browbeat their way to Perth Street'. Using flashback scenes of the night of the crime, witnesses on the stand recall describe the threatening behaviour of the four boys, portraying them as violent, out-of-control youths rendered visible by their hair and clothes: the public toilet attendant describes them as 'yobbos', the bus fare collector as 'Teddy boys' and 'hooligans', the garage owner condemns the main character Stan Coulter (Dudley Sutton) as 'sly and furtive', a stockbroker who thinks the boys are trying to rob him opines, 'This type of person is a coward at heart', and a middle-class man in queue at cinema testifies 'as soon as I saw them I recognised these people as wild, aggressive and surly'. Stan Coulter is depicted in three scenes menacingly cleaning his nails with his flick knife.

In the second half of the film, the case for the defence is presented by Robert Morley as a 'farrago of circumstantial evidence' of the boys who happened to leave a public house near the garage before the crime was committed. He revisits the urban encounters on the night of the crime as 'a perfectly ordinary outing, an innocent and as innocuous an occasion as any organised by four boys on that barren Thursday night before payday'. The boys are humanised and shown in their jobs and in their homes among their families. While in the first half of the film, the boys had been shown in darkness and without individual personalities, in this section the flashbacks show them in daylight, at home in crowded and damp, tiny East End flats with affectionate parents, cross-cut with courtroom scenes of family members peering anxiously over the rail in the spectator's gallery. The East End is visually evoked by old-fashioned buildings, looking out onto blank, bombed spaces, and half-constructed

high-rise flats whose endless waiting lists will always exclude them. The boys are depicted as using their flashy Teddy clothes and pursuit of pleasure in the West End to escape their overcrowded flats, the boredom of their manual labour jobs in construction and in garages, and in Coulter's case, the sadness of his mother dying of throat cancer in the back bedroom. The West End scenes are replayed with innocent explanations to show how the adult impression of clothes and hair filtered their interpretation of the boy's youthful high jinks. As the defence rests, the boys have become human and likeable characters. But just as it seems the boys will be acquitted, the Prosecutor asks Coulter where they got the money for the final bus fare home and to buy Coulter's mother's cigarettes. His faltering response eventually reveals that three boys did rob the garage and kill the watchman, incited by Coulter and frustrated by their failed evening out and the pleasures on view that were still denied them. The fourth boy only avoided the crime because he had left his most prized possession, his brand new union card, in the pub and had to return to get it. Robert Morley, who had believed them innocent, makes an impassioned closing speech that urges compassion for 'four boys consistently condemned by social and economic backgrounds, by their fellow citizens, by their very appearance, [who] took the inevitable next step of indulging in petty robbery'. In the final scene, the judge sentences the two youngest to indefinite sentences and condemns Coulter to death.

This film portrays the Teddy Boys as trapped, and their distinctive clothing and friendship as attempts to find room to move in a city that has no space for them. There is no space in their family flats, nothing to fill the empty spaces of bombsites, and they are excluded from the new housing they themselves build and help others to move into. The promise of pleasure held out by the West End is ultimately unsatisfying, as the boys are still constrained by their lack of money and face adult discrimination and condemnation at every turn. The most compelling reason Coulter gives to persuade his friends to help him in the robbery is to travel back home to the East End by taxi instead of the bus: 'We shouldn't be crawling in the gutter, we should be going home in a taxi... I know where we can get a hundred pounds!' Coulter envisioned the money in terms of the West End consumer pleasures it could buy—'birds and nosh'—and the ability to transverse the spaces of the city more easily. Like *The Boys* of the film, Teddy Boys used violence to create 'loose space', urban spaces in which people recognise and pursue possibilities to use it beyond its intended uses for their own purposes: 'for exploration and discovery, for the unexpected, the unregulated, the spontaneous and the risky' (Franck and Stevens 2006: 3). Threatened, imagined or real violent acts were forms of embodied spectatorship for the Teds, ways in which they could maintain their freedom to enjoy the consumer pleasures of the city.

Teddy Boy as Gender Crisis

The public anxieties expressed about Teddy Boys revolved around reformulating masculinities, just as the flâneur was also a response to a gender crisis in nineteenth-century Paris. As Elizabeth Wilson has observed, the predominantly male gendering of nineteenth-century *flânerie* was not just an extension of patriarchy, but signalled a new crisis of masculinity brought on by modernity: 'The flâneur represents masculinity

as unstable, caught up in the violent dislocations that characterized urbanization' (Wilson 1992: 109). Newspapers of the 1950s expressed and played on these anxieties, as did films and popular novels using Teddy Boy characters in plots revolving around issues of masculine authority. In these works, the Teddy Boy moves out of the London urban context into the provinces to represent a general generational crisis. In both *Cosh Boy* and *Serious Charge* (1959), the main 'Teddy' character gets his girlfriend pregnant and refuses to acknowledge her, and both films end with the character receiving a fatherly belt-thrashing. In *Serious Charge*, set in 'Deadsville England', the bad behaviour of the town's youth is observed by various male authority figures including the vicar and a Juvenile Court magistrate. Teddy Boy delinquency is associated with access to unauthorised spaces in the town; they take over the Church's youth club and the coffee shop and break into the Lido at night. Young girls are absent except as sexual objects; in this film the illegitimate pregnancy of the villainous Ted's girlfriend leads indirectly to her death. Another provincial evocation of Teddy Boys emerges in the detective novel, *The Whipping Boys* (1958) written by Constance Taylor under the pseudonym Guy Cullingford. Adolescent hooligans in an English provincial town are suspected of an elderly babysitter's death from fright, as she walks home alone on a deserted road. Local policeman Sergeant Brent expounds their unworthiness and inherent evil: 'Under privileged my foot! Those scoundrels have never had it so easy. They can pick and choose their job, play hookey when they like, get paid the earth... And out of this Paradise slouches the Teddy boy with his evil face, his fancy clothes, and bicycle chain in his pocket' (135). The Teddy Boy gang are suspected of robberies; again their crimes are associated illicit spaces, with the night and with victimised women. The ending is reassuring; of the Teddy Boy murder suspects, neither the young married man Nick Salter, leader of the youth club, nor the wealthy son of neglectful parents is guilty. Instead it is the disturbed young man from a broken, poor and violent home who was the rich boy's best friend. Class and gender hierarchy is restored, and the adults are vindicated, as they are in the pulp novel *Teddy Boy* (1960) by Ernest Ryman. In this work, a direct narrative and moral line is drawn from the purchase of the Teddy Boy suit to the murder of an old woman during a sweet shop robbery. Written from the perspective of a male teacher at a boy's Approved School, Ryman represents stilted conversations with the boys in which they laboriously explain London Teddy boy culture and fashion, worn to distinguish themselves from 'peasants' and get in with the 'judies' (Ryman 1960: 24). By the late 1950s, Teddy Boys had become public caricatures, their moment of liberatory potential and postwar optimism over.

Conclusion

As they perceived their fortunes in their dilapidated inner urban areas to be declining in the later 1950s, some groups of Teddy Boys blamed the Cypriot cafe proprietors and Commonwealth migrants who now shared these spaces (Jefferson 1976: 68). The racial masculinity espoused by fringe Ted groups was most infamously expressed in the attacks of Teddy Boys on West Indians that led to the Notting Hill riots of 30 August to 4 September 1958. Officers in the streets described crowds several thousand strong breaking into West Indian homes, shouting racist epithets

and defying police attempts to disperse them ('Racial riots at Notting Hill between 31 August and 3 September 1953–1967'). Most of the 400 arrests were of white teenagers from Notting Dale, though this fact was denied by police in official reports and in the press in hopes of reducing racial tensions. The movement of London Teddy Boys and Girls from postwar freedoms to violence mirrors the revolutionary trajectory of nineteenth-century Paris. From the optimistic and confident self-fashioning youth on bombsites and street corners in the early 1950s, Ted culture was publically vilified by the press and became increasingly associated with a racial and class nostalgia. The adult condemnations of Teddy Boys expressed in newspapers, magazines and by the late 1950s in novels and films, was a reaction not only to their perceived criminality, but to the popular anxieties about postwar London as a contested space caught between an idealised past and an uncertain future.

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