

Preface

Brian Jackson, whose short life was packed with both successful and unsuccessful schemes to help his fellow men, is sadly now almost forgotten. A book on the varied career of Michael Young, who described Brian as ‘talented and a good organiser’ and ‘the most outstanding of the colleagues I have had’, and who according to Michael, originally prompted the idea of an open university, mentions him only twice in footnotes as co-writer of two articles.¹ After an early career full of brilliance and promise Brian Jackson died tragically young, unemployed, and possibly unemployable, drinking heavily and given to bouts of depression, though still capable of scintillating on his visits to the media and to his beloved Huddersfield.² The purpose of this book is to argue for the importance of his influence in helping to change society and to explain his sad later decline.

Brian Jackson was one of that new group of post-Butler boys – girls did not figure prominently – who won scholarships from working-class homes, went to grammar schools and in many cases on to university. They came out into the world slightly fazed, having amassed a new set of middle-class ideas and social mores, yet frequently feeling a nostalgia bordering on guilt for the culture they had left behind. Richard Hoggart from an earlier generation, later a friend of Brian’s, was the first to try to resolve this dilemma in *The Uses of Literacy* and Raymond Williams’s *Culture and Society* is widely regarded as the definitive example of this *genre*. Brian himself wrote a book on the subject *Working Class Community* which, though not published until 1968 actually began life ten years previously. In the introduction Brian wrote, ‘My chief debt in preparing this book is to Dennis Marsden who did so much of the early fieldwork and writing up.’³ Dennis Marsden was working for the Institute of Community Studies ‘in a lowly capacity as an interviewer,’ as a result of Brian’s encouragement.⁴ Brian and he proposed to Michael Young, the director of the Institute, that they should research a book on working-class communities and it was only later that Michael suggested that they change their focus and do a book on grammar schools, which of course they did.⁵ Brian described their motivation as follows,

The study began in 1958, out of that debate on working-class life that blazed up, and died down, so very quickly. *The Uses of Literacy* was fresh on the bookstalls, so was *Saturday Night and Sunday*

Morning. On television Dennis Mitchell was showing *Morning in the Streets*. The papers were attending to the work on family and kinship that Michael Young and his colleagues were reporting from Bethnal Green. And the whole structure of our school and university system was clarified by findings of untapped working-class talent recorded in such surveys as Floud, Halsey and Martin's *Social Class and Educational Opportunity*. Looking back, we can see that there was an element of fashion in the extent to which this debate was taken up.⁶

Chas Critcher explains this sudden interest in working-class communities thus,

There *were* important changes in the nature of British society in the post-war period. . . . It is only an apparent paradox that the serious study of working-class culture should emerge just at that moment when it was being loudly proclaimed that the working class had ceased to exist. The discovery of working-class culture was a *response* to this argument.⁷

Brian Jackson outlined the elements of this study in three stages. First *Family and Kinship* looked at the strengths of working-class family ties centred on a strong matriarch, but as he points out, such an interpretation was challenged by Madeleine Kerr's picture of a Liverpool 'problem family' *Ship Street*, where he noted, the 'restrictive and smothering role of Mum, whose emotional hold makes it difficult for the children ever to break away.'⁸ In the same vein was Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter's *Coal is Our Life* which showed the

Mutual help and personal generousities between the men, but also suggested that the women's life especially was one of subjection (contraceptives thrown on the fire because they took all the enjoyment out of sex, husband's wages never known, violence at night when he returned with a skinful of ale).⁹

The second strand dealt with education and social welfare while a third line of enquiry, according to Brian, 'concerned itself with the nature and effect of the mass media.'

Probably the most important achievement here of writers such as Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams has been to break up the easy concept of working-class 'masses' being given the rubbish they ask for and being well satisfied with it.¹⁰

Brian then cited Williams's dictum, 'Masses are other people. There are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses.' Although this is his only reference to Williams it is important as an insight into the way Brian wanted to base his research. Critcher quotes from Williams' conclusion to *Culture and Society*

The primary distinction between bourgeois and working class [sic]

culture is to be sought in the whole way of life, and here, again, we must not confine ourselves to such evidence as housing, dress and modes of leisure. Industrial production tends to create uniformity in such matters, but the vital distinction lies at a different level. The crucial distinguishing element in English life since the Industrial Revolution is not language, not dress, not leisure. . . . The crucial distinction is between alternative ideas of the nature of social relationship.¹¹

This is precisely what *Working Class Community* seeks to illuminate. Brian describes his method as ‘listening to the voices’.¹² He goes on to dismiss John Braine, Arnold Wesker, Alan Sillitoe whose versions of working class life have ‘never strongly moved’ him. They are, according to Brian,

Too close to the sociologist or the documentary reporter to offer the kind of creative experience I’m concerned with here. That, I think, can be found with authority in three artists from the industrial north – the painter L.S. Lowry, the novelist D. H. Lawrence, and the sculptor Henry Moore.¹³

Brian would doubtless, therefore, have been proud of the accolade he received from Keith Waterhouse in the *Sunday Times* which is quoted on the back cover of the Penguin edition of *Working Class Community*, ‘He brings the novelist’s as well as the sociologist’s eye to his subject.’

Certainly Brian seems to have been in a trap between the disciplines of literature and sociology and between some vague sense of a warm and supportive community whose values were somehow threatened by mass-media culture on the one hand and, for those like himself who had been through it, by higher education and the ‘high’ culture of Matthew Arnold on the other. He never seems to have totally resolved this dichotomy in his own case. Indeed, he is the archetypal problem adult of the peer group which he and Dennis Marsden studied in *Education and the Working Class*.

But Brian’s generation of young and talented people, having grown up during wartime and post-war austerity, burst onto the scene in the 1950s as ‘Angry Young Men’ and ‘Ban-the-Bomb-ers’ and set the scene for the swinging, ‘can-do’, sixties which began with the trial of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and ended soon after the oil crisis of 1973. Brian was very much a part of that movement and, shunning a formal academic career, launched himself into a myriad schemes to help the under-privileged: the poor, the young, the old, and immigrants, not to mention his work for people abroad.

In his brief lifetime he worked especially in the field of education. He was concerned with those who had missed out, which led to his creating, almost single-handedly, the National Extension College, NEC, in 1963, as a model for the Open University. In the 1970s he worked hard to promote childminding as a cost-effective alternative to nursery education for all; a seemingly still-too-expensive goal for society to achieve. Towards the end of his life he was

promoting schemes for the on-going education of the new young-retired leisure class.

Michael Sanderson has written that it was Brian Jackson's book *Streaming* which led to unease about the 11-plus exam as it showed that children were being selected as early as seven or eight into fast or slow streams in preparation for the exam.¹⁴ Brian Simon, himself among the leading campaigners for the abolition of streaming in junior schools, wrote that *Streaming*, demonstrated the 'almost complete hegemony of streaming in the early 1960s dramatically and convincingly'.¹⁵ Moreover he regards Brian Jackson's confirmation of the relation, 'long suspected', between streaming and social class as most significant and, commenting on the book's date of publication, 1964, says that the Plowden Committee was then beginning to realise that this was *the* crucial issue in the reconstruction of the primary school. Finally Simon comments that within 'a mere fifteen years' of the book's publication streaming had almost totally disappeared.¹⁶

Most important perhaps, as Director of the Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) during the 1960s, Brian campaigned for comprehensive education and greater parental involvement in schools as well as trying to find ways to use the public schools more democratically. He was perhaps the most ardent opponent of those who, led by Eric James and Harry Ree (the latter subsequently came to agree with Brian), championed excellence rather than equality. Brian Jackson, through his personal charisma and his media skills, had a considerable influence on social change in his lifetime.

Two decades after Brian's death, education and the welfare of young people are still among the most immediate concerns of government. Brian's life and work are surely relevant today: virtually all the topics in which Brian Jackson was involved are subjects that are still very much in the forefront of debate under the present administration.

Notes

1. Dench Geoff, Tony Flower, and Kate Gavron, eds. *Young at Eighty*, pp.226, 227, Transcript, Michael Young interviewed by Paul Thompson. National Sound Archive, Letter, Michael Young to Sonia Jackson, 4 July 1983. See Chapter 3.
2. Interviews with Neville Butler, 3 May 1996, Godfrey Smith, 26 April 1997, and John Cashman, 20 May 1997. Hazel Wigmore would prefer this sentence to have been omitted or at least to have read . . . 'tragically young with no salaried employment and no new research contracts offered . . . as always drinking heavily. . .'.
3. Brian Jackson, *Working Class Community*, p.vii.
4. Letter from Dennis Marsden, 12 December 1997.
5. *idem*.
6. Brian Jackson, *Working Class Community*, p4.
7. Chas Critcher, 'Sociology, cultural studies and the post-war working class,' in John Clarke, Chas Critcher and Richard Johnson, *Working-Class Culture*.
8. Brian Jackson, *Working Class Community*, pp.4-5.

9. *ibid.* p.6.
10. *ibid.* p.8.
11. Chas Critcher, *Working Class Culture*, p.37.
12. Brian Jackson, *Working Class Community*, p.3.
13. *idem.*
14. Michael Sanderson, *Educational Opportunity*, p.50
15. Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order 1940-1990*, pp346-350.
16. *ibid.* p.370.