

Jane Jacobs Public Lecture
Risk, Community and Safety

Date: Thursday 10 February 2005

Time: 6:30pm

Venue: Hong Kong Theatre, Clement House

Speaker: Roger Graef

Chair: Niall Hobhouse and Richard Sennett

The first in a series of public lectures on the interactions between culture and city life, reflecting Jane Jacobs' seminal work on the economy of cities.

Roger Graef is a writer, filmmaker, broadcaster and criminologist. A pioneer of the 'fly on the wall' documentary technique, he is known for gaining access to previously closed institutions and has made more than 100 films, most through his company Films of Record (see www.filmsofrecord.com for more information).

He was a founding board member of Channel Four and a governor of the British Film Institute. He is Chair of Theatre de Complicite, and Social Affairs Advisor to the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. In relation to cities, he has made films about Fes, Florence, Berlin, Rome and Cardiff. He taught at the Diploma School of the Architectural Association. He was a non-executive director of London Transport, and co-designed the London bus map.. He was on the Development Control Review, the Committee on the Control of Demolition, and chaired the Study Group on Public Participation in Planning. He also founded and ran the ICA Architectural Forum.

How cities work interest me. I was born in New York. I moved to London in my twenties. Because of my experiences in New York, I tried to head off the worst mistakes that New York made. Not very successfully, but I did what I could. We used the ICA Architectural Forum to question the certainties driving comprehensive redevelopment. We helped the protestors save Covent Garden and

Piccadilly Circus from the worst planning fantasies about to be imposed on them. Their patrons had such different notions of what cities need to flourish.

One encounter I still remember was with an architect – Walter Bor, centrally involved in the rebuilding of London after the war. I asked him ‘Why have you put up all these terrible tower blocks? Didn’t you learn anything from New York City’s dreadful public housing projects? You replaced intimate terraced housing (which Jane Jacobs would have loved) with badly made and cold tower blocks, destroying neighbourhood cohesion, and local memories in the bargain. Then you did it again in Liverpool (where he was Head of Planning)’. He said ‘No, I agree with you. I’ve actually stopped the rebuilding of tower blocks in Liverpool; we’ve only put up 164 of them’. For the past decade, they have been tearing these blocks down now all over Britain and the States.

But there is a serious problem about learning from our mistakes: None of these architects and planners actually lived in such tower blocks. Without direct experience to challenge our assumptions, we draw on the scripts in our heads that are really loops. They are self reinforcing. We read the newspapers and watch programmes that reinforce our opinions. We hang out with people that also reinforce and share the assumptions in the scripts.

Cities are colour coded according to those scripts. The people in charge of cities have a script and vision of the way cities are organised, borne out of their narrow experience and the scripts in their heads about how their redevelopments should work – not how they do in practise.

I've made many films about cities. One of the things I noticed about local government as opposed to national government is that many key elected officials are working class people that have made good. One of the reasons why they have torn down a lot of the more agreeable low rise housing was because it replaced slums that they grew up in and hated, and so wanted to get rid of that memory. No nostalgia there. Or they went after areas of what was once middle classes housing that symbolised their exclusion. Politically, they much preferred the modernist vision of a Brave New World, so beloved of Soviet visionaries, to the old bourgeois one. The outskirts of most European cities reflect the legacy of this tattered vision.

In Florence, I noticed that key people who had moved into Florence, and some into Florentine local government were often *contadini*, or their recent descendents, who had been in the country and worked the land. When they came to the city, their experience was hostile and that memory was still fresh. They didn't appreciate the urbanity of those who had been born into and still celebrated the diversity of cities.

They miss the value of urban disorder, and are always trying to tidy it up. They are trying to make cities neater and more sanitised. But of course they fail. Too often the result of comprehensive redevelopment is what Gertrude Stein said of Oakland, California - 'there is no there, there.'

But not according their script. You can see it in those ghastly architectural drawings of smiling multi-racial families sitting under Campari umbrellas in full sun smiling at the new development that becomes stained and bleak if actually built.

The sun may shine in the artist's renderings but the reality in the wind swept spaces between the short and long buildings is a serious drop in temperature.

Go and stand in the Economist Plaza of St. James, with a low building and a high building next to one another in typical modernist fashion. The Barbican is colder inside the complex than outside for the same reason. The images are inspiring, but the reality is different: tower block blues are seldom part of the script.

The script is reinforced by developers and architects comfortably housed in low rise or single houses with gardens. Few spend time in the outer reaches of Tottenham, Kilburn, or the unpleasant parts of South London that have escaped the gentrification of Islington, Shoreditch and Hoxton and the like. They miss both the moonscape of brownfield sites, still neglected since the Blitz, and the odd urban treasures still miraculously surviving around them.

Along with strips of medieval almshouses and Georgian terraces and the odd Hawksmoor church, there's the Becton Alps in East London where you can ski on artificial ski slopes. But from the top you still feel the overpowering sense of wasteland. You can still feel the waste. These are the unreconstructed parts of London, and they are shamefully large, at night these are scary places. They have nothing to do with the vision of Canary Wharf or the City. If you said 'London', the images in your mind would not relate to these vast wastelands. Sadly quite a lot of people live there. That is their experience of London.

The traditional East End notion of going Up West to come into 'our city' is much more than a physical journey which some can afford and some can't. (When I did my work with young offenders in the East End in the early 90's, going clubbing involved a minimum of fifty pounds – including minicabs, door fee, drinks and drugs.) It's a psychological journey that takes them across a large distance. Many won't do it. It's alien territory. That division of space and how people feel about where they are – particularly whether or not they feel safe in their own space - is a serious difference between people who otherwise seem the same.

You can live blithely unaware of this unless you have had the privilege that I have of going to the outer regions of attractive and seemingly genial cities like Portland, Oregon, Fort Worth, Texas, San Francisco and Boston – whose public image even for their residents simply leaves out the areas that do not fit their script.

These patches of No Man's Lands are islands, not oases - wasted desert islands of frightened, terrorised people who live on very modest incomes well below the national or local average. For them the resources of the city are often not available. Police and other public services like Social Services are usually seen as the enemy, not friends. Postal workers and fast food shops refuse to deliver mail or pizzas. Taxi drivers do likewise, and public transport is usually poor.

Too often nobody recognises these wastelands until something dreadful happens, like a riot. Then suddenly people start talking about conditions in forgotten estates like Broadwater Farm or the Meadow

Well near North Shields, - places built with hope, but full of the sad accretion of broken promises and stigma.

*CLIP FROM IN SEARCH OF LAW AND ORDER, FILM ONE :
POLICING (C4, 1995): WITH MICKY ROBSON, BROTHER OF THE
BOY KILLED IN A CAR CHASE WITH POLICE. HE HATES
POOLICE AND BELIEVES THEY ARE OUT TO KILL THEM ALL. I
PUT TO HIM THAT JOYRIDING ALSO PUTS LIVES IN DANGER.
HE REPLIES 'THEY WERE NOT JOYRIDING BUT WORKING –
USING THE CARS TO GO RAM RAIDING OR BURGLING.'*

I found Mickey when filming in Meadow Well, looking for better ways than prison to stop people like him from getting into trouble. In my research phase, I went to Northumbria Probation in Newcastle and asked to be taken around their key sites for combating youth crime. I particularly wanted to meet the probation officer in charge of the Meadow Well. But my host, the Assistant Chief Probation Officer said that probation officer had a heart attack during the riots and hadn't yet been replaced – many months later.

When I asked to be dropped off on the estate, my guide couldn't get rid of me fast enough because he didn't want to go there either.

I had been given the name of the woman who ran the local Community Action Group. I found them meeting in their office above a burnt out shop. It turned out they were squatting in their own offices having been evicted for criticising the council for closing the new community centre - within two years of building it The cause of

the cut was a rates freeze by the government. But Meadow Well youth took the closure personally, as further proof of its isolation. Interestingly they left the Health centre untouched – although it sat less than thirty yards away. The Centre was an active place that helped families across the estate.

At the meeting, there were people obviously very angry but being resourceful about how to rescue their now notorious estate, much of which had just been burnt down by their own angry youth.

An 80 year old woman named Nancy Peters reported to this little group of locals saying that she and a local planning student had gone to Tottenham, to Broadwater farm, which had itself been the subject of violent riots in the eighties. The visitors found that the Broadwater farm people rejected the public funds for rebuilding by some huge firm like Taylor Woodrow. Instead, they formed a co-operative that would get the contract and train local youth to become builders under the supervision of expert craftsmen. Any profits would pay for these young men to go to college, or to send the old people to the West Indies. I thought this a genuinely constructive response, and so did they.

There was also another observer there. At the end of the meeting he identified himself. 'I'm Sgt. Alan Evans 'I've just been assigned to you along with ten other men. You'll have your own police station and team. What would you like us to do?' They didn't believe it. There'd been a long history of being ignored – or worse – by local North Shields police, Calls for help would take forever, though the station was 10 minutes drive away from 'piggsville' as it was known in the local nick.

But after the riots, the Chief Constable Stanley Bailey had counted the cost and decided Meadow Well residents must be brought in to the wider social fabric of North Shields. So a group of ordinary coppers who had previously shared police prejudices suddenly became part of this excluded community.

Over the next few years, they built confidence by simply going door to door to find out what local people wanted, instead of smashing the door down looking for their kids or husbands. It became so effective, other estates wanted similar service – and asked local police chiefs if they had to burn themselves down to get it?

But this was not enough to turn the whole estate around. Mickey Robson is typical of lost youth wandering the area in a dangerous and aimless way. For three years after his brother's death, Mickey carried a machete around the estate, with his jaw locked in unresolved grief and anger. I was the first person to sit down and talk to him in all that time. Everyone was either too scared or just hated him - and he hated them.

I talked to him for six hours before turning the camera on. I sat there just trying to get him to a point where he could have a conversation. Near the end I asked him 'Do you have a dream?' his face cracked and broke into a smile. 'Do I dream? Of course I do. A job, a family, a house.' But he had no idea how to get them. He had never even tried for a job, so certain was he that he wouldn't get one.

He is one of the young men who police loathe. They live beyond the pale. There is a pale in most towns and cities – an undefended area beyond which civil authority no longer runs. No one

cares what happens beyond it. Until something big happens to affect the rest of us.

They made just such a mistake in 19th Century London. They built squares and locked the gates and did not worry about what happened in nearby places like Somerstown in the fetid swamps Dickens described so vividly in Bleak House. But despite the gates and indifference, epidemics of cholera penetrated the comfort of the middle classes, so they had to provide sanitation for the rest of the city. The same may happen today, not only with TB and other infectious diseases carried by ex-prisoners and others arriving from poverty stricken and war torn countries. But also with crime and drugs.

The notion of the gated community: these teepees in the desert, offer only the short term illusion of safety. We kid ourselves if we think we can lock out the Mickey Robsons of this world by simply building gates, and hiring a concierge or security guards who may be escaping from a Third World country themselves and have no idea what so frightens their clients. Locked condominiums are built fantasy. They offer images of comfort and safety. It fits the script of private wealth amid public squalor. But the residents have to leave their comfortable prisons and brave the dangers of the street to go anywhere. Carjacking is a market response to those measures, much as medieval brigands and their successors menaced travellers between walled castles.

A safe place seems to be one where the enemy is kept out. But the real task is to neutralise the enemy, not merely exclude them. The best way to stop them behaving like enemies is to turn them into

something else. That involves the empathetic imaginative leap into enemy territory. Asking the question 'what would it take to stop you doing what you are doing?' may take a positive answer that doesn't fit the script - because it involves you thinking for them -, including them in your script in another role. They are already in your script as the enemy - which makes you the hero. So there's a problem. To feel good about yourself, it seems you have to feel better than someone else. But empathising with one's enemy means moving to their level, sharing their perspective.

It's interesting how cities throw people together, but actually keep them apart. The best work that I've seen trying to solve this problem does the opposite: it includes people.

But that approach is rare. Consider our default approach to young people in trouble: ask yourself, if your brother, friend, or son got into trouble, which of the following four things would you do?

1) Would you spend time with them and try and see what was going?

2) If they were your own child, would you send them abroad into a new environment so they mixed with different people and had new challenges?

3) If there was something wrong, would you try and get them help - psychological help, reading help, medical help?

4) Or would you lock them up in a lavatory with two or three other bad kids? And if that didn't work, lock them up for longer?

Yet option 4 is what we do every day to young people with fewer advantages than our siblings and children. Are we surprised that they return to crime?

Though this is hardly rocket science, few politicians are willing to face the absurdity and ineffectiveness of option 4. Recently we were treated to the terrible sight of Michael Howard in a flak jacket, following police into houses to show how tough he is going to be. He says the answer is longer sentences, and if we don't have enough prison cells, build more. He knows better. There is no learning.

What makes us not become criminals because we have something to lose. We get more from not taking the risks to be criminals than from being one. Mickey Robson says they are merely doing a job. For them this is normal. His father was equally outraged by the police chasing his son when that was the only way they could see of surviving. They have norms, rules, values, pride, just as we do.

The criminal fraternity does exist. It is one of many overlapping groups in urban communities for whom their own rules are very real. I've watched young offenders in judicial role plays. They are more punitive to each other than the justice system is.

I filmed a car crime project in South London: a project called the Ilderton Motor Project, it's been going for 20 years in Lewisham: discipline is run by the young offenders themselves. The volunteers who run it are all ex car thieves who stayed on to help. They are given a chance to build cars and race them on the Wimbledon track if they are good. Then they spend the rest of the time rebuilding them.

Every Wednesday night they sit down and deal with those who've broken the rules. They really throw the book at them. This is not amoral territory, it just doesn't quite match ours. It's important that we understand that.

Another urban illusion based on script and not reality is the word 'community'. Whenever I hear that word I reach for my gun. It lumps together all sorts of people who are at odds.

Those students who read my book 'Living Dangerously' see that one of the characters in the book talks about how they divide up their own estate into sides and how they hate each other.

One story concerned a teenage boy called Winston from Hackney. He talks to me painfully about the journey to visit his cousins in Clapham because he has to go through Brixton. 'The Brixton gangs don't know the difference between Tottenham and Hackney Boys. The Tottenham Boys are very tough and done terrible things to the Brixton gangs. If you are black and come from North East London you are seen as a Tottenham Boy even if you are from Hackney.' But Winston was lucky. He had a cousin in Brixton who gives him safe passage across Brixton to Clapham. His normal cool demeanour deserted him as he described this hazardous journey.

This is the same London where most of us move freely between these places. Hackney is trendy now, Brixton too - but not if you are seventeen, black and frightened. Winston was also worried about his seven year old nephew who was already carrying a knife out of fear. It's almost impossible for me as a middle aged, middle class white man standing up here to convey to you this experience. I'm showing you clips from my documentaries because I want you to see how real this is.

FILM CLIP. Woman from North Shields explains how her family were forced to leave their estate after they called the police regarding a brutal assault on the husband. All he had done was ask some teenagers to stop playing football against his garage as his baby was trying to sleep. For that he got a six inch nail embedded in a plank, which hit him between the eyes and entered his skull. His wife called the police (In Search of Law and Order UK Channel 4, episode 1 Policing.)

Her family brought called the police and gave a statement and were willing to go to court. If the criminal justice system is our protection, we wouldn't think that a particularly brave thing to do. But on an estate like Meadow Well, that's grassing. What followed was nothing short of torture. Their house was besieged, their children beaten up. At Christmas, gas bombs were thrown into their house. The word 'grass' was smeared in paint all over their walls. All this because they called the police and objected to the father being attacked so viciously for no reason.

They had to move. They had to be put in a safe house on a nearby estate. But within a week the word got out and the same thing happened to them again in a community where they had done nothing. Their reputation was that they would grass people up, and after comparable intimidation they had to move a second time.

By the time I met her, she was terrified, trapped inside her third house with only a police hotline for comfort. She wept as she told me how her eight year old child was kicked in the crutch at school. Her ten year old son was strangled - all because she called the police and

testified against her husband's attackers. She'd have backed down at any stage if her children had not supported her testifying.

But what was the outcome of her bravery? One magistrate heard the case at which the emotional damage as well as the details of the offense was made clear. But a week later a different magistrate did the sentencing – on the basis of case papers, not direct testimony. The offenders were given community punishment and never left the streets.

Can you imagine living next door to that kind of terror? The kind of people who do that start very young on these estates. I met fire raisers who were terrifying the local adults aged six and seven.

They grow into seriously alienated adults, in an almost unbroken arc of trouble. I saw an imaginative attempt by Meadow Well people to try and engage these men. Led by the brilliant vicar called Charles Hope and a woman from the local authority housing department, they went into Durham prison to tell inmates from Meadow Well what was happening on their estate. So instead of saying 'you are out of sight, out of mind, we don't care until you come back – and cause trouble', they tried to give the inmates some kind of engagement with the place where they lived.

CLIP: Scene in Durham prison with Housing Manager and Charles Hope talking to inmates from Meadow Well Estate. Several inmates speak passionately about the need to engage youngsters, and provide rehab for someone who stole drugs from a chemist instead of a long prison sentence. They warn

that `all that does is store up trouble for when they get out of prison and go back to the estate, and it's boom, boom boom!'.

I/V Carol Bell, a local Community organiser, talks about how hard it has been to engage her son Brian in useful work because he thinks of himself as excluded from everything. Her husband persuaded him to try to become a ship's captain. But this meant reading books. He was very bright. But he didn't even go to the library because he couldn't imagine he would be allowed in.

Carol Bell has an inspiring history. She had a troubled past, but went straight and married a ship's captain. She moved to the Meadow Well and led a community action group herself. Her work helped her become something of a national figure because she was so brave and angry, but constructive at the same time, but her son Brian fell into the bad crowd. He was Mickey's best friend.

At 19, he became a father, and was often seen wheeling his baby around the estate, when his drug addicted partner could not care for the child. But police often stopped him and searched the pram suspecting him of carrying large shipments of drugs or cash. It made him increasingly furious. He got into big trouble and was going to go down for it. But at the age of twenty two, he killed himself.

In 1990, Meadow Well's troubled youth became part of the national conversation by burning themselves down. Even after the riots, firemen were regularly called out for blazes lit by gangs of under tens because they love the noise and excitement of the fire engines. They

burn the empty boarded up houses that pepper the estate - nobody wanted to live there because it was too dangerous.

The estate received twelve million pounds from the government to rebuild the place. Yet no one would fund the youth club so the kids would not have to set fire to buildings to amuse themselves.

The notion you can build your way out of a situation like that is just fantasy. It's a comfortable fantasy because you can stay in an office, design the building, send people to build it and you never have to engage with the people who are going to live there!

CLIP Interview with Meadow Well co-operative workers, most of whom had been doing crime before they were given a job rebuilding the community centre they burned down. They feel the job is much more satisfying, and burst with pride at taking their children to see what they built. But they admit if the job disappeared they'd put on their balaclava and go back to work.

In areas of high structural unemployment, crime is a job for them, just like our jobs are for us. They speak of 'going shopping in other people's houses.' This is normal behaviour for persistent offenders, not just a rite of passage as it is for most young men who go on from petty crime to grow up into relatively law abiding citizens.

Leslie Wilkins, a great criminologist from Cambridge said in the seventies that the best thing to do about crime is a four letter word LESS. But that's no longer true. The fragmentation of the employment patterns in places like the Northeast means that you can't expect to go into shipbuilding or the mines and have a job for life.

Apprenticeships have disappeared along with heavy industry. For many local young their apprenticeship is now into crime. While many of their fathers sink into a spiral of despair and drink, and marginal jobs that can slip into crime themselves, their sons start carrying drugs across town on their bicycles because they don't get punished as badly as adults would be.

The city map is redrawn again by the drug dealers – often the only adult males who take an interest in them. Then they are supplied with weapons, these days guns, to protect themselves against rival dealers and their couriers.

This is now a career path., with rewards hard to equal with conventional jobs. One young offender said to me 'Roger, I've given up crime - I just deal from home'. That still crime in the eyes of the law. But at least he's off the streets, which is less dangerous than mugging strangers. From his perspective, he's got a future, he's got a cash flow, and he's got some security.

Beyond the pale, the territorial ownership of the urban wastelands where these young men live is divided up between fearful groups who define their identity between that space and each other. There are things that can be done to address this: if we don't pay positive attention to them before trouble starts, they will attract our attention in negative ways.

Let them build something that they can be proud of, or they will destroy our peace of mind to feel better about themselves. But punishment is no deterrent. Negativity and threats is what they have been raised with all along. They've been beaten by their parents. They've been kicked out of schools. They come from families with a

history of offending, of drug or drink abuse, of poor housing and frequent moves, of one or both parents unemployed, of harsh and erratic parenting from parents who have split up.

It is no accident that the majority of prisoners come from a small number of post codes, most located in these waste lands beyond the pale. Half those in Texas state prisons are from a few zones in Houston and Dallas/Fort Worth. Half of the inmates in New York state prisons are from a few places in New York City. The same is true in England.

In South Boston, Mass, one short street feeds the prisons: Intervale Street in South Dorchester. It's got a tree full of Adidas trainers. If you wear Reeboks onto that street you get shot. They use labels to identify themselves: 'we're from Intervale, you all hate us but our Adidas makes us heroes. Anyone who comes in here differently is an enemy - whether it's police or another young person'.

Here at the LSE, in the shadow of the great anthropologist Ernest Gellner, you can sense how deep and how ancient that tradition is. It's tribal, it's human and it's absolutely inevitable. If we want to walk those streets safely we have to neutralise them. We have to make those kids feel safe.

It's important to know that for these kids the danger hours are not at night- as in the conventional script. It's just going to and from school.

If you can think of the distance, and I mean the psychological distance, in your journeys between the LSE and home and then imagine that you felt in danger from almost anybody you see - including the police - then you got an idea of what forgotten invisible

citizens feel like. That's what I've been trying to talk to you about. We need to make them more visible - but not just by forcing them to burn themselves down to get our attention.

QUESTIONS

Question:

I think one of the strong things that comes up in what you are saying is that there is an enormous disconnect between the way politicians talk about crime and the experience of crime on the ground. Have you thought about ways to make politicians and political discourse face up to this reality? What can be done about this?

Answer:

The people who talk about crime and the need to protect victims miss the single most important point about all these statistics: that is that by far the largest group of victims is the same group as the offenders, and that is young white males under 25. Why? Because they are on the streets all the time and they are very touchy and very fearful. If you go out with a knife and somebody looks at you the wrong way, you want respect. You will forfeit your probation or whatever to protect your *amour propre*. So when people say 'who thinks about the victims?' the answer is not politicians or the Daily Mail because they have this script that's based on the misconception that little old ladies are being mugged by strangers all the time.

In fact, little old ladies stay at home. They are suffering from intense fear of crime quite often unnecessarily. But they are the safest people in the whole of society. To get politicians to acknowledge that they are on the side of the young who are the

largest group of victims would mean they would have to be on the same side as young offenders. Then the Daily Mail would have them for breakfast. The problem is the reality is almost indigestible because it doesn't fit their script, while the script bears no resemblance to the reality.

Question:

How do we stop this kind of political fantasy?

Answer:

When I went around America filming positive solutions to youth crime, Jack Straw was then Home Secretary. He invited me to show my footage to a whole ministerial group and talk about the positive ways forward. Shortly afterwards they set up the Youth Justice Board along these principles. Then they brought over all the people I'd been working with in America to share their experiences and techniques with UK practitioners. I think the YJB is a real step forward and the ministers who get behind it and stand up to the Daily Mail are undergoing a real education when they go and meet the young offenders. They discover that they are like their own kids - they want the same things: esteem, approval, security.

But if you only demonise them, and use cruel ancient language like 'spider boy' and 'rat boy', all you are saying is that they are different - when actually they are the same.

Question:

How would you be tough on the causes of crime?

Answer:

The most crucial and biggest predictors of future offending are: Harsh and erratic parenting. And having an older sibling or parent convicted

before the child is 10. In other words the criminal justice system makes more criminals. Every time it catches somebody it is increasing the likelihood of that child or sibling going into crime, because it normalises it. So to address the causes of crime you don't just punish more people. What you have to do is give them a reason not to do it.

You will find it unbelievable that there are no provisions for heroin addiction for under 16 year olds anywhere in Britain and we've known about this problem for years. The youth clubs that become a safe place for kids to hide from gangs are shut in the week ends and school holidays. Far from addressing the causes of crime, we know what they are, but until you burn down the estate nobody wants to invest in the early stages. Sure Start is a good beginning but has yet to be rolled out to all the places that need it.

The narrative of the investor has to have visible impact for its money - so you get people knocking down instead of rehabilitating an interesting old part of the city simply because you can see the tower block and name it after the councillor. But perish the thought that you will then have to spend money on maintaining it. There are no brownie points in that.

You don't get attention for the fact that the lift is working, so the lift stops working and it becomes dangerous. Only when you tear the place down again, you get back into the newspapers by blowing up whatever estate it is that has become too dangerous. In semiological terms there has to be an event.

There is no such clarity involved with the frustration and frequent disappointment of working with kids with learning difficulties,

who are beaten up all the time, and their parents don't want to know. Compare that with the clarity of the mantra 'we've caught this kid we've locked him up, and he's off the street. We don't have to worry about what he does when he gets out.'

Question:

If David Blunkett was sitting here listening to you and watching your clips he would say 'this is the argument for ASBOS (Anti social behaviour order) Do you think ASBOS are the answer to this problem?

Answer:

ASBOs are a civil limitation on the behaviour of youth like those in Meadow Well who drive everybody mad. I knew one called Christopher who was nine years old and endlessly causing trouble.. His father would take him to school; he would be ticked as present and then run out the back and then spend the whole day with other kids burning down houses. He had an order forbidding him to go to certain street corners and hang out with certain friends. Of course, he didn't adhere to it so when he was old enough he was sent into care.

One of the reasons why the prison population is rising especially among young people is that they are breaching civil ASBOs and being put into prison for it. Moreover, if you banish them from one place, where are they supposed to go? Are they supposed to stay home to risk being beaten by their parents? Are they going to go to some new part of town where they don't know anyone and they can burgle and vandalise to their hearts content because nobody knows who they are?

ASBOS are a perfect model of what not to do, because all this is half a solution. It looks like a solution. On paper it's fantastic, and fits the script of Doing Something to stop the trouble. The irony is that the politicians are saying 'we want to teach these people to take responsibility for their actions'. If only David Blunkett and Michael Howard would do that, we would be in a much better place.'

Question:

Do you have a sense that it does matter, the possibility of speaking about your condition, and secondly is there some sort of formula that we can use?

Answer:

In anthropology, the rituals of birth and death are crucial. One of the tragedies that I happened on in various parts of the Western world is how seldom deaths amongst these invisible kids are honoured or acknowledged. So you have this rage simmering as it did in Mickey Robson about the death of his brother. It's seldom acknowledged. I was with a group of young offenders in North East Portland. One of their mothers was on the game and an addict. While the group went on, she kept on knocking on the front door saying 'could I have some money, give me some money'. But what they were doing was putting a board together of pictures of their dead brothers. It was incredibly moving because it was the first time they had been allowed to openly express their feelings about them. One boy said 'One of the things that makes me so upset is that at our school nobody mentioned that my brother was killed. But when the headmaster's cat was run over we had half a day off school'. That gives you some idea of the value placed on black youth's lives.

The young black people in London that have talked to me including Winston from Hackney believe that there are a lot of black kids who have been killed by each other and no one has even recorded their death. Whether that's an urban myth or not is almost untestable but I've heard it from a number of sources. The acknowledgement of their lives and their losses is one of the key steps to bringing them to our side of the pale. Otherwise they stay invisible, with all the dangers to themselves and others that implies. Question:

You mentioned that one of the most effective ways to prevent crime is to give people an option. The examples that you gave, particularly the youth centres and the training coops are at a grass routes level. Can you suggest any policy initiatives that would bring this up to either the local or national level, because that really seems to be an issue?

Answer:

Interesting question. I think business and the church are the two missing players. I was part of the Home Office Retail Crime Initiative. We were looking at the relationship between shop lifters and store detectives. Everybody shop lifts. I certainly did when I was young. It's a very common first time offence. One third of British males have been convicted of a criminal offence by the age of 32 and one quarter by the age of 21.

But many big retailers didn't care enough to invest properly in security. I was especially interested in restorative justice pioneered in shoplifting in Milton Keynes by the Thames Valley Police. A shop owner would sit down and talk to a convicted shoplifter about what it

meant in what seemed a harmless victimless crime. It seemed effective for both parties to learn more about the other.

I back the idea that the business community should adopt young offenders, train them in prison, or train them in probation schemes, as a way to protect their own kids, their own interests. That's a leap that some companies have made but very few.

Also missing from the equation is the church. A number of times I have gone to prison chaplains and asked 'do you try and involve the local church to bring in offenders leaving prison?'. Sadly they say they have given up trying. The local vicar inevitably says 'our parishioners don't want people like that in our church'. Some Christianity!

But I saw that come to pass in South Boston simply because one of the funerals that did happen led to a gang fight in the church. The vicar, Eugene Peters, had himself been a gang member and gone from the streets of Philadelphia to become part of the Harvard Divinity School. After the funeral, and gunshots to his house, he suddenly woke up and said 'do you know what we've been doing? All these years we've been fighting for civil rights. We haven't noticed that our kids have been going down the drain.' He began reaching out to the youth menacing his streets. He turned this into the idea that 40 black churches across America would adopt the children of people who were in prison. It's a very systematic approach. It has to be done at the grass roots, but could be a national practise.

At that level, one hears all the right things being talked about, but nobody really does it. It's about delivery. Head Start is the best programme possible for deprived young people. But the one always

used as the model is in one place – Ypsilanti, Michigan where it was done properly. There it was funded well enough for teachers to go into the homes of the parents to see if they actually practised what was taught in the schools..

But too often such schemes have too little money, and professionals don't want to go into what they see as dangerous places. Head Start began in the early sixties but only got permanent funding under Clinton, thirty years later!

Delivery at the grass roots is all that matters. National policy can be great, but until that delivery happens, you get more cynicism. These are kids to whom promises have always been broken by parents, teachers, police, local officials of various kinds. Unless you deliver and get through the barrier of disbelief and establish the possibility, as Mickey Robson says, that there might be a better option, they won't trust it – and act accordingly from that despair.

Question:

You've been talking this evening about an invisibility of groups but I was struck by the film clips that you showed, that it was very broadly the women shown as victims or activists, and the criminals were young men. I wondered if you want to comment on the changing perceptions of roles in crime by gender.

Answer:

The rise in prison population for women is one of the great scandals in recent years. A lot of that has been for non-payment of fines relating to a TV license fee or being mules and carrying drugs. Women suffer from the same poverty addiction and abuse as men - often more than men. They also want to belong, and be loved by their

peers. Because they are rightly frightened on the streets, the rituals of joining a gang gives them some sense of protection. The bullying that goes on in schools and on the streets cannot be exaggerated. I am trying to convey this to you in this comfort here, but the fear of girls coming home on the streets, from other girls as well as from boys. Therefore the same dynamic and the same hardening is going on.

The saddest thing of all is that the kids who are doing this now talk about the coldness in their heart. They have felt so abandoned and so crushed by the experience of abuse in their early years, that by twelve they either fall apart or go cold. If they are cold they will drive other kids to do things in the coldness that literally terrorises them.

A lot of the mugging that went on for mobile phones in Hackney was driven by two Mauritian brothers. They created such havoc and fear around them that other kids felt that they had to join them which they did through the mugging. Or they would be permanent victims and the girls would feel the same.

Question:

I wanted to ask if you could reflect on a situation that a friend recently shared with me. He was on one of the buses leaving Aldwych during the after noon and what he described was a group of 5 or 6 boys around the age of 12 who were on the upper part of the bus and started harassing women in particular with language and behaviour that was quite sexually explicit and aggressive. As he described the situation he said that basically no one responded to the most part and then started to respond with 'now you need to stop this'. Eventually someone told the bus driver and the bus driver

implied that he would stop the bus and have the boys get off but never actually did that. When I heard it I was really struck by what I pictured was a sort of paralysis and in ability to effectively respond in a way that would be humane and pro active. I'm just wondering what your reflections are on that in terms of a society. How do we learn to equip ourselves and develop.....?

Answer:

They had positive responses in Strasbourg and in Rotterdam where the same things had been happening on the trams. In Strasbourg, the suburbs are really dangerous. There's one that is so dangerous the postmen won't deliver post. The tram becomes the only way into that suburb. What they've done is hired ex gang members to be 'ambassadors' and both in Rotterdam and in Strasbourg it works.

Other cities have picked up on that. They take people who have street cred to liaise with the kids beyond the pale.

In Boston they are called Street Workers. A lot of them are ex gang members. They are paid for out of the mayor's office so they are not actually part of the justice system. But they appear in court as friends in court. They know these invisible youngsters and pay attention to them, not just punish them.

It's giving a future to them that isn't about crime. Oddly enough there is a relief when they come out of it. It's hugely pressuring to be part of this. They are permanently in fear and seldom feel long lasting pride in the stolen money, it's a kind of buzz but it's not pride. They talk about the difference between 'working' and 'earning'.

Question:

Do you think that in cities all over the world progress is being made with regards to everything you have spoken about?

Answer:

Well I've seen enough good examples to continue to keep on doing this. The single binding thing of young people from all different social classes is that they complain that there is not enough to do. They hang out on the street saying that there is not enough to do, wherever it is. Even public school kids do the same, and the reason is, somehow the available options do not feel like theirs. If you give them the chance to do something that they feel good about themselves doing, they respond.

People seem to think all you need to do is build a community centre and add the odd ping pong table and you've solved these identity questions. There is the sense that it was given to them that actually distances them from it. There has to be some way in which they make it themselves and then can feel good about that.

I've watched kids use their hands in probation centres and build pots and coffee tables, book shelves and so on and no amount of talking about their offending equals that sense of pride, that they made something that was theirs.

I will end with this. Winston was seen by the worker who ran the probation workshop. He was in Hackney. During the 10 weeks, Winston had become more and more engaged and smiled a lot. In Hackney he was really threatening. The worker asked me to go and talk to Winston and say 'what's the difference? Why were you so fearsome on the street and so open amongst us?' He said 'Roger,

you have to understand. To be Winston in Hackney you are not so 'hello hello'.

ENDS

Further contact, including videos of the films referred to can be made via films@filmsofrecord.com.