



STANLEY COHEN

Stanley Cohen

1942–2013

I. Introduction

I WAS ONE OF THE CO-AUTHORS of the biographical introduction to a Festschrift, *Crime, Social Control and Human Rights*, that was published in 2007 to mark Stan Cohen's retirement two years before from the Martin White Chair of Sociology at the London School of Economics.¹ This memoir is intended to complement and extend that biography and other chapters in the Festschrift rather than merely duplicate them, although it is inevitable that there will be some small acts of cannibalism. Whilst the introduction was largely literary in content and exegetical in method, this memoir will be more of an intellectual portrait or mosaic based on interviews and discussion with those who knew him well, and in writing it I shall try to trace a number of broad themes which gave contour to his life and his views of the world, sociology, politics and human rights. Unless there is a statement to the contrary, it should be assumed that any quotation is taken from those conversations. It should also be said that I have been mindful throughout that it is all too easy to impose an artificial coherence on what was a long, contradictory and complicated life, but a measure of simplification cannot be avoided.

¹D. Downes, P. Rock, C. Chinkin and C. Gearty (eds.), *Crime, Social Control and Human Rights* (Cullompton, 2007).

II. A brief resumé

Stan Cohen was the eldest of three brothers born into a comfortable Jewish family in Johannesburg, South Africa, on 23 February 1942, the son of Ray and Sie Cohen,² themselves part of a larger family originating in Lithuania but dispersed through emigration and flight from the oppressive regimes of Europe in the 1930s and 1940s. He attended Parktown Boys' High School in Johannesburg, took a BA degree in social work at the University of the Witwatersrand, worked briefly as a psychiatric social worker in England between 1963 and 1964, and then studied for a Ph.D. on *Hooligans, Vandals and the Community: a Study of Social Reaction to Juvenile Delinquency*, in the fledgling field of criminology, under the supervision of Terence Morris and, for a while, David Downes, at the London School of Economics (LSE). David Downes remembered that he was 'enormously vital, buoyant and creative, full of ideas but with a clear sense of what he wanted to achieve ... it gave me a false idea of what it was like to supervise Ph.D.s because he never had any doubt really as to what he wanted to do. But he was open all the time to learning new things.' The doctorate, awarded in 1969, was published in part three years later as *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*,³ and then again with new prefaces in 1987, 1999 and 2003.

A 'moral panic', Stan Cohen said, was 'A condition, episode, person or group of persons [that] emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially-accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible.'⁴ The notion condensed ideas about the capacity of powerful groups to shape social phenomena; the ineluctably political complexion of law and order; the processual and interactive character of social problems; the ever-present potential for irrational, ephemeral, distorting and punitive traits to colour reactions to rule-breaking; and the frequent helplessness of deviants and others effectively to counter what was done to them. It was not the first

²A fuller account of his boyhood is given by Adam Kuper in 'Growing up with Stan', in *Crime, Social Control and Human Rights*, pp. 3–6.

³S. Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (London, 1972).

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 9.

time anyone had written on and around that theme.⁵ It was not the first time that Stan Cohen himself had published a piece on that topic. He and I had produced a chapter employing very similar ideas in a short history of the Teddy Boy that had appeared three years before,⁶ but we had not used the term *moral panic*, a more colourful and elaborated concept that was to become celebrated in the academic literature,⁷ and one of the very few sociological phrases to enter common currency (there were 2,750,000 ‘results’ in response to a search on Google in the autumn of 2013). Moral panic was a powerful and seductive concept. It seemed to capture important truths about the condition of England in the 1970s and beyond, and it established Stan Cohen as a public intellectual at a very young age.

Stan Cohen married Ruth Kretzmer in 1963, and they had two daughters, one of whom, Judith, became a Reader in the Philosophy of Education at the Institute of Education, University of London, and the other, Jessica, living in the United States since 1997, was to become a translator from Hebrew into English of books by David Grossman, Yael Hedaya, Ronit Matalon, Amir Gutfreund and Tom Segev. Ruth Cohen, a delightful and highly principled woman, and a ceramic artist, died in 2003. He and Ruth were doting grandparents, taking great pride and pleasure in their grandchildren in London and America.

Stan Cohen’s career took him from place to place and country to country. It was not always smooth. He was appointed lecturer in sociology at Enfield College (later Middlesex University) in 1965, but the patronage system of British criminology in the 1960s then blocked him from leaving to take a post at Bedford College, at the time part of the University of

⁵ See, for instance, R. Fuller and R. Myers, ‘The natural history of a social problem’, *American Sociological Review*, 6 (1941), 320–9; E. Lemert, ‘Is there a natural history of social problems?’, *American Sociological Review*, 16 (1951), 217–23; and E. Sutherland, ‘The diffusion of sexual psychopath laws’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 56 (1950), 142–8.

⁶ S. Cohen and P. Rock, ‘The Teddy Boy’, in V. Bogdanor and R. Skidelsky (eds.), *The Age of Affluence* (London, 1970), pp. 288–319.

⁷ See, for example, the 35 references to books and articles on moral panics in the British Library catalogue <[http://explore.bl.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/search.do?dscent=0&vl\(174399379UI0\)=any&frbg=&scp.scps=scope%3A%28BLCONTENT%29&tab=local_tab&dstmp=1382087986360&srt=rank&ct=search&mode=Basic&dum=true&tb=t&indx=1&vl\(freeText0\)=Folk+Devils+and+Moral+Panics&vid=BLVU1&fn=search](http://explore.bl.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/search.do?dscent=0&vl(174399379UI0)=any&frbg=&scp.scps=scope%3A%28BLCONTENT%29&tab=local_tab&dstmp=1382087986360&srt=rank&ct=search&mode=Basic&dum=true&tb=t&indx=1&vl(freeText0)=Folk+Devils+and+Moral+Panics&vid=BLVU1&fn=search)>; the 214,000 ‘results’ on Google Scholar <http://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar?hl=en&q=moral+panic&btnG=&as_sdt=1%2C5&as_sdt=>>; and the 1,413 citations on JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/gate2.library.lse.ac.uk/action/doBasicSearch?Query=moral%2Bpanic&Search=Search&gw=jtx&prq=moral+panic&hp=25&acc=on&aori=a&wc=on&fc=off>> (all searches conducted on 18 Oct. 2013). And see D. Garland, ‘On the concept of moral panic’, *Crime Media Culture*, 4 (2008), 9–30.

London, and it engendered some justified resentment against the professoriate of the London School of Economics. He did however eventually move in 1967 to become lecturer and then senior lecturer at the University of Durham; senior lecturer in 1972 and then Professor of Sociology in 1974 at the University of Essex; Professor at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, in 1981; and then, on his return to England, Centennial Professor in 1994 and finally Martin White Professor of Sociology at the London School of Economics two years later, retiring in 2005.

If his first career was in criminology sociologically conceived, his second was in the linked field of human rights, epitomised by his *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering*,⁸ an exploration of how torture became socially and psychologically possible, which was awarded the 2002 British Academy Book Prize that had been instituted to ‘celebrate books that significant [*sic*] contributed to scholarly understanding and, by being lucidly written, appeal to the general reader’.⁹ It was a book described by Dame Gillian Beer, the Chair of the Judging Panel, as ‘a powerful analysis of an extraordinarily important topic. How is it possible for witnesses—or participants—in atrocities to deny what has, incontrovertibly, occurred? Can one speak of a culture of denial? In exploring these questions Stanley Cohen has carved out a whole new field of enquiry relating sociology, psychology, philosophy, political theory and personal experience.’¹⁰

Amongst the other honours he received were the Sellin–Glueck Award (‘given in order to call attention to criminological scholarship that considers problems of crime and justice as they are manifested outside the United States; internationally or comparatively’¹¹) from the American Society of Criminology in 1985; his Fellowship of the British Academy in 1997; an honorary doctorate from the University of Essex in 2003; and the newly established Award for Outstanding Achievement from the British Society of Criminology (‘intended to celebrate outstanding contributions made to the discipline by members of the BSC’¹²) in 2009. He died on 7 January 2013 after a long and harrowing illness bravely borne. The British Society of Criminology elected in that year to affix his name to the opening, plenary addresses that would be delivered thereafter at its annual conferences.

⁸ S. Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge, 2001).

⁹ <<http://www.britac.ac.uk/about/medals/book-prize.cfm>>.

¹⁰ <<http://www.britac.ac.uk/news/news.cfm/newsid/115>>.

¹¹ <<http://www.asc41.com/awards/SellinGlueckAward.html>>.

¹² <<http://www.britisocrim.org/prizes.htm>>.

III. South Africa

Stan Cohen grew up in the South Africa of apartheid, and, although he was not politically active there, it did reinforce in him an abiding scepticism about the benevolence of the State, its ideology and its institutions. After all, his relatives had long known the cruelty of States (Robin Cohen headed part of an account of the family's history 'Beware the State', and had then moved on to allude to the 'Family's experience of the Russian, Nazi and Lithuanian States'¹³).

Stan Cohen once remarked to me that he was puzzled by the propensity of lawyers to look upon formal social control as benign. He took it to be malign. The social anthropologist, Adam Kuper, his oldest friend and a fellow South African, observed that 'that anti-authoritarian thing was very strong among us'. It instilled in Stan Cohen a restless, lively, questioning intelligence that would take nothing on trust, and certainly not the utterances of those in political power. He once talked of what he called the 'three voracious gods' that faced the sociologist, and, of those, one was 'an overriding obligation to pursue honest intellectual enquiry (however sceptical, irrelevant and unrealistic)'.¹⁴ It led not only to systematic doubt but also to a rugged political and intellectual integrity, what Thomas Hammarburg called a 'stubborn search for honest answers',¹⁵ that emboldened him publicly to confront atrocities in Israel, despite the calumny that could follow,¹⁶ and to defend academic freedom against assault from even quite influential figures.¹⁷

If Stan Cohen had a political ideology at all, it was probably a liberal or humanist variant of the anarchism, not of Mikhail Bakunin or Sergey

¹³In the meeting held at the LSE on 10 Dec. 2013: 'From *Moral Panics to States of Denial*: a celebration of the life and work of Stan Cohen'.

¹⁴S. Cohen, 'Intellectual scepticism and political commitment', in P. Walton and J. Young (eds.), *The New Criminology Revisited* (London, 1998), p. 122.

¹⁵At the meeting, 'From *Moral Panics to States of Denial*'. Thomas Hammarburg was until recently the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights.

¹⁶His erstwhile colleague at Hebrew University, Daphna Golan, talked at the LSE meeting of 10 Dec. 2013 about Stan Cohen's exceptional courage in talking about the occupation and torture in a university where 'lectures took place as usual as if there were no intifada'.

¹⁷See the reporting in *The Times Higher Education Supplement* of Stan Cohen's handling of the aftermath of Conor Gearty's critical article on Michael Ignatieff's *The Lesser Evil*, in the *Index on Censorship* ('Ignatieff ducks debate with critics in torture row', *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 9 Sept. 2005). Ignatieff had attempted to ensure that the article would not be published but Stan Cohen, as guest editor, refused to comply. Conor Gearty commented that 'Stan behaved magnificently throughout—fending off telephone calls from the furious Ignatieff pleading friendship as a reason to help him handle "Mr Gearty"'.

Nechayev, but of William Godwin, that embraced a mistrust of the State, the millenarian¹⁸ and big ideas. It was an allegiance that he had contracted very early in life. His brother Robin remembered that ‘at our family dining table [in South Africa] we sometimes formally took positions on issues of the day—Stan anarchist, me socialist, Clive capitalist. This is relevant to ... Stan’s close engagement with anarchism. And truth to tell the three positions—which were adolescent self-ascriptions—were not far from our final positions.’¹⁹

Stan Cohen particularly admired the British anarchist Colin Ward,²⁰ a family friend until his death, of whom it was said that he ‘saw all distant goals as a form of tyranny and believed that anarchist principles could be discerned in everyday human relations and impulses’.²¹ He was at one with Colin Ward in being particularly distrustful of the apocalyptic and the absolutist. It was no accident that what may have been Stan Cohen’s very first publication²² appeared (like those of some of his criminological contemporaries on the British Left²³) in *Anarchy*, the journal which Ward edited between 1961 and 1970. And one of the later concomitants of that antipathy to the State and its institutions was his publication with Laurie Taylor in 1972 of a clandestine study of long-term prisoners’ strategies of survival in Durham Prison²⁴ that was based on a remarkable empathy with the lot of the incarcerated (Paul Wiles called it ‘one of the most sensitive accounts of prison life ever published’²⁵) but which also led to protracted antagonism between the authors and the Home Office²⁶ and a wider and enduring souring of relations between criminologists and government.

¹⁸ See S. Cohen, ‘Criminology and the sociology of deviance in Britain’, in P. Rock and M. McIntosh (eds.), *Deviance and Social Control* (London, 1974), p. 30.

¹⁹ Email, 13 Nov. 2013.

²⁰ Colin Ward, 1924–2010, was the author of some 30 books and edited the journals *Freedom* and *Anarchy* between 1961 and 1970.

²¹ K. Worpole, Colin Ward Obituary, *The Guardian*, 22 Feb. 2010 <<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2010/feb/22/colin-ward-obituary>>.

²² The first was S. Cohen, ‘Vandalism and the social structure’, *Anarchy*, 64 (1966), 181–7.

²³ See D. Downes, ‘What will happen to Jones and Robinson?’, *Anarchy*, 53 (1965), 195–201; D. Downes, ‘One boy’s story’, *Anarchy*, 64 (1966), 173–5; J. Young, ‘The zookeepers of deviancy’, *Anarchy*, 98 (1969), 101–8; L. Taylor, ‘The criminologist and the criminal’, *Anarchy*, 98 (1969), 114–21.

²⁴ S. Cohen and L. Taylor, *Psychological Survival: the Experience of Long-Term Imprisonment* (Harmondsworth, 1972).

²⁵ Review in *The British Journal of Sociology*, 24 (1973), p. 255.

²⁶ See S. Cohen and L. Taylor, *Prison Secrets*, Radical Alternatives to Prison and National Council for Civil Liberties (London, 1976).

Authority at large was ever problematic for him. He chafed when balked by senior staff, officials and bureaucracies, in Israel, in London and elsewhere. He was not to be confined by rules. He was to be something of an innocent abroad in the highly regulated labyrinth of English higher education. One of his research students, Olga Jubany, recalled, quite spontaneously:

He had no idea about the practicalities of the PhD, registrations or any other issue. In fact, I didn't even realise that I wasn't actually registered for a PhD (but formally for an MPhil) until almost a year on, when my colleagues told me so. He would not bother with any of the admin machinery (you would not expect him to do so anyway). If at the very beginning I ever asked him something about how I should submit the Aims and Methods paper,²⁷ or how the bursary system was for PhDs, or what was the research seminar timing; he would look at me like: 'you seriously expect me to know that? surely not!'. What's more, he would not follow up on what courses I registered for and would certainly not make me choose specific ones over others (except for the wonderful Criminology seminar, where he participated too and was really the best course of the whole PhD years).

If Stan Cohen was an anarchistically minded sceptic, he was also a sceptic about some of the forms adopted by anarchism itself, observing in one of those pieces in *Anarchy* that 'Anarchists, whose intellectual roots go deeper back than any other group fighting the horrors of today's society should be the first to see that a committed and passionate position is not incompatible with an orderly argument ... antagonism needs to be documented as much as acceptance.'²⁸ Jessica, his daughter, said 'he disliked the idea of hard-line ideological positions and movements. ... I think it just came from his suspicion of dogma and structure. He could never have been a member of a political party.' It was a scepticism that could even turn in on itself, serving reflexively, in Harvey Molotch's words, as a 'loyal nag that what he was thinking might be wrong'²⁹ and that those with whom he disagreed might be right. It even led him eventually to distance himself from criminology itself, the discipline that had suckled him, when he was living in Israel (although there are some, like David Downes, who believed that the title of his matricidal book, *Against Criminology*,³⁰ was ironically intended).

²⁷The 'Aims and Methods Paper' was intended to serve as a test of the research student's competence to proceed to the second year of the Ph.D. course.

²⁸S. Cohen, 'Notes on Detention Centres', *Anarchy*, 101 (no date), 210.

²⁹At 'From *Moral Panics to States of Denial*'.

³⁰S. Cohen, *Against Criminology* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1988).

Growing up in South Africa also instilled in Stan Cohen a desire to leave what he conceived to be a malevolent country for one more admirable, Israel. His adolescent world was permeated by Zionism. The Students Jewish Association at Parktown Boys' High School was steeped in it. The November 1961 issue of the school magazine, *The Parktonian*, recorded, for instance, how the Association's:

... first few meetings of the year were addressed by members of the Zionist Youth Movement, who spoke on different aspects of life on Communal Settlements. As usual films were shown at various times of the year. Their topics ranged from Communal Settlements to Jewish holidays. ... Dr. H. Michel returned to the school and gave an awe-inspiring talk on 'The Tide of the New Immigration' concerning the emigration of Jews from Arab and Communist dominated countries.³¹

As an adolescent, Stan Cohen had travelled with his family to Israel, visiting relatives and the tourist sites, and he had spent brief periods of time with *Habonim* at the South African-affiliated Kibbutz Tsora and Kibbutz Yizrael in the winter of 1958–9. It was to Israel that he determined he would return. Adam Kuper remembered:

He wasn't that radical in South Africa. Of course he was anti-apartheid ... and he had black friends and so on but he was not politically active in South Africa in the way that a number of us were. Because he belonged to this group which said, 'okay, you know, the situation is terrible, we're against it, we're going to go to Israel.' So for a number of his friends, not for me, but for a number of his friends who then went to Israel, the great issue was 'why didn't Stan ... get further qualifications and then he would join us'.

The lure of *aliyah* was strong, and it was thought to demand particular talents from those who chose to emigrate. Robin Cohen said: 'Stan was much more committed than either Clive or myself to a sort of Zionist dream. By dream I mean ... something that was ... idealistic and he had some idea that he needed some skills that he would be able to apply in that context. And I think he sort of stumbled into social work.' It was an unusual course to take. Stan Cohen acknowledged that he was something of a disappointment and *Luftmensch* in the eyes of his parents³² (all three brothers had 'said "no" to my father's increasingly despairing pleas to take over his retail clothing business' said Robin Cohen). Social work was not the common aspiration of young Jewish men growing up in the South Africa of the 1950s and 1960s, but 'each of his cohort were supposed to

³¹ R.D.W., 'Students Jewish Association', *The Parktonian*, LVII (1961), 18.

³² A. Kuper, 'Growing up with Stan', p. 6.

have a specialism that would be particularly useful in Israel'.³³ Stan Cohen's daughter, Judith, reflected that he and Robin, who would also become a Professor of Sociology, 'were regarded as the mad ones. The younger brother [Clive] stayed in South Africa, went into finance and insurance and that was regarded as the sensible, reasonable thing to do. Whereas Stan and Robin were always ... just a bit mystifying to our grandparents ... as to how they could possibly have chosen that ... and they never understood why he left South Africa.'

Leaving South Africa was Stan Cohen's first displacement. He had felt uncomfortable there and he departed, although he always retained an ambivalent affection for the country. Judith Cohen said 'he loved it. He always felt that that was his home and yet whenever he was there ... every visit that we went on when we were little, there was horrible tension always in the background.' But, at the age of 21, Stan Cohen was to go first, not back to Israel, but to England. Robin Cohen said 'I think his idea was that he would get some practical experience as a psychiatric social worker. He would perhaps do an MA and then he would go to Israel. And then somehow the lure of LSE and the entrance to the things he was doing took him away from that.'

IV. England

By contrast with South Africa, London was a free and febrile place in the mid-1960s. David Downes recalled that 'he always said that he got an enormous amount just out of being here. Don't forget, South Africa was then such a closed society in almost every way ... he came here and he could go to all the things that he and Ruth had seen in smuggled back copies of *The New Statesman*. You know, meetings about politics in Red Lion Square and so on. [He] just loved to go to all those things [and the] debate and discussion.' The sociological criminology practised with his fellow-students, Jock Young and others, at the London School of Economics, and indeed in the United Kingdom at large, was itself febrile at the time. I have described elsewhere³⁴ how the great university expansion that took place in the wake of the 1963 Robbins Report³⁵ created a

³³ Email 13 Nov. 2013.

³⁴ P. Rock, 'The present state of British criminology', *British Journal of Criminology*, 28 (1988), 188–99.

³⁵ *Higher Education: Report of the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins 1961–63* Cmnd 2154 (London, 1963).

substantial cohort of youthful scholars who formed an intellectually tumultuous and self-referential critical mass that set itself against what was seen as the orthodoxies, postures, politics and authority of a fusty older generation.

Stan Cohen was at the centre of it all. He had arrived in England just as that ferment began, and his thesis captured what was in effect the minor intellectual revolt that was in progress around him. The Young Turks of the so-called new criminologies³⁶ rejected what they conceived to be the atheoretical positivism and subservience to the State of criminology proper, and celebrated in its place a blend of the symbolic interactionism and phenomenology personified by the Americans, Howard S. Becker, Edwin Lemert and David Matza; a sociology from below that reported the world-views of those who had hitherto lacked credit and a voice;³⁷ and, a little later, the radical Europeans, Karl Marx, Nicos Poulantzas, Evgenii Pashukanis, Louis Althusser and others.

The arguments which Stan Cohen collated and examined in his Ph.D. *Hooligans, Vandals and the Community* presented a particularly prescient and articulate opening statement of a number of those 'recent developments in the sociology of deviance',³⁸ and they served as a platform on which he would build almost all his subsequent theorising, and, indeed, as something of a platform for much of British criminology itself.³⁹ He talked there about how what he called transactionalism was a loose approach rather than 'a fully fledged theory' (p. 10); an approach that was best 'understood as a reaction against traditional ways of looking at one's subject matter' (p. 11) and against the theoretical insulation of criminology. In his exegesis of the work of Howard Becker, Erving Goffman, Kai Erikson, Ronald Laing, Edwin Lemert, David Matza, George Herbert Mead and others, he sought to bring sociology back into criminology; reject what he believed to be the essentialising, static and dehumanising definitions current in the thought of those working in social control agencies and the orthodox criminology that was their handmaiden; acknowledge the diversity of deviants and deviant phenomena; and subscribe to an imagery of deviance that was centred on social and psychological process. Rule-breaking was said to be rooted in identities that were negotiated, step by

³⁶ See, for instance, I. Taylor, P. Walton and J. Young, *The New Criminology* (London, 1973).

³⁷ See H. Becker; 'Whose side are we on?', *Social Problems*, 14 (1967), 239–47.

³⁸ He was not then, or afterwards, much influenced by Marx and the Marxists.

³⁹ As our biographical entry in the Festschrift argued, Stan Cohen 'made his mark *before* the new criminologies forked, and he continued to exercise influence thereafter as an ancestral father figure over all the criminological lineages ...', *Crime, Social Control and Human Rights*, p. xxiii.

step and reflexively, in an unequal conversation with others, often more powerful, in a sequence of transformations which Erving Goffman represented as a moral career. Critical to that processual model, Stan Cohen said, is ‘the use of concepts such as meaning, mind and self [which] moves us far away from the tenets of positivism; ... alerts us not only to seeing the reactions of others ... but also to seeing the interaction process *from the point of view of the deviant*’ (p. 29, emphasis in the original). There was in all this a part of him that toyed with the deviant and the risqué himself (and in the jointly written introduction to one work he celebrated taking drugs with students, watching pornography and organising street protests⁴⁰) but one suspects that much of it was more vicarious than practised, however much it may have been eulogised by his collaborator, Laurie Taylor, who often reminisced in public about their daring exploits together.

In affirming his position, Stan Cohen could be quite perfunctory and scathing about the failings of those who differed from him. He opened a review of Irvin Waller’s *Men Released from Prison* with the dismissal ‘Standard criminological stuff’;⁴¹ called John Williams’s *Narcotics and Drug Dependence* ‘lunacy’;⁴² and noted how ‘sad’ it was that Richard Sparks had spent time ‘on this sort of stuff [the mathematical modelling of penal systems]. Mathematical models might well have their place—but perhaps not in a book subtitled: “The Crisis in the English Penal System”’.⁴³ In so doing, he made it clear how much he disliked positivism, grand theory, descriptions grounded in the workings of impersonal social systems,⁴⁴ and what David Matza called ‘correctionalism’,⁴⁵ the pursuit of criminology to punish or change the deviant. He disliked dogmatics, even the dogmatics of his friends and colleagues on the Left (although, as Adam Kuper observed, he was outwardly tolerant of a politics that was ‘so much the orthodoxy in the circles he moved in’). He was certainly not persuaded that revolution would answer the problems of crime and criminology: it might conduce only to the substitution of one form of oppression by another, to a ‘model of social control in which offenders wearing

⁴⁰ See S. Cohen and L. Taylor; *Escape Attempts: the Theory and Practice of Resistance in Everyday Life* (London, 1976), p. 2.

⁴¹ S. Cohen, Review, *New Society* (30 May 1974), 526.

⁴² S. Cohen, Review, *New Society* (5 Sept. 1974), 624.

⁴³ S. Cohen, Review of R. Sparks, *Local Prisons: the Crisis in the English Penal System*, *New Society* (23 Sept. 1971), 579

⁴⁴ Robin Cohen said ‘He wasn’t keen on ... structuralism as in Marx, or structuralism as in Levi-Strauss, as in Parsonian [theory], I mean none of that really resonated.’

⁴⁵ D. Matza, *Becoming Deviant* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1969), pp. 15–24.

sandwich boards listing their crimes before a crowd which shouts “Down with the counter-revolutionaries!” are then led away to be publicly shot’.⁴⁶

He was driven by extension to the biographical and the intimate in the micro-sociology of everyday life. That is why he followed Terence Morris and turned to the work of the so-called Chicagoans and their heirs with their focus on the sociology of everyday life (and that emphasis was to be reinforced by semesters spent at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in the company of scholars such as Harvey Molotch, himself a product of the University of Chicago). Robert Park, the founder of the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago and one of the progenitors of the ‘Chicago School’, once remarked that William James had taught him that ‘the real world was the experience of actual men and women and not abbreviated and shorthand descriptions of it that we call knowledge’.⁴⁷ Stan Cohen would have approved. He once told me that of all the books he would keep, it would be those that had been published by the University of Chicago Press. Adam Kuper remarked he had been ‘terrifically influenced by that stuff ... the study of the pool halls. Those were very important to him.’ In his review of that study, *Hustlers, Beats and Others*, Stan Cohen said that he ‘was grateful to Ned Polsky [its author] for reminding us that sociology could be interesting and even entertaining’.⁴⁸

The new sociology was to be institutionalised in the form of the National Deviancy Conference that met for the first time at the University of York in 1968. Stan Cohen was in the van (David Downes claimed that ‘the anchor-men of the NDC were Stan Cohen and Laurie Taylor’⁴⁹). He edited the very first collection of papers from the Conference, *Images of Deviance*, as a *de facto* group manifesto, and it was there that he announced, in an echo of his preamble to *Hooligans, Vandals and the Community*, that ‘Our feelings towards official criminology ranged from distrust at its orientation towards administrative needs and impatience with its highly empirical, anti-theoretical bias, to simply a mild lack of interest in the sort of studies that were being conducted.’⁵⁰

⁴⁶ S. Cohen, ‘Guilt, justice and tolerance’, in D. Downes and P. Rock (eds.), *Deviant Interpretations* (Oxford, 1979), p. 44.

⁴⁷ In P. Baker, ‘The life histories of W. I. Thomas and Robert E. Park’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 79 (1973), 255.

⁴⁸ S. Cohen, Review, *New Society* (3 June 1971), 969.

⁴⁹ D. Downes, ‘The sociology of crime and social control in Britain, 1960–1987’, *British Journal of Criminology*, 28 (1988), 46.

⁵⁰ S. Cohen, ‘Introduction’, in S. Cohen (ed.), *Images of Deviance* (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 15.

But, if he was averse to positivism and all its works, to abstracted empiricism, to grand theory and to structuralism—to dogmas, ideologies and systems—his scepticism about orthodoxy encouraged him to be otherwise eclectic, not accepting any single theory *tout court*. He was an intellectual in love with ideas. His daughter, Jessica, said ‘I think that he had difficulty relating closely to adults who were not academics or not intellectual. He . . . wasn’t comfortable, I think, with people who were not intellectual because they would not find a common language.’ And his other daughter, Judith, agreed: ‘that’s right, that’s how he related to people. That was the only way he related to people, to discuss ideas. You couldn’t talk about just everyday stuff.’

Stan Cohen had a great liking for conversation, teaching and students, and his students were fond of him in their turn. In Israel and England, he was ever in their midst. Judith Cohen said ‘he was always encouraging students to come and talk to him and . . . he would spend hours talking to people . . . but it was only if they had a shared intellectual language’. His was a teaching rooted in discussion, story-telling and anecdote. Olga Jubany recalled that ‘His supervision relied almost entirely on our regular conversations that would focus on discussing the development and approach of the investigation. Later these would develop into personal chats . . . but certainly never, ever, about any administrative or bureaucratic proceedings.’

Stan Cohen’s thought was grounded in what he called transactionalism. He flirted with the ideas of Michel Foucault, Ronald Laing, ethnomethodology and anarchism. He was intrigued by the psychology of the self, being, as his brother Robin said, ‘much more self-reflective, much more personally aware than . . . either Clive or myself’. He had studied psychoanalysis, practised briefly as a psychiatric social worker, and received therapy in California. At the very opening of his intellectual career he had talked scathingly about the ‘sort of philistine distrust . . . which greeted the work of Durkheim and Freud. . . . How [some said] can the intrapsychic conflicts of middle-class Viennese Jews explain how the normal mind works?’⁵¹ His answer was that they could do so pretty well. Indeed, just as Sigmund Freud’s study was littered with small carvings of gods and idols from ancient Greece, Rome, Egypt and the Orient,⁵² so Stan Cohen kept a plastic manikin of Freud on his desk at work. Malcolm Feeley, Claire Sanders Clements Dean’s Professor of Law at the University

⁵¹ Cohen, *Hooligans, Vandals and the Community*, p. 13.

⁵² See <<http://www.freud.org.uk/about/house/>>.

of California, Berkeley, who used from time to time to occupy Stan Cohen's office at the Hebrew University, recalled that 'the books of psychoanalysis took up a big part of his library collection. . . . I do think that underlying a lot of his work is some sort of implicit psychology. . . . Think of moral panics as something that creates anxieties in people. . . . *States of Denial* is implicit there.' Indeed, Stan Cohen was to talk often and at length to Irene Bruna Seu, an academic and a psychoanalytical psychotherapist, whilst he was writing the book.

Stan Cohen was, in short, something of a polymath and an eclectic. One of his students, Megan Comfort, later a research sociologist working in San Francisco,⁵³ remembered the diversity and breadth of his thought as a teacher: 'it felt like he brought in a lot of different perspectives and different theoretical ideas into our thinking through all of these different issues'. He thought on a large, panoptic scale. His colleague at the LSE, Claire Moon, put it that 'Typically, Cohen took an unsettling approach to . . . problems [of the denial of human rights], what might be called a 360 degree approach . . .',⁵⁴ and by that she meant that he looked 'not just [at] the state, but also the bystanders (the consumers of humanitarian campaigns and appeals), and the humanitarian entrepreneurs, the human rights NGOs themselves. All of these were, he argued, complicit in denial and "bystander passivity".'⁵⁵

Perhaps Stan Cohen was above all *playful*. He enjoyed the life of the mind. He had an abiding sense of humour, irony and the absurd (and the transactionalism which he espoused had at times itself veered into a sociology of the absurd⁵⁶). A reflexive sociologist who looked continually at the interplay between biography and the social world, he loved anecdote and narrative, teaching through stories, and funny stories above all (one of his students, Sharon Shalev, said 'he was a wonderful gossip. There were few things I enjoyed as much as sitting and just gossiping about people with him.'). His LSE colleague Conor Gearty said too that 'The other memory I have is of course how funny he was. And that, to some

⁵³ Her full title was senior research sociologist with the Urban Health Program and an adjunct assistant professor of medicine at the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies at the University of California.

⁵⁴ C. Moon, '“Looking without seeing, listening without hearing”': Cohen, denial and human rights', *Crime, Media, Culture*, 9 (2013), p. 194.

⁵⁵ C. Moon, keynote lecture delivered to the Moral Panic, Society and Rights Conference in Honour of Stan Cohen, University of Athens, Greece, 7 Dec. 2013.

⁵⁶ See, for instance, S. Lyman and M. Scott, *A Sociology of the Absurd* (New York, 1989); P. Carlen, *Magistrates' Courts: an Ethnography in the Sociology of the Absurd*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1974.

extent, comes through in the writing but the fun was rooted in such a strong sociological understanding of the self you know. I mean he was so aware that he was part of something. It was incredible.'

Stan Cohen had a great store of Jewish jokes, and he told them very well, often to poke fun at authority, the staid, the conventional and himself. Stan Cohen's colleague, Tim Newburn, said 'one of the things that's an overriding memory for me of Stan is [that he] had extraordinarily twinkly eyes which betrayed, I thought, a really important bit of his character which was, Stan was just a little bit naughty, I thought. And that naughtiness probably displayed itself in a variety of ways but I think that as a scholar, that naughtiness presented itself at least in part, as a desire in some small way, always to subvert.'

V. Israel

England in the 1960s and 1970s may have been intellectually exciting, Stan Cohen may have come into his own and prospered there professionally, but he was never quite at home. He liked individual Britons, and he and Ruth made close friendships, mostly through work, some of which endured for the rest of their lives. They did talk fondly about their life in Durham. Yet Judith, his daughter, reflected they had 'a sense of aloofness from "the Brits" as a nation'. He did not talk about 'us' but about 'the British' as if they were foreign to him. A political animal, he never became involved in British politics. ('I was', he said, 'acutely aware that [my] original commitments could never find a home in English politics. I couldn't read about what was happening in South Africa and Israel and then connect with the striking British trades unionists or university Trotskyists.'⁵⁷) In the whole of England there was but one little area for which he had come strongly to care, Belsize Park, in North London. But the Cohens were living in Colchester in Essex in the 1970s, and that was another matter altogether. Robin Cohen said 'it was very grey and bleak and even within Wivenhoe or Colchester, wherever they were, they seemed to somehow pick out the greyest stucco and drabbest walls'.

Disengaged and rather rootless, Stan Cohen and his family quit England for Israel in 1981. Many were taken aback at their decision. David Downes said 'it took me completely by surprise . . ., his going to Israel. I mean I hadn't been in on that, as it were. So it came as a bolt from

⁵⁷L. Taylor, 'The other side of the street', *New Humanist*, 119 (2004), 4.

the blue ... that he found British society so boring. I mean that did surprise me 'cause I don't find British society boring. I find it really endlessly fascinating. But then, from his perspective, I could see how that could be. You know, there was no really powerful fundamental challenge going on to the powers that be.' It should be reported that Stan and Ruth Cohen also told Malcolm Feeley, their friend from Berkeley, that their emigration had been prompted by the anti-Semitism of the Left in England, although they seem to have said that to no one else, and certainly not to their daughters.

Other forces were in play. There was the residual influence of Zionism (Stan Cohen said afterwards that 'So strong was the brainwashing I'd received from the Zionist youth movement that I'd managed to avoid facing the full reality'⁵⁸). Jessica Cohen claimed that there was a quest for the *frisson* of political commitment, what David Downes had called a 'really powerful fundamental challenge'. 'For obvious reasons', she said, they 'couldn't go back to South Africa ... before apartheid ended, so I think Israel was a place for them to feel involved in.' And her sister, Judith, concurred: 'They needed to be in a struggle ... there was the political thing, that they wanted to feel part of something, there was a connection ... at that point in Israel, there was a sense that there was a real political struggle that was going in a positive direction. There was Camp David and there was a sense that if you joined this swell of people who were you know, progressive and moving towards peace, then you could be part of this.' There were family links. Ruth's parents lived in Jerusalem. So did David, her brother, at that time the Bruce W. Wayne Professor of International Law at the Hebrew University. And thus it was that the family left.

It was not to be a wholly happy experience. Stan Cohen said it had been 'complete madness'.⁵⁹ Judith Cohen called it 'a complete fiasco'. Instead of a vibrant politics, they found, in the words of Jessica Cohen, that 'the South African friends they had who had moved to Israel ... most of them, the vast majority of them were just not involved in any kind of political activity. They were just living *bourgeois* lives.' Stan Cohen was not to be at home intellectually or socially in the Department of Sociology at the Hebrew University. He had been lauded in England but, Jessica Cohen continued, 'he felt under-appreciated in Israel, right from the

⁵⁸ L. Taylor, 'The other side of the street: an interview with Stan Cohen', in Downes *et al.*, *Crime, Social Control and Human Rights*, p. 20.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

beginning, professionally'. He found Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt,⁶⁰ a powerful baronial figure in the department, a grand theorist in the tradition of structural-functionalism, to be a difficult colleague. In turn, Shmuel Eisenstadt and another colleague, Joseph Ben-David,⁶¹ dismissed Stan Cohen's work as not properly sociological, rejected his wish to remain in the department,⁶² and obliged him to move into the Institute of Criminology where, again, he was to be ill at ease professionally. Malcolm Feeley, who knew him in Israel and the United States, said 'Stan was just head and shoulders above them ... [he] was not happy there and he got increasingly unhappy ... he did not have a comfortable intellectual home.' Adam Kuper put it even more pithily, 'he hated the Hebrew University, hated the sociologists. He thought the university was not a very good university.' *Aliyah* had become something of an illusion. Robin Cohen said 'Israel he regarded as a pretty big mistake you know, he was living out that interrupted adolescent dream ... he had friends, he had significant ... achievements in the UK and in the United States. Israel was very much a sort of backwards move.' He and Ruth began to question whether their daughters could ever have a future in the country.

Some members of his immediate family did somewhat temper that narrative of alienation and deracination. Jessica Cohen certainly did so—her memories of life in Israel were more affectionate. But Stan Cohen had undoubtedly become estranged from large portions of Israeli society, sociology and criminology and, finding the 'Israeli military occupation of the West Bank an ongoing source of pain',⁶³ he moved into the politics and study of human rights, focusing especially on torture.⁶⁴ Adam Kuper recalled too that 'he'd got a bit bored with sociology and criminology as well ... in Israel, the most interesting people in any case were often

⁶⁰ Shmuel Eisenstadt (1923–2010) taught at the University from 1946 to 1990 and was head of the Department of Sociology between 1949 and 1969. He was said to have 'developed comparative knowledge of exceptional quality and originality concerning social change and modernization, and concerning relations between culture, belief systems and political institutions. His work combines sociological theory with historical and empirical research in the study of modernities and civilizations' (citation for the Holberg Prize, 2006, <<http://www.holbergprisen.no/en/shmuel-n-eisenstadt/shmuel-noah-eisenstadt-1923-2010.html>>).

⁶¹ Joseph Ben-David (1920–86), the George Wise Professor of Sociology, a committed anti-relativist, was a sociologist of science who had taught at the Hebrew University from 1950. See R. Westrum; 'Obituary: Joseph Ben-David (1920–86): sociologist of science and of higher education', *Social Studies of Science*, 16 (1986), 565–7.

⁶² See N. Ben-Yehuda, 'Stan', *Crime, Media, Culture*, 9 (2013), 188.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

⁶⁴ See B. Hudson; 'Professor Stanley Cohen: an appreciation', *Criminal Justice Matters*, 92 (2013), <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09627251.2013.805380#.Upd0wNJSiS8>>.

involved in these human rights things'. So it was that he moved to work with others 'to expose the torture of Palestinian political figures. And Stan published not only key papers on it,⁶⁵ he was very involved with the pressure group which ... got the Supreme Court to see what could be done.'⁶⁶ Robin Cohen added, 'he had to find some space for himself which allowed him to live in this place that he clearly hated. And I think that's probably where the human rights stuff came from. Again, the biographical angle, the personal and the political connecting.' It was in the vigorous intellectual and political world centred on human rights in Israel that Ruth and Stan Cohen then came to find a new anchorage. Judith Cohen remembered:

... he did find himself—largely through political activity—connecting to a small group of intellectuals and activists on the Left, where he and Ruth were instrumental in founding and organizing groups and activities within the anti-occupation movement ... during their time in Israel, despite the problems, they were very involved politically—Ruth perhaps more than Stan—and the friendships they formed through this activity were hugely significant and provided them with a support network, a rich social life that, I think ... encouraged them to stay on even when things got difficult.

The Professor of International Law, Christine Chinkin, Stan Cohen's future colleague at the London School of Economics, met him first at a conference in Gaza organised by the Palestine Human Rights Association, and found in his work a complementarity with her own legal interest in genocide. But what Stan Cohen introduced analytically into what was then a largely legal and activist field was a sociological inflection unusual at the time. He began by transposing the psychoanalytic vocabulary of denial, sociological ideas about good people and dirty work,⁶⁷ and the criminological language of techniques of neutralisation⁶⁸ to a new empirical terrain:

Human rights were colonised by law. There's no doubt about that at all. ... I don't think other people have done the sort of sociological roots of human rights in the way he did, how issues emerge through a language and then through being identified in such a way that they can ... explor[e] that sociological root.

⁶⁵ See S. Cohen, *Denial and Acknowledgement: the Impact of Information about Human Rights Violations* (Jerusalem, 1995); and S. Cohen, 'Government responses to human rights reports: claims, denials and counterclaims', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 18 (1996), 517–43.

⁶⁶ He was referring to the consequences of the 1991 B'Tselem Report, co-authored by Stan Cohen, and discussed by Stan Cohen's brother-in-law, David Kretzmer, in 'The torture debate: Israel and beyond', in Downes *et al.*, *Crime, Social Control and Human Rights*, pp. 120–35.

⁶⁷ E. Hughes, 'Good people and dirty work', *Social Problems*, 10 (1962), 3–11.

⁶⁸ See G. Sykes and D. Matza, 'Techniques of neutralization: a theory of delinquency', *American Sociological Review*, 22 (1957), 664–70; and D. Matza, *Delinquency and Drift* (New York, 1964).

The States of Denial stuff... Nobody else ... has really looked at this concept of what is the complicity of people with respect to human rights violations of those who are in some sense peripheral or on the margins or watching.

Another colleague in the same area, Claire Moon, would add that Stan Cohen then proceeded to apply a further idea integral to criminology, that of the politics of social control, to the comparative analysis of transitional justice, examining how societies policed the past by opening up and closing down access to discreditable and dangerous knowledge. The idea raised ancillary questions about how such knowledge should be acted on—about lustration and punishment—and about how (if at all) those who received that knowledge responded to what they were told⁶⁹ (‘the assumption that drives a lot of human rights NGO work is, of course, if only people knew, they would act [but there are] defence mechanisms that prevent us from acting on information about suffering’⁷⁰ she said). And, moving even further down that spiral of actions and reactions, the idea invited an exploration of how states such as Israel responded to those selfsame responses by ‘contest[ing] and rebuff[ing] claims by human rights organizations, such as those made by PCATI [the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel], Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International in their reports?’⁷¹ Their official rejoinder, it seemed, was typically to redefine the victim, the perpetrator and the act in ways that softened the impact of knowledge about torture, restored a measure of legitimacy, distance and necessity to what was done and allayed the bystander’s disquiet—accomplishing, in effect, the very antithesis of a moral panic. In short, Stan Cohen’s criminology of human rights posed very big sociological questions of truth, acknowledgement, catharsis and reparation:

[T]he control by opening and the control by closing was a really interesting way of looking at it because he was pointing right early on to the political dimensions ... looking at the State institutions and at how people were made to speak, who was allowed to speak, who could speak, what kind of truths were being generated and so on.

In Israel, Stan Cohen had encountered what he considered to be an oppressive polity and his antipathy to Leviathan had grown. Robin Cohen

⁶⁹ S. Cohen; ‘State crimes of previous regimes: knowledge, accountability, and the policing of the past’, *Law and Social Inquiry*, 20 (1995), 7–50.

⁷⁰ See S. Cohen and B. Seu; ‘Knowing enough not to feel too much: emotional thinking about human rights appeals’, in M. Bradley and P. Petro (eds.), *Truth Claims* (Piscataway, NJ, 2002), pp. 187–228.

⁷¹ C. Moon, keynote lecture delivered to the Moral Panic, Society and Rights Conference in Honour of Stan Cohen, University of Athens, Greece, 7 Dec. 2013.

said: ‘I think part of what happened to him there was “it’s every bit as bleak as I feared, the State is immutable, the populace is completely behind the State. This looks to me like I can’t believe in any meaningful sense”.’ It is perhaps unremarkable then that one of the few intellectual positions he came to accept almost without cavil for a while was to be the work of Michel Foucault, because Foucault wrote allusively and polemically about the diffuse and overweening tyranny of the State. Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* was an especially graphic, almost poetic, account of the way in which the controls imposed by the State insidiously and systemically permeated every fibre of the body social.⁷² Adam Kuper reflected that ‘there was a stage where Foucault was really terrific’ for him. Stan Cohen himself enthused in 1974 about ‘the marvellously rich French school around Foucault [that] has built up an impressive theoretical edifice . . .’,⁷³ calling it ‘wonderful’ to Nachman Ben-Yehuda, his colleague at the Hebrew University. The consonance between the thoughts of the two men was especially pronounced in Stan Cohen’s paper ‘The punitive city’,⁷⁴ published in 1979, and the influential book, *Visions of Social Control*, published in 1985 whilst he was in Israel, a book replete with references to Foucault, in which he explored how the apparent attenuation of State power perversely only extended State power through what he called boundary-blurring, ‘net-widening’ and ‘mesh-thinning’. But they were references made at a later stage, and by then Stan Cohen had come to be somewhat dubious even about ‘the marvellously rich French school’,⁷⁵ wondering, Nachman Ben-Yehuda recalled, about its meagre empirical foundations.

VI. England Again

Belsize Park in North London was where Stan and Ruth Cohen had first stayed when he was a research student, and it was to become the *Heimat*

⁷² M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (English translation) (Harmondsworth, 1979).

⁷³ S. Cohen, Review of D. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, *New Society* (7 Feb. 1974), 332.

⁷⁴ S. Cohen. ‘The punitive city: notes on the dispersal of social control’, *Social Crises*, 3 (1979), 341–63.

⁷⁵ He was to say that ‘I am altogether unsympathetic to the intellectual climate in which his work flourishes and (being exactly the type of “humanist” he is always attacking) totally opposed to his structuralist denial of human agency. But to write today about punishment and classification without Foucault, is like talking about the unconscious without Freud’: S. Cohen, *Visions of Social Control* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 10.

to which they returned on his appointment to the London School of Economics. His brother said ‘he fixed on one place which was Belsize Park and he never really felt comfortable in any other space. By that I mean to say, did he feel comfortable in South Africa? No. In Israel? No. In the UK at large? No. In American space? No. It was just that little zone ... he needed a certain sense of buzz and activity, eating with friends, meeting interesting people.’ The grand houses of Belsize Park are physically elegant and many of its inhabitants are intellectually animated and urbane. Judith Cohen described it as ‘the hub of this ... political, cosmopolitan environment’. In that last decade or so of his life, working at the LSE and living in North London, he seemed to have become much more content with his lot. Jessica Cohen said ‘I think by the time [the family had] sort of come to terms with all the turmoil of moving back and forth and just accepted that they were now in London.’

VII. The Marginal Man

Judith Cohen said ‘in spite of all their moving around, [my parents] sustained close friendships, often for over fifty years, with individuals from all over world. Friends were hugely important in their lives and it was their close network of friends, both those that went back to the early days in South Africa or England, and more recent ones, that made them feel at home and rooted, especially here in London.’ The family could never simply be described as homeless cosmopolitans. Yet there was, at the same time, a sense in which they were perennial outsiders. Jessica Cohen said they felt that they never completely belonged anywhere. Stan Cohen himself was frequently described by friends and colleagues as a wandering Jew, a marginal man, who had never quite settled. His friend and student, Sharon Shalev, called it ‘the curse of the Jew ... we belong everywhere, we don’t belong anywhere ... we look at the big ugly parts of the societies we live in and ... you belong but you don’t really belong.’ His brother reflected in like vein that Stan Cohen ‘did have that habit of looking past you and that’s what I’m calling displacement and you can put some other label to it which may be more slightly psychoanalytical, but it was a sense of unease with where he was’. And that was an engrained part of his background. At the LSE celebration on 10 December 2013, Robin Cohen further reflected that ‘Identities are made on the move’ and theirs had long been a family in motion.

Marginality has its consequences. It may inhibit a full taking of the role of the other, of empathy and *Verstehen*. Allied to the Young Turks' preoccupation with the deviant actor, it can bring about a descriptive neglect of the sensibilities of everyone else involved in volume crime—the victims, witnesses, bystanders, police, judges and others who are all too readily forgotten or reduced to stereotype—only when roles are reversed and the perpetrator is the state or corporate business do they merit attention. It can in its turn render almost all formal social control incomprehensible, futile or sinister. But marginality can also be propitious intellectually.⁷⁶ It leads to the attainment of an anthropological distance in which the familiar may become strange and problematic; and where, in Alfred Schutz's terminology, one can attain the *epoché* of the natural attitude.⁷⁷ The stranger can question what others accept.⁷⁸ He or she can be sensitive to what Robin Cohen called 'people out of place'. That was probably at the root of Stan Cohen's endemic scepticism and of his analytical strength. He was somewhat outside the taken for granted social and political world (Sharon Shalev said 'he was able, which very few of us are able to do, ... to look at what's happening in his own society and analyse it'). And he was also outside the very analytic frameworks, such as criminology, that examined it. His daughter, Judith, remembered 'I did discuss the kind of general idea of being on the outside of a discipline. And I remember once having a discussion in which he said he thought you were better placed to be critical of a discipline or an ideological position if you were on the outside. And that was a position that he'd adopted.'

Stan Cohen had as a consequence an extraordinary ability to interrogate apparently banal and commonplace problems anew, to say interesting things about them as if encountering them for the very first time. It was a trait commonly cited. Megan Comfort, a former student, captured it when she talked of how 'he suddenly ... turned everything on its head from what you had just been thinking ... you're ... thinking of this one lens and then, where you suddenly apply another lens into the picture, you realise that you have to rethink everything you had just been considering'. He had, she said, a flair for 'getting right in there and turning everything

⁷⁶See E. Stonequist, 'The problem of the marginal man', *American Journal of Sociology*, 41 (1935), 1–12.

⁷⁷A. Schutz, 'Common-sense and scientific interpretation of human action', in M. Natanson (ed.), *Alfred Schutz: Collected Papers*, Vol. 1 (The Hague, 1967), pp. 4–47.

⁷⁸See G. Simmel; 'The stranger', in D. Levine (ed.), *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago, IL, 1971), pp. 143–9.

upside down and making you laugh and making you question'. Conor Gearty, Professor of Human Rights Law at the London School of Economics, captured it too:

He had this incredible freshness. I mean to be able to pick up and run with ideas which were foreign to his area of academic life . . . the problematising of it, the uncertainty about it, the awareness that the [ideas] which we supported were not obvious and needed to be understood and were multi-layered, was really quite new. And getting behind the term and understanding that it stands for something and could easily stand for something else in the hands and in the mouths of somebody else was important.

VIII. Conclusion

Originality, marginality, scepticism, moral purpose and a sense of the absurd encapsulate the defining contradictoriness of the man. He was a sociological relativist committed politically to the enlightenment project of universal human rights. He may have called himself 'a pessimist, a "miserabilist," even a depressive',⁷⁹ but his occasional gloominess about the world and a consciousness of its cruelty were leavened always by a besetting sense of the ludicrous. He was *homo ludens*. Even when he was very ill, *in extremis*, he joked to me that he felt he was, like Job, being punished by God for not believing in Him. He was the only person, his colleague, Claire Moon, remarked, 'who could shoehorn the odd genocide joke into a lecture'.⁸⁰ Laurie Taylor alluded in his obituary to 'his happy readiness to undermine anything too serious with a joke'.⁸¹ And that sensibility occasionally surfaced in his writing. Frances Heidensohn reminded me about what she called 'some endearingly quirky pieces which show his sense of humour and maybe his anarchism', and she cited his 'Conference life: the rough guide'⁸² and 'The last seminar',⁸³ 'a darker paper but also subversive', with its imagery of the university as a madhouse populated by the lost and the damned wandering around mouthing 'Commentaries on

⁷⁹ Response to Public Orator by Professor Stanley Cohen, University of Essex, 9 July 2003, p. 5.

⁸⁰ Moon, 'Looking without seeing, listening without hearing', p. 193.

⁸¹ L. Taylor, Stanley Cohen obituary, *The Guardian*, 23 Jan. 2013.

⁸² S. Cohen, 'Conference life: the rough guide', *Scottish Journal of Criminal Justice Studies*, 1 (1995), 33–59 (also published in *The American Sociologist*, 28(3) (1997), 69–84).

⁸³ S. Cohen, 'The last seminar', *The Sociological Review*, 27 (1979), 1–27.

commentaries. All sense of the world gone, washed away with the excreta of the Left Bank.⁸⁴

An intellectual, enamoured of ideas, he was nevertheless uninterested in history, the natural world and the physical sciences; he could not understand how campaigners could become involved in the preservation of animal species; and he did not go to the theatre (although he loved the opera). He was also far from being unremittingly bookish, having been fascinated by boxing and boxers, and especially Muhammad Ali, since boyhood; he gambled on the horses; and he adored watching old videos of the comedian and magician, Tommy Cooper, who died in 1984, and *Il Bacio di Tosca*, a 1986 film about the operatic denizens of the *Casa di Riposo per Musicisti*, a home founded in 1896 by Giuseppe Verdi for retired opera singers.

His quirkiness was a strength. Stan Cohen's prime achievement was not to be an ethnographer in the mould of Ned Polsky (he did none of that kind of work after *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* and *Psychological Survival*); nor a grand theorist, for he had emphatically eschewed that role; but as a theorist of what might be called the lower middle range,⁸⁵ injecting a number of illuminating, unusual, beautifully phrased and always enticing ideas into the analysis of the misuses of power in societies purporting to be benign. Tim Newburn put it well:

my sense of Stan was that he was quite an unpredictable scholar, an imaginative, unpredictable scholar. So I would have said that there have been many people working as it were, in the field of criminology broadly defined, sociology, deviance and so forth, who have done great things. But I, having read one or two of their great things, I would sort of know what was coming next . . . and that's not meant in any disparaging way . . . I was never quite sure what he was going to do next and where he was going to come from other than a sort of overriding concern with justice in some broad form.

PAUL ROCK

Fellow of the Academy

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⁸⁴S. Cohen, 'The last seminar', *The Sociological Review*, 27 (1979), 12.

⁸⁵See R. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Glencoe, IL, 1957).