

# Pedagogy

## An alien institution

Sending children to school is a cultural option. It is a practice associated with a certain cultural context and a certain historical experience. The school institution both as a system and as a means towards certain ends cannot therefore be perceived in the same way by all. A school system that suits some will not suit others, but it is very common (and very ethnocentric) to believe otherwise. This may be the root cause of many failures.

Acceptance of school, its methods and its goals, is not universal. It is all the more vital to emphasise this, as it is so rarely taken into account, for various reasons. One of these is that the aims of school are always presented in their noblest light: one has only to read declarations in which it is presented as an instrument of social progress, broadening horizons and developing personal autonomy. This assumes too readily, on the one hand that everybody sees these as desirable goals, and secondly that every child who attends school is necessarily going to attain them. To promote these ideas without submitting them to critical analysis – even if it is only a critique of how they are applied in the real world – is to risk (the end justifying the means) obscuring the ill-effects of practice behind the nobility of goals.

The institution of school occupies a central role within the host societies of Gypsies and Travellers. A very high proportion of education takes place within the framework of the school system, to a degree that (as we pointed out in the first chapters) "education" and "schooling" tend to be seen as synonymous (– even in the national monographs on which this report is based). It is easy to lose sight of the fact that there also exists a fundamental in-family education which may be complementary or in opposition to a given type of school education. Here too the various national monographs demonstrate how widespread this ethnocentric view is: in the working questionnaire, under the heading "What pedagogic projects?" the answers were almost exclusively concerned with state policies, school policies, teachers' ideas. Parents' ideas were rarely mentioned. There are signs too of underestimating the fundamental, and negative, role that school may play in a policy of eliminating minorities: it can easily and effectively participate in assimilating the minority groups subjected to it, all the more so as attendance is often compulsory. Yes, school can "form" a child – but its role may be conforming, reforming, or deforming.

*One must never forget that, for Gypsies, school is an alien institution, and an integral part of a universe which has for centuries been a threatening one.*

"School runs a double risk of transforming acculturation into deculturation, because it plays a role of 'cutting off' (the child finds himself within an alien world) and because it is inherently geared towards the *inculcation* of new values. School is after all one of the major instruments of socialisation and one with which the child is in contact throughout virtually all the most important years of his life. Faced with a strange, alien teacher, usually mixed in with children who are also of a different background, and expected to behave in a passive and receptive manner,

the child is very vulnerable. And one could ponder indefinitely the implications of the following observation by the authors of *La Reproduction*: 'All pedagogic action is objectively a form of symbolic violence as well as an imposition, by an arbitrary power, of an arbitrary cultural content' [Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970, p. 19]. This is not to say that nothing should be undertaken, but that one must take account of the consequences of what one does. Conflict between two antagonistic systems of socialisation can be grave for the individual caught between them, taking the forms of role-conflict, loss of identity, cultural schizophrenia. Nowadays, the number of legally stateless persons is diminishing, as they acquire nationality. Will acculturation (in which schooling will play an active role) result in a growing number of 'culturally stateless persons' who will not know where to fit in?" [Liégeois, 1980b].

There is no point in cluttering this report with a detailed analysis of the historical conditions in which the schooling of Gypsy children has taken place. We have already, in part I, gone into the policies followed over the centuries; then, under the heading "The History of School Provision" we pointed out that "In every state, school policy has been coherent with overall policy as regards Gypsies/Travellers." This policy of negation (whatever its forms) pursued over the centuries; the constant presence of negative, erroneous images and prejudices; the arbitrary and violent measures taken against Gypsies and Travellers; the fact that school is an institution uniquely – totally – part of the environment perceived by Gypsies as coercive: all imply that school can only be experienced as yet another imposition, as a tentacle grasping at the children to ensnare and assimilate them. An institution all the more disconcerting in that, although the child is obliged to attend, he is often not permitted to do so, or, having got in, must fight in order to remain, because his relations with other children are still tainted with the mark of centuries of conflict between nomads and the Settled. While present he has, moreover, the impression of representing a way of life that is somehow illegitimate, when his culture and language are marginalised or even stigmatised in word and deed. The layout of tables and chairs, the imposed layout of caravans on official sites. All are products of the same – alien – order.

Whatever the present efforts to make Gypsy and Traveller children feel at home in school, and to adapt teaching to suit them, such efforts cannot be separated from the broad spectrum of "Gypsy policy" of which they are a part. It will take more than a few months or even years to cleanse actions and minds of the mistrust which has characterised relations between the two communities for so long. It is thus all the more important for more and more Traveller children to have a positive experience of school, and equally important to discover, to understand, and to take into account, the generally misunderstood or ignored reasons which make Gypsy parents wary of sending their children there.

The following analysis pertaining to compulsory schooling at secondary level, may well be valid for other – most? – cases: "For the Gypsies, school, with its demand for attendance and the corresponding conditions of that attendance, is a constant source of anxiety and conflict... it is clear that the children do not see themselves as a problem. For them it is undeniable that school is the problem. The Gypsies' attitudes to their so called 'devious' behaviour is illuminating. For each of the instances of misconduct as described by the staff, they have their own rationalisation and justification... It is observable that their behaviour is a response to their dislike of school arising

from their feelings of being victims of prejudice and discrimination. It is the sense of injustice which influences their behavioural responses more than anything else" [Ivatts, 1975, p. 16].

"On his first day of school the Gypsy child must confront a totally new, and considerably different, world from that which he has known up to now: his parents, his lifestyle, their rules. Since this situation repeats itself throughout his school career, we perceive that the rapidity of his adaptation is astonishing. But if his first experience of school has been negative (difficult relations with teachers or with other children – Gypsy or not), the child will form an impression of school as enemy territory and it will be a hard job for the parents to persuade him to return: I regularly meet children who have stopped attending school altogether for these reasons... What is more, the Gypsy child will base his ideas of our society on his experiences in the classroom, and this is where his preconceptions will become more and more rooted the longer he attends" [Grimaud, 1984, p. 46].

In addition to the fact that school has, up to now, been perceived as a threatening, forbidding institution, is the objective fact of its non-adaptation to the Gypsy child's needs. On the one hand the Gypsy has always perceived the risk he runs in submitting his children to a value-system which is not his and which he does not want them to pick up. On the other – and there is copious evidence on this point – up to now, "There has been no connection for Gypsies between scholastic success and economic success (since school provided no skills of relevance to Gypsy work-patterns) nor between scholastic success and social success (schooling being an alien concept, success at it brought no status increase in the eyes of the child's own community). In fact one could say truthfully that in both respects schooling was – still is – regarded as a handicap, since the time wasted at it has kept the child from picking up economic skills and loosened his sense of integration in the group" [Liégeois, 1983b].

Success, flexibility, social status – all are still totally unconnected to anything school has to offer. Indeed the submission of the child to the school system, and his success by that system's criteria, entails a degree of distancing from his family (sometimes with drastic results) due to the consequent weakening of the group's social coherence – which, as we explained earlier, is a paramount priority.

"This year six of our old girls got married. Not one of them wanted to marry a Gypsy. This girl has a balanced personality, but stressed to us that she had not wanted to marry a Gypsy" [report from the manager of a home economics training centre for adolescent girls, France, 1968]. "Two girls, both successful in school, had a very difficult adolescence: the first refused to live the Gypsy lifestyle and slashed her wrists to avoid getting married according to custom; the other did submit to the laws of the group, and she's better adjusted now than the first... Another Rom did well in school, and married a (non-Gypsy) schoolteacher. They had two children and he worked as a company 'rep' (a job which is quite similar to hawking, selling door-to-door). But in the end he couldn't bear being cut off from his own people; he deserted his wife and married a Gypsy girl" [in: *Journées d'Étude des Techniciens Sociaux*, France, CNIN, June 1972, p. 18].

The concept of school failure is obviously just as subjective as that of success. For the Gypsies, school failure has up to now been the failure of the school, which has not been able to attract them, hold on to them, or equip them with the tools essential for adaptation to the modern world. There is even a (compensatory?) pride in emphasising that Gypsies

get on just fine without school (that is, without the help of non-Gypsies). At present, Gypsies on the whole cope with their inability to read and write without feeling guilty for being "illiterate", despite being immersed in societies where there is continual bombardment from the written word. "We prefer to be Gypsies by first choice, than non-Gypsies by second choice" [a Gypsy speaking at an international seminar, cf. Liégeois, 1983b]. Likewise, in a complementary fashion, certain groups of Travellers do make use of their few members who can read and write: "This is particularly the case among the Belgikarja Roma, among whom a literate woman from a different ethnic group, an adult who learned to read and write outside the school system, or a young person who – unusually – attended boarding school, can provide the necessary link with the outside world" [Reyniers]. Yet we must be wary of generalising: "Other families have more school experience, be it because school has provided them with a means of affirming their identity in the 'world outside', or simply 'by accident'" [Reyniers]. If we wish to deepen our understanding of how the school is perceived, we should examine the uses of literacy – while bearing in mind that all generalisation is risky.

To this purpose we shall quote at length from the monograph compiled for this report focusing specifically on the question of education within the Gypsy milieu. Starting with a resumé: "Writing as a means of communicating one's own ideas is only relevant as regards strangers. As there are no strangers in a Gypsy community, it is writing itself which is the stranger, and the presence of semi-literate individuals suffices for those exceptional cases (letter-writing, official forms, etc.) where such skills are required. Since, for Gypsies, language is not an instrument of conceptual analysis, but their basic means of communication and interaction, it is seen as something personal to the group. They tend to be wary of how they use it with non-Gypsies, and avoid written communication, which they see as far less persuasive and expressive than person-to-person action" [Piasere].

To put it more concisely, but still being very wary of generalisations because "This could be quite meaningless in future situations unforeseeable at present. The use of the written code obviously implies the existence of transmitters and receptors... From the Rom Gypsy's point of view, the following four situations are possible:

Each of these situations will differ according to circumstances.



1) *Gadjo-Gadjo*: For the Roma, this is the expected use of writing, whatever the circumstances. Writing was invented by Gadje, for use by Gadje. For Roma today, knowing how to read and write is seen as a Gadjo characteristic, an ethnic indicator, and all things written are seen as typically Gadjo and thus typically alien, be they books, newspapers, forms to be filled, or documents of whatever kind.

2) *Gadjo-Rom*: Living among the Gadje, surrounded by the world of writing, the Roma recognise as 'useful' the ability to decipher this Gadjo code. Being able to read is seen, not as prestigious, but as advantageous. On the other hand, that it is not indispensable is clearly demonstrated by the number of literate Gadje who behave stupidly. Knowing how to read may also be perceived as dangerous, since reading 'makes a person vulnerable to the 'lies' of the Gadje' [Dick-Zatta, MS].

3) *Rom-Gadjo*: Since writing is an intrinsically Gadjo instrument, the Rom would never by choice use it in communicating with them. Even filling out a basic form or signing a document is considered a tricky business. If a Rom should master writing and become a writer himself, or if he takes to 'writing' through an intermediary (for example by dictating his life story to a Gadjo) he may often find himself mocked or criticised or ignored by the others. The fact of knowing how to write is not encouraged, and written composition which tells the Gadjo more than he ought to know is frowned upon.

4) *Rom-Rom*: In a very few cases we have come across Roma composing written texts expressly for other Roma: letters, postcards, and other brief messages. Apart from such situations, the Rom sees writing as a totally inadequate means of communicating with another Rom. Even when written communication does take place, it is the act itself which is significant, more than the actual information imparted. Without going into detailed analysis of the text, a letter such as the following is clearly communication for communication's sake:

'Dear Reja, we are well and hope that you are too. How is your wife? How are your children? I am well and so is Mama. I hope that you all are well. Mama says hello. Greetings to your wife and children. Hello from me. Stay well.'

(...) Today, as for decades past, most Gypsies only half-accept reading and writing; they prefer to be on the receiving end and let a few members of the group handle the informal and prestigious task of knowing how to use a pen" [Piasere].

Evidence from various countries suggests that the situation described above is dominant – which is not to say that it is exclusive. Different groups have different attitudes, and within family groups there can be differences between generations or individuals.

To give an example from *England*: "Some (of the children) are eager to display the skills they have acquired. In a world where the all powerful adult has to bring them their forms and letters to decipher, literacy is seen as a powerful tool, it has given them considerable cachet, something which is not very common for them. One of the pupils entered a National Story Writing Competition for Gypsy children and won third prize; this aroused high glee amongst her family and friends and envy amongst the rest" [Joan Lockton, in *Traveller Education*, 1984, p.16].

## Gypsy education

Several years ago in the course of a critical study of social work geared towards Gypsies, we made the observation that little (indeed at the time none whatsoever) attention has been given to the question of maladjustment or deviance *within the Gypsy context*. Gypsies as a whole were seen as maladjusted or deviant, to be "readjusted" or "reintegrated". This is yet another sign of rampant ethnocentrism and an evolutionism which is still alive and well, since only *one* society is taken as universal reference point, a model of "normality", and groups which do not conform are seen either as maladjusted or "backward", stuck in a primitive state from which they should be helped to emerge [Liégeois, 1977a]. The same observation also applies to the question of education *within the Gypsy context*: "Either it is mentioned, with the claim that it does not exist, or it is not mentioned in order not to have to admit that it does" [Piasere].

The report on education in the Gypsy environment cites a flagrant example of ignoring this facet of education while considering questions of schooling [Piasere]. In one of the countries covered by this study there exists a journal of high quality and with a wide readership. Those producing it have been involved in school provision for Gypsy children for decades, and the magazine reflects this. Over its twenty-year existence, it has published 796 articles totalling 5,760 pages. One hundred and forty of these articles are concerned with schooling, pedagogy, and didactics – to a total of 1,082 pages. If we add in a few more pages which deal with other aspects of school provision under other headings, at least 20% of the total material published deals with this subject. And – a single, three-page text, attesting to the importance of in-family education. That makes a total of 0.05% of the content on Gypsy education.

This is a clear illustration of a tendency which does not happen by chance but, as we have regularly emphasised, is linked with both history and politics. The periodical in question is far from alone in exhibiting it; indeed, as the author of the report points out, "We believe that if we were to subject other specialised periodicals to the same analysis, findings would probably be even more discouraging" [Piasere].

In-family education is not only alive and well, but continues to provide the perfect socialisation to enable the Gypsy child to adapt to his family circle and to the broader environment. We shall not repeat here the points raised in the section on "Education" – nor is this report the place to give a description/analysis of Traveller education methods. That is a task for ethnographers, though few such studies exist to date and those which do are rarely consulted by those involved in school provision. This lack is often lamented by teachers who would prefer to base their methods on existing dynamics rather than risk running into conflict with them. Just as we commented earlier on the potential benefits of linking training with information, a link between cultural anthropology and pedagogy would be similarly beneficial.

Generally speaking, teachers do recognise, even if only indirectly, the degree to which in-family education is responsible for producing a strong child who is well adapted to and integrated within a large and reassuring social body.

"Children and parents visualise the future in the same way: not as (hoped-for or dreaded) social change, but as a reproduction of the present: the children will live in trailers and continue in their parents' trades. This reproduction is not perceived as something to accept fatalistically, but as a desirable fact – as a value. In consequence, Gypsy children (at least, those in the group I deal with) do not exhibit the fragility linked with classes of immigrant children, and described as 'the second generation phenomenon': torn between family values and those of assimilation. On the contrary, they arrive in school armoured with strong values which permit them to experience it as a place of secondary values. They do not see school as providing anything connected with social status, future careers, or practical skill. To put it bluntly, scholastic failure does not exist for Gypsies; the concept makes no sense" [Cotonnac, 1983].

Evidence on this point is broadly in agreement. "Success, adaptation, and social promotion were outside any school curriculum. It must be borne in mind that even now, as far as Gypsies are concerned, 'scholastic failure' is nonsense. Or, when it does take on meaning, it is as the dramatic manifestation of yet another form of rejection" [synopsis of a Council of Europe seminar, cf. Liégeois, 1983b].

In most cases Gypsies find themselves, up to the present, *parallel to* the institution of school. This has the effect of "rendering futile all pedagogical practices linked to the institutional and psychological pressure on which a so-called normal school course is based" [Cotonnac, 1983]. Gypsy parents are, and remain, above all "parents of children" rather than "parents of pupils" [a distinction underlined by L. Guibert in correspondence with the author]. Many reports emphasise their frequent fear that school will submit their children to influences which will alienate them from their background, undermining parents' moral authority and weakening group cohesion. Parents do not see it as their role to reinforce the workings of the school institution on their children, for example by encouraging their studies. As far as they're concerned the important thing is their child, and it is up to the school to adapt to him – that is to say, above all, respectfully.

"The high concept that Gypsies have of the moral prestige and dignity of each person from the earliest childhood plays an important role in connection with school. Gypsy parents will not tolerate their children being humiliated, all the less so by strangers, and if this happens the children will be withdrawn from school. Moreover they will never force an unwilling child to attend, since he too has the right to make a free choice, and to have it respected" [Karpati/Massano].

Parents are proud of the education they provide and convinced of its quality, particularly in comparison with the education given by the non-Traveller society around them, and the results it brings.

In Sweden a child psychologist in close contact with families indicated that, when talking with parents, they were only interested in knowing what went on amongst the Swedes, since they felt they already knew about Gypsy families. "When, on a few occasions I wondered why they asked so few questions about the bringing-up of children, while their non-Gypsy counterparts asked so many, they answered: 'Swedes have problems, but we haven't'. On the basis of the analysis of Gypsy socialisation, this statement must be regarded as a true one. It is not a question of disstimulation. They may, of course, find their children troublesome, but generally speaking the means and aims of child rearing are no problem; they go without saying... They acknowledged me as an expert on child rearing, but not for Gypsy children. They were even rather interested to hear me tell what problems non-Gypsy parents had and what advice I gave in my professional capacity. On the other hand, I was clearly not regarded as an expert on Gypsy children. When, at times, I made suggestions on how to deal with upbringing situations they found irritating, the reply was usually: 'But that won't work with Gypsy children, you know'" [Gustafsson, 1973, p.94].

Moreover, parents are aware of the fact that schooling, as it generally exists, teaches their children far less than they do themselves:

"Even schooling in a proper school teaches us nothing. You learn stuff for Gadje. It's a waste of time for Gypsy children. The staff think we have to adjust to settled life. They won't listen to us. They don't want to know what we need. We and only we are capable of teaching our children what they need to get on in real life: knowing about different metals, about repairing cane chair-bottoms... Gypsy children take an active interest in such things from a very early age. At six or seven they already want to go out with their father and mother. That's how they learn something worth knowing on the road" [a nomadic Manouche, aged thirty-eight, quoted by Reyniers].

"One commonly employed argument is that boys are better able to learn their future trade from their father than from the school (apart from which there is no formal vocational training in typical

caravan-dweller occupations) and that girls can learn 'house' keeping just as well – or better – from their mothers. Another argument is that further education is 'simply training for unemployment' and that given the amount of available labour, employers are unlikely to recruit caravan-dwellers or Gypsies" [Hovens et al].

"Parents are not negative but often indifferent... they obviously prefer to keep them to their way of earning life, than to press them to waste their time in classrooms 'doing nothing'. They have so many problems to solve before they can see a probable prospective of a different way of life for their children. Gypsies were born to live free, running around the fields. Too much education is evil. It leads to wars. You can easily see it' (A. Sideris, President of the A. Varvara Association). 'Why be highly educated or qualified? So many educated people are unemployed. Or should we exchange our trade for slavery in factories?'" [Korré/Marselos].

The relation between schooling and Traveller economic practices, which determine the individual's capacity to survive with independence, is direct and crucial, for three reasons:

First: as emphasised above, there is no correlation between presence in school/scholastic success, and economic success. So what's the point in undergoing – with difficulty – schooling, and getting nothing out of it, or even being penalised for it? Since the future cannot be foreseen, the best attitude is to live in the present, and (for the moment at any rate) the economic activities practised by Gypsies are the most appropriate for their situation.

Next: school fails to take into account the economic activities practised by parents, with two consequences. First, school is of no direct help in preparing for future work, and so can objectively be dismissed as useless. Secondly, it removes the child from his family for a considerable period each day, thereby depriving him of an opportunity to learn by working with his parents, and simultaneously depriving the family of the child's economic contribution. This two-way deprivation becomes particularly significant when the child reaches secondary school age. Almost all the national reports, and numerous other commentaries, strongly emphasise the negative short-term effect of the absence of the child from his family: by attending school, he doesn't learn to work, and he doesn't help the family. When he leaves school, he can't "get a job", but he doesn't know how to work like a Gypsy.

Finally, the above points take on particular significance when we see them within the socio-historical and socio-economic context outlined above. The actual economic situation of a certain number of families cries out for functional, useful, rapid schooling.

Even in the case of the immediate project of learning to read and write, and within the framework of adult training, "The grave economic problems of the participants pose a serious obstacle to their willingness to tackle the difficult task of learning to read and write. In this context, the fact that literacy will not bring an automatic and immediate improvement to their economic situation plays an important role. The experience of being able to read on the course, yet being unable to get any good out of it in the world outside, had a demoralising repercussion on the learning process" [Bremer Volkshochschule, 1983, p.30]

## Two pedagogies

Traditional school methods do not "educate" the Gypsy or Traveller child. Gypsies are educated by traditional Gypsy methods – and there is a very significant gap between the methods and goals of the two systems. The conflicts which every child feels between his home and school environments are exacerbated in the case of the Gypsy child. He does not arrive in the school as a sort of empty jug to be filled; he brings with him his cultural baggage and psychological profile. In fact, there is no empty space within him – all of the space is already occupied, and it is a question of working with the existing elements, and building on them, rather than (as some still see their task) removing certain elements and replacing them with others. The child's entry into school represents a major break for both parents and children, as Gypsy society and socialisation in no way intermesh with it.

"School denies the Gypsy child. It denies his physical appearance, his mother tongue, his skills and his experiences. While the non-Gypsy child continues on his 'natural' path, the Gypsy child is being asked to 'start from scratch'" [Weiler, 1979, p.259, quoted by Reemtsma]. "Faced with the existing school system, with its focus on performance, teachers, and exams, many children, adolescents and parents feel threatened by school because its organisation, goals and teaching content have virtually no relation to Gypsy culture or to the child's experience" [Reemtsma]. "Gypsies and Travellers express a series of recriminations about school, which is accused of lack of respect for the essentials of their culture. The school institution is perceived essentially as a field of confrontation between their society and that of the Gadje" [Reyniers].

School can be deeply upsetting for the child who attends it.

"Gypsy children would be motivated to attend Gadjo school if it gave them access to new and varied skills; instead, it tends to stifle eclecticism. While their society perceives childhood and adolescence as part of an uninterrupted continuum, children in school are pigeonholed by age. Just at the moment when the Gypsy community requires of the child that he form a coherent and richly symbolic vision of the Gadjo and his world, the Gadje (by the method and content of their teaching) present him with a fragmented vision of themselves (analysing Gadjo words, different periods of history, different types of Gadjo: nations, states...) which tends to be entirely detached from the symbolic construction of the Gypsy. How can Gadjo school teach the child to be Gypsy?" [Piasere].

Gypsy children mature very early, yet school has a tendency to impose infantile behaviour on them, instead of developing their sense of responsibility and building on their capacities; teachers as well as parents frequently mention this. "A number of the parents said that Traveller children had skills and abilities that no 'country' children had – they could survive without adult help in situations that no 'country' child could cope with. They would not want them to lose these abilities or their strong family ties. Several parents stated that there was more to education than book knowledge and that many Settled people who considered themselves to be very educated were in fact very ignorant as their attitudes revealed" [McCarthy].

School can have a destructive influence on the society that entrusts it with its children. Particularly in the context of assimilationist policies, the automatic assumption is that Gypsies and their children are attracted by the lifestyle of the

surrounding society. Yet their aspirations – be they in the realm of education, accommodation or work, are not necessarily the same as other people's, nor indeed are they necessarily the same from one Gypsy group, or even one Gypsy family, to the next. As we have already mentioned, at present in many societies school is charged with an enormous proportion of the child's overall education, responsibility for which has been transferred from the family. What is more, scholastic teaching – as a part of "education" in the broadest sense – is an adaptive, crucial, strategic vehicle reinforcing and maintaining – indeed reproducing – the profile of the society of which it is a part. Yet if the vehicle efficiently maintains the dominant society, it must be threatening to a minority society on which it is imposed from without, since it seeks educative hegemony.

It is within this context that Gypsy and Traveller parents' reservations must be considered. These are eloquently summed up in the words of a Greek Gypsy saying, "He who knows much, suffers much" [Marselos]. We must look deeper to understand their meaning.

"When one of the members of a group of parents once said, 'Children can die of knowing too much', it was perhaps not merely an expression of magical conceptions, but still more a symbolic way of saying that as a result of the knowledge imparted by the school the Gypsy child dies; it becomes a Swedish child instead" [Gustafsson, 1973, p.87].

"Perhaps we can begin to comprehend the impasse in which school provision for Gypsy children is still locked. A lot of time and thought have gone into investigating the school atmosphere, attendance, difficulty in relating to non-Gypsies; there are many didactic studies on things like the use of non-Gypsy language, the problem of culturally alien teaching materials and so on. Yet the fundamental (unconscious?) fear is of disturbing 'Gypsy thought', a possibility which up to now has effectively blocked the schooling process. 'Gypsy thought' balks at the verbal autopsy of experience, social behaviour and belief. 'Gypsy thought' does not perceive language as having an existence independent of its practical everyday content. 'Gypsy thought' avoids distancing itself from particular experience and entering into the realm of the hypothetical and the deductive. 'Gypsy thought' fears Gadjjo schooling precisely because it suspects that an intensive use of the written word would destroy it, thereby destroying community cohesion" [Piasere].

It would be easy to measure the breadth of the gap between the two education systems produced by the presence in school of Traveller children who are products and bearers of an educational system radically different from – and often opposed to – that of most schools. If we were to picture the systems as two circles, we would see that they hardly intersect at all. Or, if we were to represent the elements conveyed in the two systems (organisation of space and time, attitudes to various types of behaviour, degree of initiative, of independence, etc.) as two parallel columns, we would see that the parallels conform to their definition, that is, they do not meet – even less so, as most of the elements are in an opposition which is difficult to reduce. As school does attempt to reduce them, the child is disturbed and frustrated. Many studies and teachers' own observations have shown that the Traveller child cannot balance these contradictory relationships within the school context. Not only does the school actively seek to promote the values which it sees as its very function to transmit, but as a rule it also entirely negates the positive values upon which the

Gypsy child is so solidly based outside of school: his independence, initiative, mobility, creativity, solidarity... all become handicaps.

Quite apart from this point-by-point opposition, we are dealing here with "two different philosophies of education (reflecting two different conceptions of the world) the core principles of which seem to be the following:

*Vision of others:*

- 1) For the Rom, Sinti, etc., Gadjé are 'others' par excellence; they are considered to be the 'environment' in which one must live and survive both materially and symbolically.
- 2) For European non-Gypsies, Gypsies are 'others' among many 'others', an element of folklore among many other such elements, one problem among many, one marginal group among many.

*Vision of self:*

- 1) The Rom, Sinti, etc. do not see the world of children and the world of adults as separated by barriers. The Gypsy world is a whole, both vertically (inter-generationally) and horizontally (intra-generationally).
- 2) European non-Gypsies conceive and live their lives in stages: stages of status marked by 'rites de passage', stages in one's professional career, etc.

*Restrains:*

- 1) In order to live amongst Gadjé, the Rom, Sinti, etc. must cultivate eclecticism and a readiness to change, and even more importantly – a fundamental consideration – they must bequeath to their children a capacity for eclecticism and readiness to change.
- 2) The social division of work, like the work market, of European non-Gypsies is geared towards superspecialisations (of which 'Gypstology' is but one) and the proliferation of school as a place of transmission privileged with selected knowledge, is a direct consequence.

Anthropologists and cognitive psychologists are in broad agreement as to the changes wrought by the introduction of written communication onto thinking patterns based on oral communication: decontextualisation of knowledge; materialisation of the linguistic act; rigidity of discourse; development of formalisation, type of memory, type of classification, development of individualism. It is clear, then, that a simple change of communication technique has enormous repercussions on thinking patterns. Writing changes a people's worldview totally: it modifies the structure of cognitive processes and perhaps even of perception itself. One must not, therefore, treat literacy and schooling as simple tools, untainted by cultural overtones, but instead conceive them as means with clearly defined and predictable consequences. The choice of 'No, but...' or of 'Yes, but...' of most of the Gypsy populations of Western Europe is no accident, but a strategy of adaptation to the non-Gypsy environment...

Understanding Gypsy thinking patterns is thus essential in order to comprehend the partiality – and thus to avoid the hypocrisy – of an 'intercultural' approach, since it is clear that the problem is no longer, for example, simply to introduce the teaching of 'Gypsy history', but how to teach history to Gypsies... The study of Gypsy thinking should have been the very first stage in the founding of a pedagogy for Gypsies, whereas most of the time Gypsy thinking has simply been denied and thrown into the rubbish bin to which is consigned all 'primitive thinking', all the thoughts that must be eradicated from the heads of 'backward' peoples, to be replaced by our, more 'civilised', ones." [Piasere].

## Behaviour in conflict

Confrontational attitudes may develop partly as a response to the fact of having to attend school in the first place, and partly as a response to the school as it is. This consideration is important because each of these attitudes carries different implications for practice – and for policy. It is a good idea to sit down with parents and to examine carefully the reasons behind their attitudes. We repeat once again that no generalisations can be made, and that the range of attitudes and aspirations of parents as well as children, is very broad. If all of them share the misgivings described above, and many oppose schooling because of them, there is nonetheless a growing number who do want schooling for their children – but not "at any price". "If we can't have them taught our way we don't want them taught at all" [an Irish Traveller parent quoted in Quirke, 1984].

"Many examples show that parents who are satisfied with a school will do everything they can to remain near it for as long as possible, and that members of the extended family group camped in the same area will follow their kin into attending the satisfactory school. Families may even move to the area expressly to send their children to school there." But, conversely, "the Gypsies will throw a spanner into the works to stop developments (at school) at the first suspicion of danger" [Ferté, 1984].

Though attitudes differ, opposition manifests itself in similar types of behaviour:

"The five children with whom I worked were called Valérie, Patricia, Roger, Christophe and Albert. In their own culture they became, respectively, Stora, Larma, Volki, Jessy, Humberto... The use of Gadjo names enabled them to avoid involving themselves 'wholly' when interacting with Gadje... If someone calls me Roger instead of Volki, then the social (or scholastic) judgment he passes upon me concerns only my capacity to relate to the Gadje (acculturation), but does not concern my socialisation within my own group (enculturation)" [M. Pragnère, MS].

The child who does not wish to attend school utilises and manipulates the situation (whether consciously or not), explaining his absence to school personnel in terms of family or social reasons – or, to his parents, his refusal to go in terms of the bad treatment he receives there. Within the school itself there are other forms of resistance: "It is very common to come across children who are entirely or semi mute. When they speak you would think you were listening to a deaf-mute attempting to produce sound. Afterwards it is most surprising to hear these children, with totally 'normal' phrasing in well-pitched voices, talking nineteen to the dozen amongst themselves in the playground" [Ferté, 1984].

The reasons given for explaining absence from school are manifold. Here is a mixed bag of them, taken from various sources: "The distance from school, late bed-times, holidays and the need of help in the home (for girls). In this context, sickness can be an excuse for all sorts of other reasons." "The Gypsies exploit any flexibility and compromise shown in individual cases. Any leniency allowed to one child is used to apply to all the children, or is used as a guideline for future occasions." "All excuses are 'good', but in my experience, there is no real cause." "One mother said that her son was unable to go to school because he had no trousers. When asked what he was wearing at present she said that they were brown and not allowed in school. The grey ones had a big hole in the crotch." "The girls are helping their mothers (doing the washing)? The boys are helping their fathers with scrap?"

In an example from a secondary school in *England*, children habitually miss their bus: "Another facet of behaviour which identifies the Gypsies as a disruptive and uncooperative group is the persistent failure to wear school uniform... In the past, blatant breaches in the rule often resulted in the offender being sent home, but the more common breach nowadays is in regard to small items, such as shoe colour and design, no tie or irregular shirt colour and design, etc. The wearing of jewellery is also against school rules, and periodic purges usually hit the Gypsies hard with their liking for precious metal, rings and earrings... A more disturbing feature of their disruptive behaviour, as seen by the staff, is the common occurrence of the Gypsies operating a united power group within the school... they always sit together ... their social mixing with other children is peripheral and limited... Many senior members of staff are of the opinion that the school cannot offer them anything in the present situation. 'If you give them an inch they take a yard'; the children 'beat the system every time' and are 'out of tune with the school' in most ways.

It is, of course, not as simple as it seems. The children take with them to school attitudes which are anti-school and anti-authority. These, inevitably, elicit strong reactions and responses from the staff and other non-Gypsy children. The situation is thus compounded and results in a strengthened confirmation that the original definitions of each side were right" [Ivatts, 1975, pp.13, 14, 27].

"This refusal, conscious or not, is entirely functional; it is geared towards preserving culture and cultural identity, and thereby the social and psychological equilibrium of the group: all the more so since, in a society founded on oral tradition, without written archives, 'The perception of the new quickly merges with the old' [Mead, 1970, p. 52]. It is for this reason that, as one US Rom put it, 'The Rom avoid the school system like the plague! While most other American minority groups are organising to demand a better education for their children, the Rom are racking their brains for ways to keep them at home' [Dimas, 1975]. The author goes on to speak of 'collective truancy' giving the following factors to be taken into account:

- reduction of time spent in school reduces proportionately the influence of the teachers' value system on the Rom child, and totally eliminates 'peer-pressure' from non-Rom children – (two of the most powerful forces in the socialisation process);
- illiteracy blocks all socialisation through the written word, which in turn blocks identification with alien culture heroes in books and novels;
- illiteracy guarantees that Romani will remain the first language of every Rom;
- illiteracy tends to discourage mixed marriages... [op. cit., pp.14-15].

Ways of rejecting school, or of utilising rejection, are manifold... Once again it is unwise to judge this attitude too quickly; broader analysis demonstrates that it is a question of the sometimes desperate measures taken by individuals to preserve their culture, who can succeed or fail in negotiating the acculturation process directed at them" [Liégeois, 1980b].

Even when it is no longer a question of children's schooling, but of literacy for adults, attitudes and behaviour are the same. Two examples:

First, an extract taken from notes made in the Paris area one March evening in 1971, during a meeting held by a voluntary organisation for teaching Gypsies. The author of the notes was brought along to the meeting by one of the Rom invited there. About a dozen Rom<sup>6</sup>, half of them accompanied by their wives, were present. The question of when to hold the courses was under discussion; here are some reactions.

- "The Rom say that if it's on such-and-such an evening, it will clash with the Film of the Week' on telly, and no one will show up.
- Tuesday seems ideal: no film on the telly, and the local cinemas are closed. But it's the day the Pentecostalist families attend their meeting.
- The Rom argued very loudly, frightening the Gadje present.
- Some try to corner the literacy teachers for themselves: 'You can come to my place, have dinner, teach me, my wife and my kids.'
- Some refuse to let their wives learn to read and write, laughing, 'Afterwards she'll be writing to lovers - My darling! My love!'
- Some emphasise that if there is an important meeting, for example if an important Rom happens to be passing through, or if there's a wedding on, no one will show up for class.
- The immediate wishes of the group: to be able to read posters and street signs" [Liègeois, MS.].

Next, a description of the workings of an adult class in *Sweden*: "Many students arrive at very irregular intervals during the school day. The lessons are not infrequently interrupted by the students walking in and out of the classroom, leaving the lessons to make telephone calls, talking to someone in a neighbouring classroom, and so on. Nor is it unusual for the students to leave the school before the end of the day's lessons. Much Romani is spoken during the lessons; this leaves the teachers outside the conversation and they sometimes seem to be forgotten completely...

When Gypsies were asked what they thought of the adult school, most of them answered that it was a good school, and that it did not need altering. Reading, writing and arithmetic were best. When asked to suggest improvements, they mentioned the length of the school day - which they would like shorter - and the size of their grants - which they would like greater...

One explanation, a convenient one in this situation, is that the Gypsies are really only interested in the money they get for attending school. For my part, I prefer to explain the conduct of the Gypsies in relation to the adult school as a meaningful, purposeful and logical expression of the Gypsies' effort to preserve their cultural autonomy. Such an explanation does not require us to see their reaction as an expression of a conscious intention, but rather as a result of these efforts" [Gustafsson, 1973, pp. 46-47].

In various questionnaires, the reasons most often mentioned by teachers for the absenteeism of Gypsy pupils are "lack of interest" or "parental opposition". As we have seen, such "disinterest" and "opposition" are only superficially true, a façade behind which we must always look for deeper causes. Disinterest is not simple negligence; it is conscious, aware, often well thought out. Opposition is not simple reaction, but occurs (in general if not in each individual case) as part of an overall strategy of refusal: "A long history of conflict between the school and their parents and elder brothers and sisters was reported (by the children) with some strength of feeling and even delight" [Ivatts, 1975, p.19]. We see once again that the schooling of Gypsy children is a question of society, which largely surpasses pedagogy, and a question of community, which largely surpasses the individual.

As some teachers commented on Traveller children's way of talking: "They are like the transmitters of a speech which they did not produce and which does not belong to them. Everything happens as if there existed an organisational frame of reference which permits Travellers to express their relation as Travellers (rather than as individuals) to schooling 'in general', in part independently of their individual experiences of schooling. The force of this attitude is such that it will always,

at one time or another, be validated in the experience of each and that each child will thenceforth adopt it, thinking it his very own" [Cotonneq/Chartier, 1984, p.13].

The Gypsies have remained for the most part outside the school system which in addition to the threat it poses to their culture also seems to produce cumulative handicaps: unemployment, pauperisation, deviance, dependency... Can we say that they're wrong when we consider the harshness of school up to the present for a society such as theirs? As was once said of another minority: "One cannot speak of a future, since school as we know it is ethnocidal. Native resistance to the actual state of unimaginative and undignified schooling is evident proof of wisdom" [Malaure, 1977]. Thus, "by far the most significant question to ask is why they attend school at all" [Ivatts, 1975, p.27].

### Towards functional schooling

"The Gypsies' only means of defence against being absorbed by the dominant culture is to make use of school, without yielding to it" [Karpati/Massano]. It is a question of compromise between cultural values, which must continue to inspire and permeate lifestyle, and functional values which must allow for adaptation to the environment: compliance with laws obliging school attendance, fulfilling the school requirements without which licences to practise certain trades will not be issued, obtaining a driver's licence, ability to read ads in the press, etc.

"My children will continue to travel, and they'll have to make their own way. Schooling isn't going to help them to get on. As far as I'm concerned, they don't have to go; if they want to, they can. The main thing, if they do go, is reading and writing, and sums. The rest is useless" (a semi-nomadic Traveller, aged about forty). "The only thing we did at school was fight. All I learnt there was the letters and the numbers. Once you have the letters and the numbers you can do it all yourself. Me and my dad, we'd go out organ-grinding, for example to Malines. I'd copy out the letters from the road signs, then look them up in my book. That's it - Malines! You see? Me, I learnt two languages, I can read and write, but I did it all my own way, travelling. What do you want my kids to do with Gadjo schooling? That's not the way we live!" (nomadic Manouche, aged thirty-five) [Reyniers].

"Let's be honest: our kids are sent to school not so much out of free choice or because the parents think it's a good idea, but because the law says we have to, and if we don't it can cause trouble for us. Not all parents understand the importance of school; the proof is that once the children have finished primary very few parents send them on to secondary. They never stop to think that, without the cert. showing they've finished their legal minimum of schooling, those kids won't be able to get a licence to follow their chosen trade. The kids are finding it out for themselves, though. For the moment they can still use their parents' hawker's licence issued before this schooling requirement came into force. But they won't be able to get one of their own without their school cert. We've already lots of cases of kids going back to school" [Amicar Debar, in Karpati/Massano].

All of the reports and most of the interviews emphasise that the parents wish above all - and sometimes exclusively - for their children to learn to read, write and count.



The rest is considered either a "plus" or useless, or even harmful (as explained in detail earlier, in the context of opposition to school).

"We're all for instruction!" declares Jean Aiciati (president of the *Centre Culturel Tzigane*). "Teach us to read, write, and count. But leave your ancestors, the Gauls, outside the classroom. And as for education – we'll take care of that!" [*Quest-France* (newspaper) 31/10/1985]. "Most important thing with us is reading... they learn all the other things outside of school" [in Quirk, 1984]. "Very few Travellers see school as a means towards earning a livelihood but rather as a place to pick up some useful skills. For a very small minority of children in houses state examinations are a real option and concern... From the point of view of the parents and children success is undoubtedly the achievement of literacy... They feel that once a child is literate they can teach themselves all they need to know about the world" [McCarthy]. "It is clear that for the vast majority of Traveller children and parents what is desired from the schools in the first place are certain basic skills, above all literacy, rather than certification to take part in non-Gypsy waged labour" [Acton/Kenrick].

This utilitarian "three Rs" approach to school, on the present wide scale, is a new phenomenon. Evidence from twenty or even ten years ago shows that up to that time adults felt they were managing perfectly well without literacy and didn't see why their children shouldn't do the same. Now, as a result of the various changes described throughout the preceding chapters, a new (and cautious) desire to acquire a few useful elements as quickly as possible, within well-defined parameters, is emerging.

"Everybody's suddenly so interested in our children! But then they write up little reports on them, labels that they burden us down with, or burden the kids with at any rate... Anyway, I see reasonable people, some saying this, some saying that – but what's the good of it in the end? No matter how many years you've put into educating them, into teaching our children to write, it doesn't look to me like you're making much progress. So I have to conclude that you're not trying too hard, and that the reports aren't altogether true. And as for us – there are little things that wound us: they make our kids do tests with cubes. That's what they do for abnormal children, for people who need some kind of adjusting. But all ours need, is to learn to read and write" [Mrs. Benoit, in Liégeois, 1980d].

In conjunction with these new "utilitarian" wishes, various reports emphasise that many families have a "traditional" concept of school: children are there to learn, not to play or walk about. The teacher is in charge, and his job is to provide the child with useful knowledge, with as little delay as possible.

At the same time the usefulness of school may include factors other than basic learning:

Certain parents "saw it primarily as a convenient crèche for their children" [Hovens et al]. "The children keep asking for broken chairs, scrap metal, and old clothes for their parents; during recreation periods they rummage through the rubbish bins to see if there's anything salvageable" [a schoolteacher, quoted by Reyniers]. "The result was that the school to a very high degree became a winter school. With the coming of spring most families went south. The Gypsies used the school as a place where all their children could stay (even toddlers of three years were

'smuggled' into school often hidden in their big sister's skirts). The reason for this was of course the poor housing conditions in the caravans in the camping place" [Gudmander/Rude].

Yet another use: children's school attendance can be a bargaining point in a hostile world: parents threaten to withdraw them if 'the powers that be' fail to meet certain demands (for halting space, supplementary social welfare such as clothing vouchers, transport for the children, etc.).