

A phenomenology of working class experience

Simon J. Charlesworth
Clare Hall, Cambridge



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK www.cup.cam.ac.uk

40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA www.cup.org

10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014, Madrid, Spain

© Simon J. Charlesworth 2000

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2000

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeset in Times NR 10/12½ [SE]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Charlesworth, Simon J.

A phenomenology of working class experience / Simon J.

Charlesworth.

p. cm. – (Cambridge Cultural Social Studies)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0 521 65066 6 (hardback). – ISBN 0 521 65915 9 (paperback)

1. Working class – England – Rotherham. I. Title. II. Series.

HD8400.R68C48 2000

305.5'62'0942823–dc21 99–21510 CIP

ISBN 0 521 65066 6 hardback

ISBN 0 521 65915 9 paperback

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page viii</i>
1 Introduction: Dead Man's Town	1
2 Rotherham: history, demography and place	32
3 Class and the objectifying subject: a reflexive sociology of class experience	63
4 A landscape with figures?	86
5 Understanding the barriers to articulation	131
6 Necessity and being working class	150
7 The culture of necessity and working class speech	203
8 Conclusion	275
<i>Notes</i>	295
<i>References</i>	305
<i>Index</i>	310

Introduction: Dead Man's Town

Who taught you to hate the colour of your skin?
Who taught you to hate the texture of your hair?
Who taught you to hate the shape of your nose and the shape of your lips?
Who taught you to hate yourself from the top of your head to the soles of
your feet?
Who taught you to hate your own kind?
Who taught you to hate the race that you belong to, so much so that you
don't want to be around each other?
You know . . . you should ask yourself who taught you to hate being what
God made you. *Malcolm X*

Our relationship to the world, as it is untiringly enunciated within us, is not a thing which can be any further clarified by analysis; philosophy can only place it once more before our eyes and present it for our ratification. (Merleau-Ponty 1962: xviii)

This work is a description of lives in one of the old industrial areas of Britain. It is focused upon the town of Rotherham, part of what was once a whole network of interconnecting towns and villages that gave South Yorkshire its distinct culture. An area that has suffered de-industrialization and the attendant social consequences of poverty. It concerns deprivation and its wider consequences, personal and social, and looks to locate the problems socially and culturally. This book, and, more importantly, the archive of transcription that it emerges from, is an attempt to set down a living record, a testimony to the dying of a way of life; the extinction of a kind of people.

Yet describing the nature of working class people in an age of such fragmentation and atomization, especially where so many are so uncertain, is not straightforward. There are, of course, the simple truths of what is

everywhere on the streets but, listening to politicians, these simple things are endlessly contested. The middle classes fear the crime that is related to the economic marginality and social exclusion of the poorest third of the society, yet they want their own wages free of the tax burden involved in funding a civil society. For the working class, themselves, for whom the economically marginal and socially excluded are family members and neighbours, they have had to deal in the most palpable way with the decline of their own economic role and social position. Since the early 1980s, the gradual decline of the culture of the working class has been one of the most powerful, telling developments in British society. The bleakness of English society, what lies around us in the faces of the urban poor everywhere, emerges from this context, and yet there have been few accounts of the transition and consequences from amongst those who are unable to buy their way out of the conditions and into the protected elite spaces of the English middle and upper classes.

The book works through looking at the personal testimony of people who expressed something revealing about the nature of their lives in this milieu. Testimony was taken through recorded interviews and notes were taken from conversations participated in and heard. The task of trying to capture the voices of working class people, emphasized the gradual effacement of a way of life based around a coherent sense of the dignity of others and of a place in the world. Those around forty have a coherent way of describing their lives and a sense of what has happened to the working class, but, as one comes down through the generations, one moves away from the efficacy of any narrative of the social, away from the co-ordinates of class, and encounters an arid individualism devoid of personal embedding in something beyond the ego. The coherence of a spoken common understanding based upon mutual respect and shared sources of value, becomes more and more infrequent until, among the very young, understanding and value seem impossible. An inescapable conclusion of the work seems to be that the most dispossessed individuals understand their lives the least and are certainly the least able to articulate their existence. At times it has seemed to me that the central issue of the work was muteness, silence, inarticulacy and the problem of accounting for the available sense that grounds these lives and which the silence rises amidst. One cannot adopt a formalized systematic procedure for recording this, one simply has to be amongst this life and do the best one can to see the traces in the details of these people's speech of the world as it is for them and to be sensitive to what it makes of them. And what is true of the recording of phenomena, is true of its writing. Many expecting sorrowful stories of poverty and moving testimony, the bleeding-heart prose that reassures readers of their

own sensitivity, will find my prose frustrating. My first task is to elucidate the phenomena, not to write something that is easy to read.

Hence, documentary description is part of its method but not its sole aim. The work tries to bring to light the sources that contribute to making working class people recognizable as people of a certain type, subject to an objective meaning. My aim has been to try to illuminate the obscure processes that lead to the invisibility of the sources of everyday misery and stigmatization involved in the constitution of a group of people who know themselves in certain ways: ways that have consequence for their life-chances and forms of self-realization.

Although this purpose is sociological, the subtlety of the processes that concern me, have drawn me away from strictly sociological literatures towards anthropology and philosophy, particularly towards phenomenological ideas. Such writing is concerned to provide insight into how, through the human situation, phenomena come to have personal meaning, a lived-through significance that may not always be transparent to consciousness. The focus is upon involvement in a natural-cultural-historical milieu within which individuals discover themselves as subject to meaning. This tradition stresses that we can only understand human phenomena, such as language, in practice, or use. Moreover, this tradition shares Wittgenstein's effacement of the primacy of an inner realm of phenomena, private to each individual, by insisting that we appreciate the role of affective behaviour, and recognize the body as the realization, or objectification, of the soul. Of particular importance, this tradition embeds human communicative processes in what McGinn calls a 'pre-epistemic relation to other human subjects which is rooted in our immediate responsiveness to them' (McGinn 1997: 8). It is this tradition's sensitivity to the grounds of the human, to the conditions of humanity, that I have come, over and over, to experience as being important in understanding the lives of people whose social environment 'grounds' their humanity in ways that curtail their generative competences for language use and expressive behaviours; inhibits the mediums through which they might found a richer form of existence based upon a fuller realization of the potentialities embodied in the forms of association they currently realize.

These ideas, with their unusual sensitivity to the significance contained in the expressivity of the human body, are particularly suited to one of the key problems of this work. A disturbing feature of the world I am trying to capture is that it is being enveloped by silence. A silence that is not merely metaphorical, one that does not simply reflect these people's relationship to the political institutions of England,¹ but one which describes the form of their intimate lives. It is in the most personal dimensions of intimate life,

that the cultural conditions of working class life are most pronounced and most disturbing.

Yet there is an important issue here. Writing involves one generating an order, and the documentary method relies upon ethnographic techniques, most importantly, upon the recording of testimony. A central aspect of this work has been the recording of voices that tell their own moving stories. These people chose themselves by showing that what for many has remained, in some uneasy sense, unspeakable, is not inexpressible if we are capable of recognizing and exploring the residual traces² of damaging, fracturing experiences that have been incorporated by individuals from the grounds through which they have become what they are. Yet what is impossible to represent here is the pervasive silence which surrounds the instances of testimony and which the resultant transcription only apparently contradicts. The sense of vulnerability-bound inarticulateness does pervade some of the transcription and is a reason why I tried so hard to preserve the verbal form of the speech, with all its inarticulate mumblings and broken lapses, but the form of the work cannot capture the bleak darkness of the invisibility of these people's lives to themselves. My task throughout has been to record the instances of expression that exhibit the conditions which render so many quiet. It is a paradox that rendering this intelligible depended upon getting these people to speak.

There is a central and pervasive hermeneutic aspect to the project, in that it is an attempt to understand phenomena, whose sense is 'incomplete, cloudy, seemingly contradictory – in one way or another, unclear' (Taylor 1985: 15); or whose sense coheres in a background of implicit meanings that exist before, and as a condition of, individuals' constitutive self-understandings. There is something paradoxical in this project of writing a culture whose being is not enshrined in self-conscious cultural representations and thus for which gesture and enunciation are the seat of identity. If one is to understand and represent this experience, we need a phenomenological hermeneutics capable of recognizing the importance of pre-discursive, pre-rational constituents of intersubjectivity. Without this, we will fail to recognize the forms of humanity that humanity takes for those whose being is shaped by the absence of freedom to become other than what they find themselves having to be. If we are capable of recognizing the human processes involved in the constitution of the inhuman and thus how what is spontaneously perceived as abject emerges from the conditions of human culture, then we can understand how critical, racializing, comments come to be made about people so highly visible because of their demeanour and yet who are also completely lacking in the resources to represent themselves.

I need here to point to the irony involved in producing too strong a sense of a group capable of articulating their own experience when the central experience the writing is trying to communicate is of a confusion based upon a radical dis-embedding of individuals from social conditions of sociality, and thus from forms of sense and, hence, of sensible coherence. It is as if slowly, carefully, descending everywhere upon the realm of these personal lives, a silence is falling like snow, erasing the pathways through which we might return, once again, to the village of our being. Yet, the truth is that, for many, those paths were being erased whilst we were struggling to find our way. One of Toni Morrison's characters insists: 'Listen here, girl, you can't quit the Word. It's given to you to speak. You can't quit the Word' (Morrison quoted in Nbalia 1991: 102). Yet, in Freire's sense of 'speaking one's own word' (Freire 1970: 121), from amidst one's experience and the judgements of the group who share that experience, many have, unknowingly, given up on the word. Its possibility belonged to spaces and habits whose conditions are gone. During a period of mass unemployment, in which work has become more atomized and more precarious, insecurity has become the condition of too many. Elementary solidarities of family, work and place, once consolidated by the culture of the trade union and tertiary education, have been washed away by the corrosive cleansing of *laissez-faire* economic practice; the logic of financial markets sacrificing for profit the cultural configurations that human decency requires. In place of the dignities embedded in these elementary solidarities we can see a fractured anomie, juvenile delinquency, crime, drug and substance abuse, alcoholism and a host of other problems. For too many the sands of their time and experience have been washed away from beneath them, taking with them the customary reference-points of their existence. For these people, the condition Camus described as 'the absurd' is a sociological, not a metaphysical, predicament:

A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and light, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity. (Camus 1975: 13)

The reasons for our world have crumbled. Hard work and education seem to lead nowhere, and the endless round of consecutive governments' retraining policies are known for what they are. Many have learned the lie of the lies that sustained the old world and know no stories of a promised land. Yet, unlike the heroic figures of Camus' work, this experience of the absurd is different. These are not individuals divested of intuitive feeling for

'the chain of daily gestures'³ (Camus 1975: 19), rather, it is as if the grounds of their practical belief, the networks of an older world, have been washed away, slowly erased so that they can never know the satisfaction of forms of coexistence that might bring the peace of value. Rather, the world they inhabit is fractured, no longer supported by a steady stream of habitual associations, and their personal, affective world is pre-constituted as chaotic: absurd. Yet this is the only sense we have ever known. So this is an absurdity that cannot know itself because it cannot experience the ontological security and social grounds upon which self-justification might be realized. There is only ambiguity and confusion. This is an experience of the absurd emanating from a realm that is fractured, perceptually aggressing and negating. It is a world whose solicitations lead to a relation to the world, a form of inhabitation, that holds itself at the primary level of habituation, as close as possible to a realized automacy that leaves individuals less affected by consciousness: knowing only through the comportment by which sense is realized; knowing the world through a medium and in a manner that emerges from conditions of deprivation and symbolic impoverishment; the price that body-subjects pay for the absence of humanity that we all require but which only the privileged are able to inscribe in their own protected social space. This experience of absurdity, then, emerges from an economic and cultural condition, and is manifest in the mental and physical ill-health that afflict people. This sense of the world haunts working class existence. And this is what one would expect if 'man is a being without a reason for being' (Bourdieu 1990c: 196); because, if it is fundamental to being that it is radically ungrounded, or groundless, standing in need of a sense of life produced by human association and the sources of value to which it gives rise, then the condition of being-in-the-world must be more problematic for those whose lives are most devoid of social consecration. That is, for those condemned to live their meaning through self-understandings based upon notions of utility and stigmatization.

The book begins with a brief survey of the history and demography of the area, and moves on to focus upon the experience of the people of the town by considering the sense that emerges from examples of everyday conversations. The work progresses through the form of a series of meditations about the relationship of persons to their social environment. Whilst this is a particular site, understanding the lives of these people gives us an insight into the nature of being working class in the traditional industrial areas of Britain. The task is to highlight key experiences and to focus on what is characteristic in them: that is, to focus upon what makes those experiences possible.

Throughout, I allow the transcribed material to represent itself, without

directly interpreting at the surface level of the speech acts themselves, since these have illocutionary force (and of course, perlocutionary force). The material tries to capture the form and force of the speech that emerges from these people's practices and connect it with a modality of being and the series of social and economic conditions which that modality originates in, and which the speech exemplifies. I try to look beneath what is said, at what it offers: the possibility of recognizing the relation to human being that being working class instils. It is a humanist attempt to show the problems of a naive humanist universalism that fails the poor by failing to recognize the real personal consequences of being poor. The book tries to exemplify the extent to which humans become differentiated and come to live their marks; that is, come to live amidst a background of social meanings, positive and negative, through which they experience themselves as individuated, as a being of a certain *kind*. As Nagel puts it, '[for] an organism [to have] conscious experience *at all* means . . . that there is something it is like to *be* that organism' (Nagel 1979: 166). And this work is concerned to elicit the originary experience through which a person comes to experience the world, through life among others, as a distinct place through experiences which teach a certain relation to themselves, the world and experience. To be working class, then, is to be part of a socially realized category. The book deals with the category 'working class' as an ontological concept, one which traces the nature of its realization through social relations that define individuals' objective being, and thus create for agents the modes of subjectivization through which their world and their forms of comportment are realized as possible solutions to the problems of a world that opens up to them as, always, from birth onwards, the world of the subjects they objectively are, beings of a certain distinct kind. It is the world of the working class person that this book wants to communicate, and it is for these reasons that it homogenizes, because it is looking for what is shared across the differences of life style, gender or race that must necessarily striate a multi-ethnic community that is poor and deprived; at what allows us to know each other as people who share a commonality in the eyes of those who do not share what is obvious in us.⁴

This is not a Marxist interpretation of working class experience, yet one of the most important reasons for this approach is to try and show that the social and cultural resources for developing one's inalienable human capacities, what Marx called one's 'species being', of coming to fruition as a person of categoric value, are inequitably distributed, with the result that the possibility of the development of capacities important to personal fulfilment are frustrated. Moreover, I depict a relation to being, contained in working class people's economic and social conditions, that forecloses

upon and makes almost impossible autonomous ways of becoming a self-developing subject, of value for oneself and to others; capable of founding through oneself and others an intersubjective realm of mutually constituted empathic self-involvement. If this study convinces, then the demonstration that this condition exists must be an indictment of the economy which produces this relation to self and personhood. In *Humanism and Terror*, Merleau-Ponty suggests that 'to understand and judge a society, one has to penetrate its basic structure to the human bond upon which it is built' (1969: xiv). This work tries to illuminate that structure, and to show how it creates forms of being through which its fundamental patterns of relations are realized by inscribing between bodies forces of attraction and repulsion that reproduce the structure: at a price inequitably distributed by those invisible scales of justice which settle destinies in a racist society.

This book, then, is not the sociological equivalent of behaviourist studies of the natural world. It hopes to describe not merely what people in Rotherham do, the tapestry of practices that are the backdrop to their life-projects, but how they feel, and why; and what those feelings reveal about their relationship to social reality; how their being is mediated such that they are the subjects of such feelings: how they are made subjects in this way.

The history of the area, and of the country, means that the main concern is with the lives of young people who left school to face mass youth unemployment and a life governed by poor working conditions, poor wages and the almost constant threat of trips to the Department of Social Security and Job Centre. I have interviewed a large number of people who I have met throughout my own life in the town. And, where it was not possible to record their voices, I have written down their comments at the first possible opportunity. Clearly, being male, I have more access to men's private, intimate conversations than to women's, but at least one third of my respondents were women, and women's voices are a significant contribution to the book. Similarly, a significant number of the quotations that I have used are from Asian men, with whom I have both worked and trained. There was a sense of common concern, among both the women I interviewed and the members of the Pakistani community, about how impoverished their lives in Rotherham are, and they felt it inappropriate to mark what is fashionably called their 'subject-position' in the text. Clearly, women and members of the Asian community experience a commonality of location, of a life-impoverishing entrapment that they feel as a collective fate that shapes their experience of time and space and which they feel is confirmed in their conversations with others. For these reasons, in my original text I have not recorded these differences, reciprocating the respect these people exhibited in their own intuitive sense of their own lives as situated by the common

humiliations and degradations that structure life in the working class life-course. However, it is conceivable that some readers might share the feeling that a colonizing 'white male . . . doxic heterosexuality is absolutely taken for granted' and effaces differences of race and gender: a response which I have received from at least one reader of an earlier draft. I am happy to let these criticisms stand if only because the work of communication the writing emerges from is, in any case, one in which these issues do not seem to be prominent. What emerges spontaneously, I have recorded and used. That people have participated in the way that they have and contributed what they have felt important is significant in itself. Furthermore, there are literatures on recognized ethnic groups as there are on issues concerning sexuality, and it is obvious that women are a powerful group of spokespeople for the experience of women. There are many women enjoying careers speaking for the experience of women in a way that is simply not true for the experience of working people. It seems to me that the university has been too silent about an experience that too many share outside the domain of the academy and the politics of representation and legitimacy that absorb so many of the intelligentsia. In this context, it seems that this project has a certain logic to it.

The academy has not, however, been over-eager to embrace the view from South Yorkshire, which has recently been shown, yet again, to be among the very poorest regions in Europe. And certainly a sociological community committed to projects concerned with the latest forms of a developing modernity, and fashioning categories that help us understand its newest cultural configurations, was not going to share, nor particularly respect, an interest in the living archaeology of a decaying world that in their own genealogy is unimportant, unexotic and, as a phenomenon, simple. The problem, however, is that this pattern of social development is not particular to South Yorkshire: it is a global phenomenon leaving disempowered, dispossessed people the world over invisible within their own national cultures. Labour is unrooted, dis-embedded, being made migrant the world over, creating people so vulnerable and atomized that they carry the marks of their impoverishment in their bodies as oddity and illness. Cheap labour, scrounging a day here, a day there, a mass of bodies rendered worthless by ubiquity, fit to clean or lift, care or dig, mend or clear, yet invisible except as a threat, aliens among their own species. This condition is ontological, this is social difference, categorization, realized in the being of beings. How could bodies share this contemporaneity as a life-course and not share a large part of their being? This is the primordial ground from which individuation springs. This is the experience revealed in the talk of the people of the town, and it warrants the moral stand of commonality

that their communication exhibits and thus which I have felt a deep obligation to honour.

The original work was drawn from a base of forty-three interviews, although the ethnographic element from which I have written down conversations from disparate spaces gives me a much wider base of material in which to contextualize and extend the voices recorded. Moreover, these sources together have provided me with a developing archive of the thoughts of the people of the town. The original work was drawn from an archive of 350,000 transcribed words. This has consistently been added to and is part of an ongoing project. However, what emerged from men and women of all ages was a remarkably coherent story of the loss of a way of living that was based upon hard work and industry, within which there was a sense of friendship and relation, of basic dignity and respect. Of something that one could live in. Of a once-present state, now lost, in which individuals could plan a future, buy a house, marry, have children, live a life that, though constrained by the routines of work, offered some security and some circumscribed pleasures. However, the decline of traditional industry and its replacement with jobs governed by new working practices have brought great vulnerability at work, through lack of companionship, as well as at home through worry about the security of employment, its duration and the low pay most jobs offer. Such changes have meant that people do not feel attached to a future, something about which they feel great anxiety, a worry that touches virtually all aspects of their lives and which makes their experience of the present one of a misery born of hopelessness. It is a phenomenon Camus understood: 'A man devoid of hope and conscious of being so has ceased to belong to the future' (Camus 1975: 35) and, one might add, 'to the present as well'. Writing about the nineteenth century, Gash has written:

Some years before the general election of 1841 the realization was growing that there was a social question to which middle-class sectarian and party conflicts had little relevance. 'A feeling very generally exists', ran the opening sentence of Thomas Carlyle's famous pamphlet on *Chartism* in 1839, 'that the condition and disposition of the Working Classes is a rather ominous matter at present; that something ought to be said, something ought to be done, in regard to it'. When intelligent and socially conservative members of the educated classes considered the state of industrial England and Scotland, two reflections usually occurred to them. One was the instability of a society where thousands of men, cooped up in mean houses and narrow streets, without savings, adequate poor relief or even gardens of their own in which to grow food, could be thrown out of work or put on reduced wages at a moment's notice because of trade depression. The other was what seemed to them the artificiality of a system where the traditional framework of social life – commu-

nity sense, acceptance of rank and inequality, reciprocal feelings of duty and deference, the practice of religion, charity and neighbourliness – had been replaced by the indiscriminate massing in particular areas for purely economic reasons of people whose only link with their employer was the cash nexus. (Gash 1979: 187)

If the educated classes walked around the industrial areas of Britain today, they might feel an affinity with their forebears. What is certain is that what Carlyle called ‘The Condition of England’ question is again pressing in Britain today and, now, as then, ‘something ought to be said, something ought to be done’ (Carlyle quoted in Gash 1979: 187).

Clearly, this work concerns some of the deeper moral issues raised by economic organization. Its particular concern is with the possible grounds of inclusion of the people whose social existence it depicts. Social exclusion and the possibility of creating the grounds of inclusion for such groups is one of the main problems confronting Europe. The dislocation of the industrial working class may be as significant at the end of the twentieth century as the economic dislocation of Europe’s peasants was at the end of the nineteenth century. Yet, if we are to tackle this problem with anything approaching good faith, we need an accurate understanding of the conditions of dispossession which their being-in-the-world was premised upon before economic change rendered them a problem. We therefore need to understand their recent experience and present social condition. This book is thus not concerned to catalogue the changes that have occurred in social and economic organization, but with the ontological and epistemological questions raised in understanding the being-in-the-world of working people in their present social conditions. It therefore develops an account of working class culture as overdetermined by economic necessity and dispossession, something that has been true throughout the era of industrial capitalism. However, as well as this general account, the book tries to recognize new strains within working class life that are a result of the rapid decay, within one or two generations, of an older culture. But it does not try to grasp this through the usual sociological and economic categories. It is an attempt to use philosophical ideas ethnographically. To use ideas drawn from philosophy to lay open to view a version of human life; to draw connections and show why it is as it is. Frank has suggested that ‘Only an ethics or a social science which witnesses suffering is worthy of our energies or our attention’ (Frank, 1991: 64) and this work is an attempt to make this more than the laudable self-justification of a profession desperately needing to recover some credibility.

It is hoped that through considering this particular place and these particular lives, through engaging this particularity with a philosophical

anthropology, there will emerge insights of a more general nature into the processes whereby individuals become trapped and alienated from themselves, others and the possibilities of perception and the forms of experience contained in different forms of life. Yet, I hope that, out of the doom and pessimism of this topic, the dim light of these people's humanity might be seen to shine, however overpowering the surrounding darkness may be. It is thus a work that, through the construction of a particular example, hopes to transcend that particularity and engage its readers' compassion and thus extend their commitment. It is, therefore, a work of recovery, of a form of being that is dying because the economic way of life that sustained it is no longer viable. Yet it is a project of recovery, of not only a way of life that has become obsolete but, of a coherent form of life, a certain form of honour or dignity, one of the variants of human dignity, at a point when our need for that pre-capitalist sentiment, honor, is most pressing.

There will be little straightforward description in this book. The reasons for this will emerge as the writing unfolds and begins to constitute its object. Furthermore, this has been done because the culture that it describes is not unique to Rotherham and anyone can experience the equivalent in any British industrial town or city. The deeper moral of the story of Rotherham, the universal that lies in its particularity, must be the same for economically powerless and politically dispossessed people everywhere. Furthermore, it is a reconstruction of a *habitus*⁵ (Bourdieu 1990a), of a distinct way of being, and the reconstruction is done through the words of people and reflection on the deeper issues raised by those words.

The study concerns an environment encountered as an unquestioned universe in which 'Shit happens', because 'It's the way the numbers come up'. It is a place in which one is subject to apparently random events to do with one's individual fate, yet which obey a logic embedded in the politics of region and place, of economic context and class. Furthermore, representing a group as the victims of injustice and suffering is unavoidably a moral act. It is a political representation to the extent that it is an attempt by a member of a group of people to bring into being a sense of the group's experience as having distinct grounds that stem from the political and economic relations in which their lives happen to have been lived.

My purpose is to produce an account in which the subjects of the research would feel recognized if it were relayed to them through the intermediaries that are likely to be readers of this study. The reason for this is that we live in a social world where the instruments, the concepts and forms of association that enable individuals and groups to produce political representations and political acts are very unequally distributed, leaving many dispossessed of the means to produce a discourse that might be the begin-

nings of a framing of an effective political representation in the political process. The problem is that spokespersons need to emerge from the group, and yet the conditions of the group and, importantly, its socially mediated relationship to the political process and the media of representation, have been such as to curtail the production of such persons. Furthermore those who do exist require instruments that enable them to defend their own people as the subjects of injustice, and this makes them partially dependent upon cultural intermediaries. The normal producer of cultural intermediaries is the university. However, there are reasons why this social field does not produce people capable of framing schemes of thought in which the social world is correctly recognized. The university transmits ways of seeing. And the transmission is made easier by universities selecting, from a pre-selected group, individuals whose education produces the transformation of the mind, body and self of students. Having selected a pre-disposed habitus, the university tends to produce the habitus of a distinct cohort who deploy schemata of perception that ensure the reproduction of the discourse and behaviours that our political culture demands. These individuals enjoy access to the means of production of the instruments of production of discourse (Bourdieu 1991) and they are unlikely, because of the combined effects of rupture and co-optation involved in their education, to misalign themselves. Many move on to become professional producers of the schemes of thought and expression of the social world: politicians, journalists, high-ranking civil servants, who produce for the dispossessed a form of political culture that is fetishized. In relation to this political realm the dominated are condemned to occupy a position that renders them passive consumers of political ideas that are constituted for them elsewhere and in which they have no part.

Working class people require intermediaries in the realm of culture to relay their condition: that is, people committed to expressing their condition through the instruments offered by the field of cultural production. It is, in a sense, a matter of translation, but not from a foreign language: rather it is a translation from a different mode of being: a translation of indeterminate, embodied experiences of forms of domination and exclusion into a language that allows for respect of the experience, that captures it without doing violence to the nature of the experience. As things stand, four things determine class-cultural intermediation. Firstly, the Labour Party appears to have turned its back on working class people. The Labour Party is now dominated by individuals whose primary political experiences were university politics. It is no longer a party in which working class people can play any prominent role. Secondly, the Trade Union movement, the traditional field that produced working class spokespersons, is in serial

decline and no longer plays that role in any extensive manner. Thirdly, the university system has both given up on working class politics and been swallowed up by a crisis of funding that has all but curtailed the production of working class intellectuals. Finally, with the massive changes to the field of the English university system, particularly the emergence of clearly defined routes through working class sectors of tertiary education on to vocational degrees at lower-end universities, there has emerged a hierarchy of courses and universities that militates against the kinds of nurturance that the production of genuine working class spokespersons requires. As the system has been massified, so too the grounds for the personal links that would allow for the recognizing of genuine cases, a kind of informal 'positive discrimination', have disappeared as working class students have found themselves negotiating a system that, whilst allowing for a greater rate of survival, has achieved this, at the cost of a devaluation of their qualifications. Importantly, while working class people are involved in higher education for the first time, most are being trained rather than educated in the traditional sense. There are too many factors to detail, that have contributed to the prevailing political culture and to the connected issue of the state of our academic institutions. The humanities and social sciences are key sites for the production of the *petit-bourgeois* professionals who have contributed to the current culture. And this is reflected in the culture of the university which treats issues of deprivation with a quiet disdain issuing from an arrogance born of security.

The result is that there is no interest in class within the university and among publishers. Apparently, 'people do not read books on class', so there is no market. It is a paradox of writing about a dominated group. Because of their condition of dispossession, they do not consume books about themselves. Hence, class as a topic has sunk to the bottom of the hierarchy of intellectual objects. Within the contemporary university, it is seen as a sign of backwardness to have any concern about class and one is met with a mixture of disbelief, ridicule and derision. There is no symbolic profit to be had from being a working class intellectual or scholar which means that one cannot simply be what one is, say what one has to say, without constant verbal and non-verbal violations. 'You aren't a black woman' and 'Rotherham ain't exactly East Harlem' capture the mood of contemporary radical culture.

The universities celebrate their ethnic diversity, whilst failing to recognize the forms of discrimination that have shaped the nature of their own space, to say nothing of the inequalities upon which British nation-hood stands. There is no acknowledgement of the conditions of exclusion and racial enmity that define the contours of English society and which the English university system is a product and microcosm of. English society is built

upon a deep social apartheid; an economically based racism, which marks the flesh of individuals as profoundly as differences in skin pigment. This is why this work does not develop through the standard literatures on inequality and poverty. This is because one of the central questions for anyone who grows up in a deprived area, is to grasp the consequences of living in such environments. This issue is not simply one of inequality because deprivation concerns the relationship to other social groups within the social universe as a totality of relationships. It is perhaps this, more than anything, that creates for individuals (and groups) a trajectory, or destiny. For the consequences of their milieu can only be understood in the context of the history of relations that have contributed to the space being constructed as the space that it is. Moreover, the effects of this primary milieu upon individuals is part of the economic relationship that defines the space of their personal lives. Marked as they are by the primary conditions of family and school, they then face a labour market within which individuals are defined by their difference within a totality of objectively hierarchized patterns of difference. Carrying specific meanings, individuals must negotiate the world from their meaning, which has a social value, positive or negative. Although economically based, the phenomenon of inequality and deprivation becomes racial and social. One might, facetiously, suggest that being poor leads to being poor; that the exigencies of the social relations that deprivation is built upon mean that the marks of its conditions cannot be resisted and yet once incorporated are of consequence for life-chances and for the next generation. The philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir has always seemed strikingly relevant:

No factor becomes involved in the psychic life without having taken on human significance; it is not the body-object described by biologists that actually exists, but the body as lived in by the subject. (de Beauvoir 1952)

The phenomenological ideas are an attempt to lay clear, to *show*, the sense that de Beauvoir's final clause, 'the body as lived in by the subject', might have, and to exhibit this temporal, existential structure for these people. This study concerns the institutional positions and the social grounds which lead to the imbuing, and taking-up, of a form of comportment that makes the world meaningful in a certain way; open to a certain form of corporealized subjectivity: a subjectivity that makes certain things show-up in the social universe, and which also leads these people to be possessed of an objective being, the result of which is that they suffer unemployment, low wages, job-insecurity and deprivation.

Understanding this means recognizing the processes whereby individuals come to be so clearly marked and condemned to the consequences of those marks. It means struggling to understand how an environment exists

for human persons; in what ways it is experienced through the long duration of maturation through specific mediating forms through which individuals become subjects and, simultaneously, objects. We need to be sensitive to how the environment has an impact upon the corporealized ways of being opened by being, and how for the poor this may lead to a closure of potentiality in response to a world that is bereft of positive human enforcement and fruition. Asserting this and understanding it are, however, two different things. If the effects of this malaise are that a relative closure of being takes place, a refusal to be engaged by the world and an inability to consider the grounds of experience, then we cannot directly 'read-off' this condition from practices. Orthodox observational methods cannot help us here. And we need a way of recognizing the significance of the way subjects are situated with regard the phenomena of their environment, how they are disposed to act in relation to their world. We need to be sensitive to the sense manifest in what Wittgenstein called 'fine shades of behaviour' (Wittgenstein 1958: 207). There is, then, something at stake in understanding the relation of people to their environment. For those living in deprived environments, it is the price they have paid with their life-course and, often, their children's to boot, which we have a duty to appreciate.

If we are to appreciate the impact of the barely perceived minutiae of an environment that exists as an inexpressibly complex mixture of architecturally given space; of inherited historical sense; of social practices; of behaviors and institutions; of the space that particular persons live through as body-subjects, then we need to understand the relation of persons to their environment as something deeper than the relation of subject and object. We need to have a developed sense of the ways in which human beings inhabit the places in which they exist, and realize that the milieux through which people come to understanding are cultural-historical contexts where things count, or 'show-up', in distinct ways, the sense of which is carried by the communal practices of one's immediate group *and* its relation to national political and economic structures. Through life in a place we become imbued with a sense of the world, of people and objects, through the concerned involvement, unknowingly assimilated through a community's comportment, a comportment that reveals the world under distinct aspects with a certain resonance or attitude. The spaces in which we live, then, constitute a realm of shared intelligibility, disclosed in mood, through which we come to dwell in a world defined primarily through its affective dimensions and the possibilities of being which it circumscribes. We come to know a world through an inextricable tangle of background skills and discriminations that constitute the structure of intelligibility that we

unconsciously realize as the condition of personhood. Importantly, this assimilation is unselfconscious; embodied in the pervasive responses, motor skills and realized distinctions in the forms of comportment that are the inescapable conditions of being human. This way of approaching the relation of person and world thus places an important emphasis upon the corporeal, because the manner of being of subjects is that of embodied agents (Taylor 1989a: 3).

The body is the site of an incarnate intentionality within whose horizon self-realization and self-understanding take place. The 'lived body' is understanding, intention incarnate, and cannot be separated from the experienced world because it is through the particularity of the encountered world that individuals come to skilled, knowing comportment. It is the lived spatiality of the body which constitutes the basis of objective space:

Besides the physical and geometrical distance which stands between myself and all things, a 'lived' distance binds me to things which count and exist for me, and links them to each other. This distance measures the 'scope' of my life at every moment. (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 286)

The lived-body is the *locus* of an intertwining of space and an unfolding meaning embedded, or opened-up, by the totality of the background practices and patterns of life which frame individuals' experiences of place. Place is the setting of the projects that come to make sense for us as we develop into the form of life in which we grow up. The world is therefore a *particular* world, come to be known in a particular way: a way that makes possible the realization of life-projects. The important point here, is that this is based upon the pre-personal project of the body as being-in-the-world. That is, that the initial 'world' through which we come to self-knowledge is one of taken-for-granted, non-cognitive attitudes to objects and other persons, manifest in forms of behaviour, or comportment, that 'teach', purely practically, the grounds of an affective-attitude; that operates like an attitude to existence and which is the body's 'style' of being. These styles of being constitute distinct social groups at the deepest level of being. Class is one of those critical mediations of being, and this book tries to show why, across the world, a Pakistani farmer of the Mirpur valley shares an attitude to perception, experience, persons, objects and belief with a working class person in Rotherham.

I perceive in relation to my body because I have an immediate awareness of my body as it exists '*towards*' the world. My sense of the world and my sense of my body cohere because it is as an inextricable mix, that I have learnt, through involved intimacy with others, the sense of both through each other. Our sense of space is thus mediated by life among the

expressive bodies of others, an intercorporeality upon which our deepest beliefs stand as part of the stand on existence involved in membership of a group that has failed to universalize, or naturalize, its own comportment as justified-in-being, the happy flesh of the consecrated, honoured, dignified, valued, beautiful. The body thus involves a primordial, pre-reflective orientation that is passed on through a kind of 'postural impregnation' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 118): a way of feeling the world which is an aspect of the body projecting itself into the world, apprehending significances.

Two things are important here. Firstly, this means that we inhabit the world not merely as perceptual subjects but also as affective beings. For our perceptions are always inhabited by an excess of meaning, originating in the primordial grounds of sense, which is more than sensation and which reveals the world of perception for what it is: the achievement of a body-subject which has a temporal structure enabling it to carry this primitive acquisition of horizons which allows a more determinate world of objects and projects to exist. This is the second thing of importance. This means that there is an 'ontological complicity' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 20) or mutual 'possession' (Bourdieu 1996b: 3) between a person and the world around them. There is a contact and communion between person and world within which the world becomes pervaded by a sense constituted from amid wider social relations. The source of the disclosure of sense is the everyday being-in-the-world of the people among whom we live. From amidst this, persons and things resonate with more sense than we normally cognize; they become possessed of an affective hue. We find persons or things becoming or unbecoming, beautiful or ugly, and this affects our responses and relations, creating fields of force, or a dimension to human existence that is felt through affinity, distance or repulsion, whose processes lie deep in the socialised body; a kind of bodily kinetic sensitivity, of unerring logic, that has grave consequences for individuals whose world and being fall towards the negative pole of social valuation.

This is what Merleau-Ponty calls the 'antepredicative unity of the world and our life' (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 61): the world of sense that language is used to articulate; a pre-objective contact between person and world sedimented in the body socialised into an intersubjectivity amidst the infinitely complex 'fine shades of behaviour' (Wittgenstein 1958: 207) through which we come to understand psychological concepts and their place in our form of life. This mutual 'possession', or 'ontological complicity', felt between persons and their world, arises from the point of space in which the individual is located and thus is defined both to themselves and for others, through the medium of the socialization that being a body-subject implies.

This is why Merleau-Ponty speaks of the body as ‘the potentiality of a certain world’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 106). It is a point expressed in more orthodox terms by Charles Taylor:

The fact of being inescapably in a world means that we cannot give a purely intrinsic description of the subject, one which makes no reference to what surrounds him in its meaning. This implication is strongly resisted by some of the most important streams of modern philosophical and scientific thought, for which the subject *ought* to be a potential object of intrinsic description, like everything else. The philosophical stance, that one can’t start with a subject and relate him to a world, but can only describe the subject-in-world, has had to be constantly revived and defended against the mainstream of modern philosophy. A famous example in our century is Heidegger’s passage in *Sein und Zeit*, where he talks about the way in which the subject is ‘in’ his world. The subject is not in the world in the way in which an intrinsically-describable object is contained in another, like water in a glass, for instance; rather the subject is in a world which is a field of meanings for him, and thus inseparably so, because these meanings are what make him the subject he is.

(Taylor 1989b: 2)

The relation of person/world is situated in the dynamic of body/space, and is thus socially located to the extent of becoming the site of a necessary particularity. These are the consequences of an appreciation of the lived body as the site of a generative capacity of practical understanding which enmeshes the person, knowingly and unknowingly, in an objective being. Place, then, as a social site related to other positions and social localities and known as a locality in which experience, memory and feeling are constituted, is critical to understanding being-in-the-world. And Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the lived-body allows us to understand how place is experienced through the founding of sense by human communities. Places exist to individuals as constellations of affective senses expressive of the life of those who inhabit them:

all these operations require the same ability to mark out boundaries and directions in the given world, to establish lines of force, to keep perspectives in view, in a word, to organise the given world in accordance with the projects of the present moment, to build into the geographical setting a behavioural one, a system of meanings outwardly expressive of the subject’s internal activity . . . for the normal person his projects polarise the world, bringing magically to view a host of signs which guide action . . . I must reverse the natural relationship in which the body stands to its environment, and a human productive power must reveal itself through the density of being.

(Merleau-Ponty 1962: 112)

The conditions of such a ‘density of being’ are one of the targets of this book, and this means that ‘particularity’, or the location of human beings in *places* and the cultural relations that define regions as significant to the

categorizing of beings, is fundamental to its more general relevance. The importance of place and of the phenomenal body are of critical importance because both mediate being so inescapably. Illuminating their relation will allow us to see the human condition as inescapably circumscribed by relations of domination which infuse space and subjects as part of the fabric of both. It is as though, finally, we are all parochial.⁶

Understanding a place, then, is a natural starting-point for understanding being. As Merleau-Ponty put it:

Traditional Psychology has no concept to cover these varieties of consciousness of place because consciousness of place is always, for such psychology, a positional consciousness, a representation, *Vor-stellung*, because as such it gives us the place as a determination of the objective world and because such a representation either is or is not, but, if it is, yields the object to us quite unambiguously and as an end identifiable through all its appearances. Now here, on the other hand, we have to create the concepts necessary to convey the fact that bodily space may be given to me in an intention to take hold without being given in an intention to know. The patient is conscious of his bodily space as the matrix of his habitual action, but not as an objective setting; his body is at his disposal as a means of ingress into a familiar surrounding, but not as the means of expression of a gratuitous and free spatial thought . . . I can therefore take my place through the medium of my body as the potential source of a certain number of familiar actions, in my environment conceived as a set of *manipulanda* and without, moreover, envisaging my body or my surrounding as objects in the Kantian sense . . . free from any attachment to a specific place or time, and ready to be named or at least pointed out. . . .there are my surroundings as a collection of possible points upon which this bodily action may operate, and there is, furthermore . . . the world as pure spectacle into which I am not absorbed, but which I contemplate and point out. As far as bodily space is concerned, it is clear that there is a knowledge of place which is reducible to a sort of co-existence with that place, and which is not simply nothing, even though it cannot be conveyed by a description or even by the mute reference of a gesture . . . The whole operation takes place in the domain of the phenomenal; it does not run through the objective world. (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 105)

This I take to mean that the deepest knowledge of a place is something that cannot be conveyed because it is carried in comportment (the mute structure in whose context gesture 'refers'), even 'transferred' in that medium of silent sense, through non-verbal cues that instil in space its contours of amiability or aggression. It is that realm which affects how things show up for us, but which we seldom think about because it concerns the world in which we are spontaneously absorbed in coping with the space we must negotiate in order to achieve our immediate projects. To put it simply, understanding the everyday world of places means understanding the spatiality of absorbed involvement, of being inhabited by its phenomenal sense. That is,