Welcome to the knowledge factory? A study of working class experience, identity and learning in Irish Higher Education

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Abstract

This is a study of working class students'experience in Irish Higher Education. It is based on eighty one in-depth interviews with fifty one students of all ages between 2007 and 2012 gathered longitudinally in three different institutions of Higher Education in the Republic of Ireland. Using in-depth biographical interviews and grounded methods, within a critical and egalitarian theoretical framework, the main aim of the research is to offer a 'thick' account of working class students' experience and, in particular, to document how they view and value education.

The thesis analyses access and widening participation in Irish HE from the perspective of the interviewees. It documents that tertiary education is very highly valued and examines why this is the case through the participants' life and learning stories. The research also explores the impact institutional differentiation is having on access and participation. The data also offer insight into the type of learning processes that are occuring in contemporary HE and elaborates a theory of reflexive learning through the interviews. This is framed within a critical synthesis of the work of Engestrom and Mezirow and a critique of the 'reproduction and resistance' debate as well as drawing on recent sociological work on the role of education in the making of contemporary biographies.

The participants' biographical accounts offer insight into working class experience inside and outside the walls of the university and the research suggests that shared experiences in community, family and work gives rise to distinct patterns of class (dis)identification. Based on the data and wideranging desk research-especially the work of Axel Honneth, Diane Reay, Henri Lefebvre, Andrew Sayer and Pierre Bourdieu- the thesis outlines a conceptual framework for analysing class inequality based on ownership, authority and legitimate cultural capital within a theory of social space. Furthermore, the biographical accounts of education and society gathered for the inquiry indicate that the politics of respect and recognition are crucial to understanding contemporary working class experience. A key argument of the thesis is that class analysis, social science and educational scholarship needs to develop a more sophisticated set of theoretical tools for exploring the normative nature of social practice and in particular the affective, embodied experience of class inequality inside and outside education.

Acknowledgements

My parents for all the things that one can never say or cannot say often enough -for the kindness, love, support and a good deal of patience. It begins with 3, 4, 5 and knowing how to laugh. I love you dearly.

My rusałka- to be away from one's beloved lakes and forests is one thing but putting up with a real 'mug' and his doctoral mania is quite another. Love resides in the everyday things and without these and your intelligence, care and warmth it all would have been impossible. Kocham cię**.**

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Chapter 1

Introduction: rationale, context and content

Introduction

This is a study of contemporary working class experience in Irish Higher Education. Based on eighty one in-depth biographical interviews the thesis examines where education fits in the lives of the research participants and explores what this indicates about the nature of class inequality in modern Irish society. The overall aim of the study is to offer a 'thick' biographical description of the interviewees' learning lives and give a detailed account of how they view and value Higher Education (HE). Through an analysis of these life and learning stories the thesis develops a grounded, critical and egalitarian analysis of class and education in Ireland.

The interviewees' accounts offer a very different way of thinking about access and widening participation and are, I believe, a necessary addition to the more familiar descriptions of these issues found in 'top down' policy statements and statistical reviews. I think, for democratic and egalitarian reasons, the voices of these students deserve to be heard and their perspectives need to become far more central to the way we discuss the purpose and value of HE. Moreover, I think we can learn a great deal by attending to what the participants had to say. In fact I believe Irish society and the system of Higher Education are cast in a new light when they are seen through these people's eyes. It is, for a variety of reasons which will discussed later in the thesis, enormously significant that the people at the heart of this piece of research chose to "use a language more complicated, more puzzling than the computations of material well-being than their interpreters use" (Sennett & Cobb, 1977, p. 18). What these men and women have to say about identity, class and education, and about agency, self-respect and social recognition, simply does not fit within most of the standard models available in Irish social science for thinking about class inequality and education. In talking about college they spoke of their desire to learn, their strong belief in the transformative power of education and the dignity and respect that can stem from learning; in discussing their lives and Irish society they talked about their resilience and agency and their experiences in their families, communities and their workplaces and they spoke eloquently about the effect that unequal resources, disrespect and lack of recognition can have on human beings. My hope is that this

thesis can capture the full significance of what the people I spoke with, and learnt from, had to say about these crucial issues.

In order to do this I wish to place the research in context and start to sketch out the conceptual framework I am working within for the reader. In the remainder of this chapter I will briefly outline the nature of the empirical research, why I chose to undertake this study and broadly situate the inquiry in its academic and historical and theoretical context. I will finish this chapter with a description of how I think the research contributes to our knowledge of class and education and give an overview of the thesis content and structure.

A snapshot of the empirical research

Eighty one in-depth, biographical interviews were conducted with fifty one people of all ages between 2007 and 2012. The interviews were with students and graduates in three Higher Education Institutes (HEIs); the National University of Ireland Maynooth, Trinity College Dublin and the Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown. Eighteen of the fifty one interviewees participated in the longitudinal element of the study. Forty three of the participants came from working class backgrounds and eight came from middle class backgrounds. Twenty eight, of the total cohort were mature students. Thirty three of the cohort are women and seven are migrants from the UK, Eastern Europe, Africa and America.

In order to develop a deeper analysis of the institutional setting twelve interviews were conducted with staff from the three case study HEIs. This was later supplemented by four interviews with community activists and educators in working class areas. Alongside these ninety seven individual interviews a focus group was held with a community education group in 2011 to explore how non-participants in HE view tertiary education and to discuss some of the broader themes generated through my work with the main research cohort.

Observational data was collected in all three research sites. Besides this primary research I completed extensive desk research on the case study HEIs, on education and educational policy, and on learning and theories of class and inequality. Secondary research was also undertaken on the main themes that emerged in the interviews most notably respect, care and the normative aspects of social practice.

Mind the gap! The genesis of the research

The research question was first formulated during a mixed methods piece of research on mature students and disadvantage that I conducted with three other colleagues while working at the Centre for Research in Adult and Community Education in NUIM (Fleming, Loxley, Kenny & Finnegan, 2010). During this research it became apparent that there was very little in-depth empirical work on class and student experience in Irish HE which we could usefully draw upon for our study. I was also somewhat surprised to discover the full extent to which quantitative research has dominated the way we discuss access and widening participation in Ireland. Less surprising, but just as important, I further discovered that most of the studies, both qualitative and quantitative, employed a categorical approach to class based on occupational data, which suggested that these occupational categories were self-explanatory and neutral. The dearth of qualitative material and the widespread use of under-theorised categories piqued my interest which crystallised into a set of related questions which provided the departure point for this research and still remain right at the core of the thesis; namely 'what is the nature of contemporary working class experience in HE and what does this tell us about Irish society'? This necessarily leads us to ask 'what precisely do we mean when we talk about class and how can this be best conceptualised, explored and described?'

West (1996) has argued there is always an autobiographical aspect to how and why we chose to study an issue and in my case this is undoubtedly true. My interest in class and education has deep roots in my life and my work and is inextricably linked to my experience as an adult educator in an inner city area of Dublin. Long before joining the Centre for Research in Adult and Community Education I was interested in questions of social inequality and about who 'wins' and why in our society and working and living in a poor working class area meant that these questions became part of the texture of my everyday life. This was between the late 1990s and mid-2000s during a much feted economic boom and a period of rapid change which led to, amongst other things, friends, colleagues and ex-students enrolling in third level education courses-a decision which would have been unthinkable for most people in this area of Dublin even a decade beforehand. The formulation of the research question and to a lesser extent some of the theoretical and methodological choices I have made in the course of the research are intimately connected, albeit somewhat indirectly, to this period in my life.

Of course my participation in an academic research centre, where questions about inequality and education were viewed as matters of intellectual concern and empirical investigation, altered the way I approached and thought about these matters (Field, Finnegan, Fleming, Holliday, Morgan-Klein & West, 2010; Finnegan, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2011a, 2011b; Fleming & Finnegan, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2011a, 2011b; Fleming, Loxley, Kenny & Finnegan, 2010). As a researcher at the centre I read through a good deal of the Irish material and a portion of the vast international literature on class and education. At the outset I was searching for material which was empirically informed and which tested its own theoretical assumptions in a rigorous fashion and although a rich body of work does exist which meets these criteria I found that this type of material was less common than might be hoped (see Chapter Four). In fact, a large swathe of class theory puzzled me because either the empirical basis for the various claims being advanced was not made entirely clear or worse appeared desiccated and entirely removed from everyday experience. This I found was even true of certain critical theorists of education who despite having a strong commitment to social justice discussed inequality in a way that left the lived experience of class dimly visible (e.g. Giroux, 1992, 2000; for a critique of this aspect of Giroux's work see Finnegan, 2007; Lynch, 1989).

I began to think of how best to tackle what I think is an important but neglected subject in Irish educational scholarship and my final decision to pursue the present study occurred during preliminary discussions in the Centre about a new research project examining retention in HE (undertaken by the RANLHE research network-see Field, Finnegan, Fleming, Holliday, Morgan-Klein & West, 2010; Finnegan, Fleming, Johnston, Merrill, & West, 2009; Fleming & Finnegan, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c). It became clear that we, the researchers at the Centre, would be gathering a considerable amount of interview data which I believed would afford me an invaluable opportunity to address the questions I had about class and higher in a substantive and nuanced manner.

The institutional and policy context
The Irish tertiary education system has been completely transformed over the past three decades a process which accelerated during the rapid economic and social change of the Celtic Tiger. In line with international trends a once 'elite' system of third level education has evolved into an increasingly diversified network of institutions of 'mass' education and the

overall admission rate of people of school leaving age has risen from twenty per cent in 1980 to fifty five per cent in 2004 (Clancy & Wall 2000; O'Connell, Clancy & McCoy, 2006). Since the mid-nineties Irish policy makers have put an increased emphasis on the importance of widening participation in third level education. It has been repeatedly argued that improving access to education will have a positive effect on society and that this would help overcome, or at least diminish, the level of class inequality in Ireland (DES, 1995a, 1995b; HEA, 2008a; NOEAHE, 2010; Osborne & Leith, 2000; Skilbeck & O'Connell, 2000). It is also contended that bringing a greater range of students into tertiary education will guarantee the future vitality of tertiary institutions and ensure economic competitiveness and flexibility in the era of the 'knowledge economy'.

However, despite a massive increase in student numbers since the 1980s class continues to have an enormous and I would say a defining, influence on who enters third level education in Ireland. This has been documented in a number of major quantitative studies on the varying participation rates of different socio-economic groups in Higher Education (Clancy, 1982, 1988, 1995, 2001; Clancy & Wall, 2000; O'Connell, Clancy & McCoy, 2006). In the most recent of these large scale studies it was noted that although there had been improvements in access for working class people there continues to be an enormous disparity in the third level participation rates of different social classes (O'Connell, Clancy & McCoy, 2006). The figures in more recent, but less detailed, policy reviews confirm that this remains the case (HEA, 2010a, NOEAHE, 2010).

So I am certain that that important changes have occurred in our educational system (after all the idea of working class participation in HE was not even countenanced a generation ago in Ireland) but I am equally convinced that the effects of this complex, multi-layered and uneven process are not yet fully understood. What we do know is that working class students are now attending colleges in significant numbers yet remain a relatively small minority of the student body as a whole. This might prompt us to ask 'has Irish HE developed pedagogies, curricula and resources commensurate with the needs, values and experiences of these students?' Well, I think it is still very much open to question whether this has entailed any sort of profound rethinking of the culture and practices of higher education but currently there is simply not enough research on the topic to even begin to answer this properly. We might also be curious to learn what going to college means to working class students and what to understand the

effect this experience has on them and their families? However, to date such questions also remain largely unasked and unanswered in the existing literature. For the most part the work dealing with widening participation and non-traditional students is either framed through quantitative assessments or policy statements. However useful such work may be it is obviously incomplete in the sense that it does not offer any insight into *how the students themselves view or value third level education*. With the field structured in this way, measured largely in statistical 'inputs and outputs' buttressed by aspirational policy rhetoric there is an obvious risk that access policies are being developed in a way that is disconnected from students' lived experience. I also think this inhibits us from examining aspects of power and inequality that can only be explored through intensive qualitative inquiry. The research has been designed and conducted with these questions and lacunae firmly in mind and therefore focuses closely on students' learning stories and explores in some depth what this indicates about equality and social change in modern Ireland.

The need for sceptical and empirically grounded research on class

Any Irish social scientist interested in doing research on class and education will soon encounter an interesting paradox. Academic literature which looks at the influence social class exerts on people's quotidian experience, notions of identity and trajectories in society and education are well-established, and arguably in some quarters perhaps even over-rehearsed, topics in international social science but they still remain relatively neglected subjects in Ireland. When one examines the literature on class as a whole, as I have done for this research, the disparity between the international and the national field is even more striking and class remains an under-researched topic in Ireland (see Chapter Five).

In this sense empirical research on class and education in the national context is required and readily justifiable but nonetheless a study such as this cannot ignore recent developments in class analysis beyond Ireland and the specific methodological and theoretical approach taken here has been directly informed by political and sociological debates about class in the international literature. This argument will be fully explored in Chapter Three but I want to sketch out the lineaments of this argument very briefly now. I believe that the legacy of authoritarian socialism, the reality of neoliberal capitalism, the reconfiguration of the welfare state and the massive technological and cultural changes which have occurred over the past forty years, especially in the nature and organisation of work, has radically altered class

politics, class composition and the meaning of education for working class people in the global north. When we also take into the account of the growth of 'new' social movements-most notably feminism- many of the confident claims made about class and identity in the past have to be now treated with a good deal of scepticism. While reports of 'the death of class' are very much exaggerated contemporary research on class cannot presume its conceptual models to be beyond scrutiny (Savage, 2000). However, despite these momentous changes a preliminary review of the literature confirmed my initial impression that there is a strong tendency in much class analysis to work insulated within the boundaries of a particular tradition and treat the basic theoretical premises of one's paradigm as uncontroversial.

But in the current context I think we need to be willing "to cut a passage through the thicket of new and yet unexplored life realities" (Bauman & Tester, 2001, p. 13). So I began the research willing to completely rethink the validity of the project of class analysis and although, on the basis of previous research and life experience, I thought this was unlikely I did nonetheless think it was possible. Four years later I am fully convinced that class does matter, and matters more than I thought, and that it remains a key axis of social division and is fundamental to understanding education. However, on the same basis I am much less certain that the dominant models in Irish social science-the categorical, the Marxist and the Weberian- are capable of grasping some of key aspects of contemporary working class experience (see Chapters Three and Four for further detail of this critique). The continuing salience of class, albeit within a new socio-political conjuncture, alongside the highly overdetermined nature of a large portion of established scholarship on class requires that research on class, education and identity is both sharply sceptical and empirically grounded.

Scepticism and a concomitant desire to ground the study firmly in empirical data has profoundly shaped the conduct and design of the research. In the gathering and the initial analysis of the data I made very few assumptions about how class, identity and education might be related to each other. How this was done will be fully explored in the next chapter but suffice to say at this point that one of the most important aspects of the study is that I have used biographical methods for gathering the data and this was done longitudinally. In other words the thesis is built upon very open, rich and layered accounts of life and learning to make its findings. Apart from maximising the possibility of unforeseen discoveries this method also allowed me to explore in a sustained way the relationship between biographical and educational experience and I think the biographical approach is particularly well adapted

to investigating the processual and phenomenological nature of both learning and identity formation.

So throughout the research I was at pains to avoid a mode of thinking, researching and writing which does not deign to explore social experience and which all too often results in a form theoretical closure in which theory simply ratifies itself. However, as the research was conducted from a critical and realist perspective (see Chapter Two for a full exploration of how this is conceptualised) I think an approach which grounds itself in the data and is careful to avoid making large and unsubstantiated claims for a 'grand theory' is not sufficient (Mills, 1959). It is just as important to bear in mind that narrow empiricism is just as limiting[1]. A blinkered empiricism which avoids the task of understanding structures and social logic by presenting individual experience as the totality of what can, and needs, to be said about class and education is just as limiting.

What is left? Situating the research within the critical 'tradition'

As such I think the work of conceptualisation and secondary research is absolutely fundamental to good research and I have tried to match my careful attention to the interviews with an equally serious attempt to make sense of the theoretical field in which the research is situated.

I have drawn from a wide range of theoretical sources in trying to tease out the central questions tackled in the thesis but like any piece of critical research on class and power one of the main issues I have grappled with is how to makes best use of the intellectual legacy of Marxism. Within the thesis many of the ideas of Marx and other Marxists will be deployed but I have no interest whatsoever in trying ratify the categories of Marxism as *the* categories of thought of *the* emancipatory tradition and I will argue in Chapter Three that there are a host of reasons to remember the cultural critic Stuart Hall's (1981, pp. 35-36) admonitory advice

> The task of critical theory is to produce as accurate a knowledge of complex social processes as the complexity of their functioning requires. It is not its task to console the

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1 Mills uses the phrase 'abstracted empiricism' but I want to approach the limits of empiricism in a slightly different way than he does. I will expand on the relationship between empirical work and theory in Chapter Two.

left by producing simple but satisfying myths, distinguished only by their super-left wing credentials.

This is particularly true of work that deals with class and identity and which so often follows well-worn grooves and wearyingly familiar lines of argument. As I have already suggested "the idea of establishing the authentic first principle of scientific explanation prior to going out and doing research is a gross misconception of the nature of inquiry (Pawson, 1989, p. 10). As such the thesis has a tense but, it is hoped, productive relationship with a number of ideas drawn from Marx and Marxism (especially the work of Marx himself as well as Henri Lefebvre, Paulo Freire, E.P. Thompson. Raymond Williams, David Harvey and to a lesser extent Gramsci).

My considerable debt to Marxism along with a healthy scepticism about its political legacy and its status as a *complete* theory is expressed in the title of the thesis- *Welcome to the knowledge factory?* The question mark is primarily there because on the most basic level I think we do not know enough about Irish working class students' experience within universities. It is also been chosen there because I think the factory is a much mythologised space of exploitation and resistance linked to a rather clichéd notion of who and what constitutes the working class. I want to argue that these clichés are now, and perhaps always were, an obstacle to a realistic form of class analysis (see Chapter Three). There is a third reason for choosing the title; the critical theorist Stanley Aronowitz (2000), building on the work of Italian autonomists in 1970s (Wright, 2002), has asserted that the modern university has become a sort of 'knowledge factory' which has become increasingly subordinate to the logic of capital and is central to social reproduction. While I appreciate Aronowitz's (2000) effort to unshackle class theory from nostalgic notions about the industrial proletariat I am, on the basis of the research, a little more circumspect than Aronowitz and other theorists of social reproduction about what is occurring in universities in the era of 'mass' education. I have little doubt that the university is subject to the logic of capital and I think there is good reason to believe that this has intensified in recent years and that in the medium term this may well transform the very meaning of education (Ball, 2007). Yet despite this I think something more complex is happening to both students and to a much lesser extent the institutions of higher education than this type of formulation allows for. I think it plays a fundamental role in social reproduction but it is *also* a space in which normative claims, shaped but not fully determined by the neoliberal conjuncture, are being advanced by working class students and I think that these claims are both biographically and socially significant.

So my contention is that if we want to really grasp what is occurring in contemporary education and society I think we need to be attuned to the complexity of student experience and aware of the logic of reproduction. On a theoretical level I take this that we have to both use Marx's ideas and understand the limits of Marxism. As a result in the thesis I have used a problematising, demythologising mode of thinking that moves between various foci and theoretical perspectives that destabilises fixed orthodoxies in order to reconstruct my own understanding of the question and the field. The manner in which I have engaged in this inquiry has been strongly influenced by the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1990, 2000) and a number of other theorists- who one way or another can be described as Bourdieusians-most notably Diane Reay (1998a) and Beverley Skeggs (1997). But Bourdieu's work will also be critically scrutinised and I think a good deal of the theoretical value of the thesis lies in the fact that Bourdieu's work is interrogated in a substantive manner through the empirical data and other forms of critical theory and sociology (see Chapter Three).

By working through the interviews and extensive desk research I have developed my own conceptual framework for analysing class inequality along three axes of power –ownership, authority and access to legitimate cultural capital. As such the position elaborated through the thesis is neither 'properly' Marxist nor 'strictly' Bourdieusian; it is more accurately described as a critical and egalitarian piece of work which is particularly concerned with developing a normatively orientated theory of social action and practice. This stress on the normative aspects of human activity is influenced by the work of Axel Honneth (1995a, 1995b, 2007, 2009) and Andrew Sayer (1992, 2000, 2005, 2011). In fact one of the main arguments of the research is that critical and egalitarian theories of class and education need to develop a conceptual framework which is far more alert to how dignity, respect and the moral dimensions of everyday life inform social practices and help define the biographical significance of class.

The contribution of the thesis

Remarkably this project is the most extensive piece of qualitative research on class and Irish Higher Education that has been done in sixteen years. As we shall see there is far less qualitative research on the topic than might be imagined and even though there are some signs that this is changing (Finnegan, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2011b; Fleming, Loxley, Kenny & Finnegan, 2010; McCoy & Byrne, 2011b) a great deal of work remains to be done in this

field. Given the rapidity of change in Irish society and the expansion of HE over the past two decades and the importance of the issue of social inequality the need for and the empirical significance of this study are, I think, very clear. Like Lynch and O'Riordan's landmark research (1996) the study is concerned with working class students' experience in HE and in fact confirms the continuing validity of many of their findings. However, it should also be noted that this research takes a slightly different approach than these authors- who were primarily concerned with the barriers to working class participation in HE -and exams longitudinally what happens to students while they are at college on a number of different levels. In particular it explores the construction of learning identities, student resilience and reflexivity and the educational importance of respect and recognition in a novel manner. It also offers some sense of the multiplicity and complexity of working class students experience in HE in a way that has not been done before in Irish educational scholarship. As such I think the study contributes to debates about Irish HE, access and social equality and learning theory. Furthermore, the research design-which is based in three different HEIs- offers insight into the differentiation of the HE sector which has become a vital factor in assessing the progress of the 'access agenda' (see Chapters Four and Seven).

The thesis is one of a tiny handful of works that examines in detail working class attitudes to education and explores how class identity is negotiated and made through learning processes in educational institutions. Beyond education and the access and widening participation debate the thesis is also a contribution to the small body of work in Ireland that explores working class experience and culture using qualitative data. The thesis also includes an interdisciplinary review of extant research on class and class formation in Ireland and to my knowledge this is the most complete review of this sort that has ever been conducted in Ireland. This may sound surprising but this is because most prior work of any depth has worked mainly within the fairly well defined boundaries of a given discipline (mainly sociology, history and political theory-the exceptions in literary studies and geography are noteworthy see for example (Breathnach, 2006; Pierse, 2010)[2]. As this is a minor part of this thesis (Chapter Five) I do not want to make extravagant claims for it as a piece of work but I do think it lays a solid basis for a more detailed interdisciplinary inquiry into class in Ireland

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[2] There are some very useful overviews of labour history as well. The novelty lies in the fact that there has not been a review which draws these various elements together in order to assess how class has been constructed through symbolic struggles over class formation. This is linked to an argument about class and classification and economics and culture which will be elaborated in Chapter Three and then developed through the thesis.

in the future which I would argue is absolutely fundamental for the development of the field of what might be usefully termed 'working class studies' (Russo & Linkon, 2005).

Much of the value of the study lies, I believe, in the way the empirical and theoretical aspects of the project are synthesised. It explores two significant intertwined fields of scholarship *through* the data and using a grounded approach the thesis outlines a conceptual framework for analysing class inequality and educational experience. I cannot claim that it is wholly new. As a matter of fact I think it is probably impossible to say something entirely novel about class but the value of my particular framework is the specific way it is has been elaborated through a recursive process based on extensive empirical research and a wide body of secondary research. The fruit of this is a distinct theoretical framework which connects a historical analysis of social structures to lived experience. It is informed by my discussions with the research participants and through a confrontation and synthesis of the work of the Bourdieu, humanist Marxism and critical theory. In theoretical terms research using Marx or Bourdieu's ideas is hardly uncommon in either social theory or educational research. Nonetheless, the retheorisation of Bourdieu through the heterodox Marxism of Henri Lefebvre in a theory of social space is new. The model of class inequality, experience and identity developed here is, of course, context specific but has been conceptualised in a manner which means I am quite confident that I will be able to employ, develop and amend it in future research projects.

The strong focus on learning and education within a theory of class, social space and identity formation adds another layer of value to the study. Specifically the thesis reformulates the idea of habitus within a differentiated theory of learning and reflexivity and thus makes a contribution to the 'reproduction and resistance' debate by drawing on Bourdieu, critical theory and the groundbreaking writings of the Finnish thinker Yrjo Engestorm (see Chapter Four for details). Furthermore, as we shall see the participants' accounts indicate that it is impossible to understand contemporary learning experiences without reference to desire, recognition needs and the human capacity for agentic forms of critical reflection. These key empirical themes are explored in relation work of Axel Honneth and Andrew Sayer and the thesis makes a sustained methodological and theoretical argument for a normatively orientated form of social scientific research. I think this approach, which combines a historical critique of political economy, reflexive empirical sociology, learning theory and a concern with the moral and normative aspects of social practices, is novel and generative.

Just as importantly I believe it offers a realistic and non-reductive theoretical framework for understanding the making of working class biographies through education in a highly individualistic neoliberal era. It does so in a way that consciously and systematically foregrounds the participants' voices and for all these reasons I think the thesis offers a solid basis on which to rethink some aspects of the sociology of class and education.

There are also a number of minor methodological innovations which have been devised through developing a critical and grounded research methodology which are described in the Chapter Three and I believe these research techniques can be used and honed in the future.

The thesis structure

The aim of the thesis is to outline a coherent theory of class and education which is empirically grounded and conceptually developed. The study consists of eight chapters but does not follow the most common format of social science theses. This is because the most typical arrangement of material in theses (e.g. literature review followed by a chapter methodology and then findings) is based on empiricist distinctions and assumptions which are not commensurable with a critical approach to research that I want to develop here. The next chapter, which discusses this in detail, will outline why I believe a different methodology is called for and will give an overview of how the work was conducted and the methods I used.

One of the main arguments I will make in the next chapter is that critical research demands detailed conceptual work and broad contextualisation. Consequently the literature review- part one of the thesis- is divided into three chapters each of which tackles a key topic. Chapter Three examines theories of class and class identity and will elaborate a conceptual framework for exploring these issues. The following chapter builds on this and explores the relationship between class and education. The first half of the chapter analyses the nature of learning and the classed nature of the education system and the second half examines the modern expansion of Higher Education and the key theories underpinning my own approach to education and class. Chapter Five then turn to the topics within an Irish context. This chapter further contextualises the rationale for the research and explores why working class experience has been so often overlooked in Irish society. The second half of this chapter

describes recent social change and the role education plays, and is supposed to play, in Irish society.

These three chapters develop a theoretical framework which is organically linked and contextualises the second part of the thesis which details the empirical findings and their interpretation. Chapter Six looks at how the interviewees discussed or chose not to discuss, class and identity and explores why work, community and notions of worth emerged as such important recurrent themes in the biographical accounts of working class experience. The concern with worth-and especially dignity and respect-is also a major theme of the following chapter. Chapter Seven examines how the interviewees view and value HE. The key contention here will be that HE is highly valued because it is envisaged as a space of recognition and potential transformation. This chapter will also explore the students' learning as a biographical and longitudinal process and conclude with an interpretation of the theoretical implications of the data. This will bring the findings on recognition, reflexivity and class together primarily through a critical appraisal and retheorisation of the ideas of Bourdieu. The final chapter will summarise and discuss the main findings of the thesis.

Chapter 2

Methodology: Defining a critical research perspective and designing a reflexive process of inquiry

> Every particular study is a multi-faceted mirror reflecting the exchanges, readings and confrontations that form the conditions of its possibility
> (Michel De Certeau)

> The first fruit of this [sociological] imagination [..] is the idea that the individual can understand his (sic) own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his own period, that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of all those individuals in his circumstances
> (C Wright Mills)

Introduction

The present chapter will give a more detailed account of how critical research is imagined and explain how the research was conducted. I will outline the major theoretical assumptions that underpin the study in section I and then in Section II I will give an overview of research design and explore the reasons for choosing in-depth biographical interviews as the primary research method in further depth. The final part of the chapter is a description of the research process which will focus on various aspects of the project including sampling, the choice of case study institutions and research ethics. I will also delineate how a critical and grounded approach was used for gathering, analysing and interpreting data.

Section I

A critical research perspective: Ontological assumptions and core principles

The research was designed and conducted from a critical and egalitarian perspective. Being critical involves a commitment to a clear and systematic explication of ideas and developing a coherent analysis. It also demands honesty, rigour and sensitivity to ambiguities and contradictions within data and this in turn requires a willingness on the part of a researcher to rethink their own assumptions and ideas through the process of inquiry. While all these things are indispensable I mean far more than this when I use the term critical.

The definition of critical research that I will now outline is a synthesis that draws on a variety of sources and is most deeply indebted to certain strands of Marxism[3], Critical Theory[4] and

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3 Marx's 'ruthless criticism of all that exists' connected sophisticated analysis of the structures of exploitation and domination helped define critical theory and will be discussed at length in Chapter Two. Marx's *Theses on*

Critical Realism. Within these overlapping intellectual traditions there is a consensus that critical research has to begin with a clear account of what it means to produce knowledge in a given socio-historical context and this necessarily includes developing an analysis of how social power functions. This entails more than a sociological interest in the sources and use of power and includes a strong normative commitment to social justice; according to Erik Olin Wright critical scholarship necessarily involves "identifying the ways in which existing social institutions and social structures impose harms on people" (2010, p. 11). The significance of Wright's argument is twofold -first, we cannot be neutral in the face of unnecessary social suffering and second, that understanding the *causes* of social suffering has to be one of the major objectives of critical social science.

In this definition being critical involves a commitment to examining social practices and asking whether they contribute or limit freedom and equality[5]. In this regard theorists of equality have usefully distinguished between liberal ideas of equality, defined primarily as equality of access and opportunity, with a more radical notion of egalitarianism which seeks a greater degree of equality of condition in regard to "respect and recognition, resources, love care and solidarity, power and working and learning" (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2009, p. 46). While the thesis will develop its own analysis of how these various aspects of equality are related to each other this notion of equality of condition offers a useful departure point for defining what equality means within the present research. Underpinning this approach to equality is the desire to seek ways of ensuring "well-being for all" (Kropotkin, 2007, p. 63) and this necessarily requires that we attempt to identify immanent possibilities

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Feurbach (1964) is still one of the most pithy and conceptually rich statements on emancipatory theory and the nature of critical thought that I have come across and although it is not quoted often in the thesis it has been crucial to how I approach critical theory. As I noted in the first chapter one of the secondary concerns of this study is to engage with both the limitations and strengths of the Marxist tradition. This requires identifying and retaining what is useful and convincing in this body of work while avoiding the disastrous forms of political organisation and often bizarrely exegetical approach and fetish of category that mars so much Marxist analysis.

4 Critical Theory is usually identified with the work of the *Institute of Social Research* -see Jay (1996) and Held (1990) for useful overviews; for key work by critical theorists see (Adorno, 1973; Adorno & Horkheimer,1979; Benjamin, 1992; Habermas, 1984; 1992; Honneth, 1995a; Horhkeimer, 1982; Marcuse, 1964). However, Critical Theory here and the related field of critical pedagogy (e.g. Apple, 1982; Aronowitz, 2000; ; hooks, 1994; Giroux, 1983; Livingstone, 1983; McLaren, 1998; Shor, 1987) are viewed here as important nodes in a much broader tradition of critical thinking about equality and change and I would argue there are important sources of critical theory both inside and *outside* the academy which are not connected to the Institute at all and have influence the definition outlined in this chapter.

5 I am convinced by the argument, put forward by Etienne Balibar (2002) that these are in fact completely interdependent ideas rather than just complimentary ideas (what he calls 'egaliberte'). A similar idea is proposed by Kropotkin (2007) and Freire (1998).

for expanding human freedom (Freire, 1972). Freedom here is provisionally defined in terms of meaningful opportunities for agents to develop their full human capabilities (Sen, 1999; 2009). The empirical data gathered for the present research project and a wide range of literature strongly indicates that the full development of human capabilities depends on the strengthening of personal and collective autonomy and increasing the level of self-determination across society as well as deepening a sense of solidarity and care for others (Balibar, 2002; Kropotkin, 2007; Ranciere, 1989; Sen, 1999; 2009).

This emphasis on overcoming inequalities and domination and fully developing human capabilities is meaningless unless social relations are subject to conscious change. In fact one of the defining characteristics of critical thought, as understood here, is that is grasps the profound historicity of human activity. A sense of historical contingency and the related conviction that social structures and institutions are mutable, historically conditioned and subject to intervention is an inalienable element of my approach to the research. Thus critical research has to find a way of describing society as structured, relational and historically conditioned but also as a space of possibility. That is to say we have to bear in mind that varying conceptions of possible futures, what Bloch (1985) has evocatively termed the 'not yet', play a part in defining our sense of human possibility and encouraging human creativity. This sense of possibility is not only future orientated it also relies on how we use historical traces and events and patterns in the history of the struggle for equality and freedom to reimagine the here and now. A notion of the 'not yet' linked to traces of what has been inspiring and emboldening in history is a minor but nevertheless important part of how I have chosen to structure and present the thesis. It will also be argued that this also requires attending to the types of practices in everyday life that *already* exist and are in some sense prefigurative of greater levels of equality and freedom in society.

We can see how the various elements of the critical perspective highlighted thus far–a concern with power linked to an emancipatory critique of society bolstered by a strong notion of human possibility are brought together in Horkheimer's (1982, p. 245) famous exploration of the difference between traditional ideas of scholarship and his conception of critical theory

> The elaboration of theories in the traditional sense is regarded in our society as an activity set off from other scientific and non-scientific activities, needing to know nothing of the historical goals and tendencies of which such activity is a part. But the

critical theory in its concept formation and in all phases of its development very consciously makes its own that concern for the rational organization of human activity which it is its task to illumine and legitimate. For this theory is not concerned only with goals already imposed by existent ways of life, but with men and all their potentialities.

For Horkheimer critical theory is far more than an academic 'method' and requires a mode of theorising, capable of mapping "the normative, historical and relational dimensions of social inquiry and knowledge" (Giroux, 1983, p. 35). It is intimately connected to an egalitarian political vision and a theory of history that posits that social phenomena are the product of dynamic, complex sets of relations rather that static and isolated events. This critical mode of research sets itself against what Dewey (1938) has termed the limits of either/or thinking and seeks to overcome the familiar and limiting binaries of subject/object and fact/norm which structure much research and which critical scholars maintain are not tenable distinctions (Sayer, 2011). Critical inquiry is concerned with the relational nature of social practice and thought and seeks to illustrate the connection between the subjective and the objective, the past and the present and the economic and the cultural bases of power in describing social phenomena as processes. Related but nonetheless distinct from these arguments is the fact that from a critical perspective disciplinary boundaries between, to pick three subjects which are directly relevant to my study- history, sociology and psychology- are less important than exploring different bodies of knowledge in a processual and situated manner which avoids reification and is capable of illuminating the nature of social power and is attentive to immanent needs and possibilities (Calhoun, 1995). This dialectical and interdisciplinary approach to research obviously has enormous implications for research design especially in terms of how we envisage data, conceive of evidence, understand validity and describe the role of theory.

However, before turning to these issues an important qualification needs to be made. The critical research perspective outlined thus far might seem to freight any small-scale research, such as this study, with undue weight. But I obviously do not wish to tie the thesis to grandiose and impossible ambitions. Rather what is being discussed is the *potential* of critical thought and what this perspective calls for, or can achieve, in a specific context cannot be settled in advance. Moreover, I believe explicitly naming the deeply held assumptions that underpin research is both the most concise and effective way of opening up my research to the scrutiny of others. From my perspective too often basic ontological assumptions about

human capacity are smuggled in to scholarship through declarations of neutrality and I believe the acknowledgement of partiality and a description of one's normative horizons and commitments offers the soundest basis for clarity and critique both for me as a researcher and for potential readers (Bourdieu, 1990; Skeggs, 1997).

One other thing should be said about the emancipatory intent behind the thesis and the expectations I am bringing to this work. I think it is helpful to distinguish between two approaches to critical scholarship; there are those authors who are primarily concerned with a thoroughgoing critique of existing norms, patterns and behaviour (Adorno, 1978; Foucault, 1977) and those who link egalitarian critique to more concrete projects and initiatives for social change. As the first chapter suggests I have far more sympathy with the latter approach and I believe there should be some immediate and clear relevance to critical research-however modest that might be (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2009; Sayer, 2011). I see this as part of a more general effort to begin to 'envisage real utopias' (Wright, 2010) and find practical ways of developing more just, egalitarian and generative social relations. This strand of research is further distinguished from some of the more 'grand' iterations of critical theory in that it puts greater store in empirical research and has a much stronger faith in the possibility of progressive change and clear communication based on empirical inquiry[6]. This has directly affected the research design; I think one of most important tasks of critical research is to use research to explore unmet needs (Bhaskar, 1989) and discover the normative demands for justice that are immanent in people's accounts of their lives and in their experience of structures and social relations (Honneth, 2007).

From a critical perspective to a critical social science methodology
Critical research is defined here as historically aware, reflexive, situated, interdisciplinary and explicitly normative form of inquiry which is concerned with identifying the sources of suffering and discovering the emancipatory potential within any given context. This does not necessarily have to involve large scale changes and includes more modest attempts to understand and act in local contexts. Developing a workable research methodology based on this perspective came through a sustained engagement with Critical Realist philosophy. While critical realism does not offer a complete and definitive account of critical social science the conceptual distinctions made in the work of Bhaskar (2008, 1979) Sayer (1992, 2000) and

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6 See for example Adorno's *Minima Moralia* Fragment (50) to get some idea how sharply my position diverges from other versions of critical theory.

Archer (1995, 1996, 2007) are, I believe, invaluable and have been crucial to the development of the research methodology.

Critical realism emerged in the 1970s primarily through a number of academic interventions in the debates about the nature of scientific inquiry which resulted in carefully constructed arguments against empiricism and positivism in philosophy and psychology (Bhaskar, 2008[7]; Madden & Harre 1975). This intellectual project has developed in multiple directions since then and now includes a very rich body of work in the social sciences, (Archer, 1995, 2007; Bhaskar, 1979; Elder-Vass, 2010: Pawson, 1989; Sayer, 1992, 2000 etc.).

Roy Bhaskar's *Realist Theory of Science* is one of the foundational works within this corpus and is a useful place to begin to map out some of the ideas I have used to elaborate a critical research methodology. In this book Bhaskar identifies himself as a realist in the widely employed philosophical sense of the term-in that he argues the world exists independently of our knowledge of it. Thus he distinguishes between the transitive and intransitive objects of knowledge (Bhaskar, 2008); the intransitive dimension include things, phenomena, processes and structures in the natural and social world (many of which it should be noted are not in the first instance produced by, or dependent on, human activity or knowledge for example the process of photosynthesis). Transitive objects are our descriptions of these things through theories, models and paradigms which change through time (so one could point to Aristotle's observations and metaphysical speculations on botany as one possible set of explanations and modern science's identification of the Calvin cycle in photosynthesis as part of a competing and alternative account of things in the world). Bhaskar is a *critical* realist in two major respects. First, like the critical theorists discussed above he is concerned with eliminating unnecessary suffering and thus thinks it is vital to identify the causes of suffering. Second, he argues that the world is *complex and stratified* and our empirical experience of the world relies on deep structures and powers which are not immediately discernible[8.] According to Bhaskar, both the natural world (2008) and the social world (1979) has depth and cannot be

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7 Initially Bhaskar (20080 termed this 'transcendental realism' .

8 He describes three domains of empirical, the actual and real. The experiential is the domain of everyday experience. This occurs within the actual and depends on structures, mechanisms and powers which are not readily discernible at an empirical level. The actual occurs within the real-that is whatever exists- and includes the idea of includes the idea of both activated and *potential* powers. Although dependent and interrelated these levels should not be conflated. Reality is therefore structured yet remains inexhaustibly complex due to the interaction of various powers (see below).

understood through visible regularities and therefore events and objects are not explicable solely in terms of their external characteristics or correlations between these characteristics. Bhaskar (2008) distinguishes his position from the empiricism of Hume, from Kantian idealism and from Skinner's behaviourism. Objects and entities in the world exhibit specific structure with their *own* causal powers some of which are activated and some which remain as unactivated possibilities within whatever exists (Bhaskar, 1979, 2008; see also Collier, 1994; Sayer, 1992, 2000). To arrive at this conclusion Bhaskar uses a method[9] which proceeds by asking 'what are necessary conditions for the existence of an object or practice?' He argues it is only by pursuing this form of reasoning we can appreciate the ontological depth of the world and develop critical forms of knowledge. I believe these are compelling and useful propositions with clear implications for a social science methodology.

Despite Bhaskar's conceptual clarity and theoretical rigour, there is little to distinguish this emphasis on a real external world and on the depth and structure of this world from Critical Theory and many versions of Marxism (e.g. Harvey, 2010a; Lefebvre, 1991a; Marx, 1990). There are certainly considerable overlaps between Marxism and critical realism (Bhaskar, 1989; Callinicos, 2006; Collier, 1988, 1994; Sayer, 1992)[10] but the specific value of this approach, and this is a point which is not usually as forcefully marked out in the other critical traditions discussed above, is the centrality it gives to *the principle of emergence*. Emergence depends on the way various powers interact to create new powers and these results in unpredictable events (Sayer, 2000; see also Archer, 1995; Elder-Vass, 2010). This is particularly true of the *social* world in which entities and mechanisms interact in complex *open* systems in which human reflexivity employing artefacts, codes and new ideas can radically reorganize social practices (Archer, 2007). This stress on emergence need to be linked to the importance given by critical realists to a person's own self-understanding and self-monitoring; these powers are crucial to agency and grasping emergence in the social world (Harre & Secord, 1972). I believe this formulation goes some way to capturing the structured yet dynamic and unpredictable nature of social activity. It therefore follows that neither atomistic individualism nor schematic structuralist analyses are capable of giving an adequate accounts of the social world.

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9 This is a critical reworking of Kant's transcendental idealism.

10 For alternative approach see Archer (1995, 2007) whose approach to critical realism is clearly distinguishable from Marxism.

The implications of such a position-the stratified, structured and emergent nature of the social world- are wide-ranging for the practice of critical social science. When this concept is combined with the fundamental distinction made between the transitive and intransitive objects of knowledge it suggests that while knowledge is necessarily fallible its value *is not completely relative*. It can be judged according to the criteria of 'practical adequacy' that is to say "knowledge must generate expectations about the world and the results of our actions which are actually realized. It must also [..] be intersubjectively intelligible and acceptable in the case of linguistically expressed knowledge" (Sayer, 1992 p 69)[11]. How practical adequacy might be defined will vary according to context but what this suggests is that social science needs to aim for research which has explanatory power and I want to argue that this relies on reconstructively linking empirical phenomena to the generative mechanisms behind events in a contextually relevant and plausible way. Importantly, this theoretical work, the grasping of depth, structure and emergence, is also where the emancipatory potential of a piece of research becomes apparent. Bhaskar (1979, p. 32) is worth quoting at length on this point

> The essential movement of scientific theory will be seen to consist in the movement from the manifest phenomenon social life, as conceptualised in the experience of social agents concerned to the essential relations that necessitate them. Of such relations the agents may or may not be aware. Now it is through the capacity of social science to illuminate such relations that is can come to be 'emancipatory'. But the emancipatory potential of social science is contingent upon, and entirely the consequence of, its contextual explanatory power

The methodological implications of this approach for research become even clearer if one contrasts this position with other common ways of defining knowledge and theory in social science. Positivists and behaviourists maintain there should be no distinction between the approach and methodologies of natural and social science (Ayer, 1952; Skinner, 1972). The aim of science they believe is offer predictive accounts of the world based on the discovery of law like regularities. In contrast a critical realist holds that the open, emergent nature of the social world means the role of social science is clarification rather than prediction. Furthermore, one cannot expect "descriptions to remain stable or unproblematic over time" (Sayer, 2000, p. 13) or can we ignore how ideas serve a function within a given power structure and thus historicity and an analysis of power remain the keystones of a critical

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11 Interestingly despite the similarity of these arguments to American pragmatism this is not discussed as a source for these ideas by Sayer (1992).

methodology. Similarly, a naive or narrow empiricism is of limited use because this approach relies on generalising from visible regularities and inevitably skates over the stratification of reality and the complex temporalities of cause and effect (Bhaskar, 2008)[12]. A critical approach also stands in opposition to research which embraces the extreme relativism of much modern social theory especially what Sayer (2000) has called 'defeatist postmodernism' as this also flattens out reality and fail to recognise the crucial distinction between the transitive and intransitive dimensions of knowledge.

The conceptual distinctions developed through this chapter offer what I believe is the most robust basis for a critical research methodology. As these ideas are absolutely fundamental to the design of the research and the presentation of thesis findings, I will, at the risk of sounding a little pedantic, now summarise the major points made so far. First, critical knowledge is situated and the major task of critical social science is contextual explanation which has depth and complexity. The adequacy and power of a given explanation relies on the ability to theorise the connection between empirical experience and social structures in a way that explore the constraints and possibilities for emancipation. Second, social science has to acknowledge the specificity of the social world and its dynamics and it therefore cannot accept the methods of natural science uncritically. In practical terms this also means that a lot of 'common sense' ideas in social science which rely on atheoretical conceptions of truth and data which lack depth –such as generalisability, based on statistical regularities or numerical coverage etc., have to be treated sceptically. This does not mean that work produced in this fashion is without value but rather a lot of store has to be put on *the way* such data are integrated within a piece of research (Sayer, 1992). Third, there are specific powers in the social world related to nature of human beings and human culture-such as interntionality, reflexivity and the instrumental and transformative power of ideas - which have to be accounted for in critical social science. Amongst other things I take this to mean that totally frictionless theories of social reproduction inherently lack plausibility. This also implies that there has to be a hermeneutic dimension in critical social science and human intentions, beliefs and self-understanding have to be properly accounted for in any effort of critical reconstruction.

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12 E.g. events and the operation of the mechanisms behind specific events may well be asynchronous and due to the effect of complexity and emergence are unlikely to be easily traced as patterns of conjunction.

In terms of the research methodology and design developed here it is important to note that these arguments are predicated on the theory laden nature of social reality. Both everyday practices and academic reflection are inherently theoretical and this means that "clear accounts of concepts themselves are needed" (Harre & Secord, 1972, p. 37). Therefore a good deal of the effort of critical social science needs to put into the proper conceptualisation of a field of inquiry. As Sayer has noted (2000, p. 23) "it is not the mechanical application of standard tools in which concrete knowledge of the phenomena being studied and previous research is irrelevant; rather scholarly knowledge of the subject is crucial, coupled with particular applications and contexts". Particular care is required then on how we mark out, carve up and conceptualise a research project, how we choose certain phenomena as worthy of attention and how we decide that other potential concepts, themes and events are irrelevant (for example in this case the relationship of university to social experience as a whole) and how we deal with 'keywords' (for instance in this thesis class and learning).

The relationship between criticality and reflexivity

There is a methodological challenge which stems directly from an approach which describes the world as structured, subject to emergence and in which knowledge of the world is necessarily fallible and contingent. This is the challenge of ensuring research is properly reflexive. The term reflexive is now ubiquitous in social science and is often used quite vaguely but the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's definition of reflexivity is both specific and, I think, persuasive. Furthermore, Bourdieu's work also serves as a useful bridge between the methodological and philosophical concerns discussed above and the more immediate practicalities of research design.

Bourdieu's (1990) argument that sociology should concern itself with the logic of *practice* is well known. This is predicated on an external world which is not identical or reducible to our descriptions and a conception of human activity that is practical and embodied. I take this-what I believe are eminently realist distinctions- to mean that any scientific account of social activity has to acknowledge and work through the demands and tensions involved in rendering an account of the logic of practice in the language of theory. Furthermore, Bourdieu (1984) has argued we have to be cognisant of the specific fields in which a given social practice occurs and is studied in analysing the social world. I think this emphasis on the heterogeneity and multiplicity of human practices-which nonetheless are structured and

structuring- is enormously important in grasping the dialectical logic of reproduction and emergence in empirical sociological work and, to return and develop a point made earlier, also directly links criticality to researcher reflexivity.

According to Bourdieu (2000) critical research has to acknowledge that academic work takes place in structured and situated field of activity with its own demands and power relations, criteria of distinction, preferred modes of understanding and mental schema. This field is defined by the cultivation of a contemplative approach to practice which is, in many respects peculiar, and depends on having time and space set aside from everyday demands. The nature of this field is that it naturalises its own conditions as the conditions for social practice in general. Academics are therefore prone, Bourdieu (2000) argues, to taking a 'scholastic view' of the world and tend to confuse, pace Marx, 'the logic of things with things of logic'. To combat this tendency a researcher needs to analyse carefully the social field in which research is taking place and ask how this specific field invites them to conceptualise their own practice (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). What this means in practical terms is that one's values and assumptions have to be made explicit within a piece of research but also that one remains continually aware of how the field of practice and one's position in social space shapes the process of research. So in this thesis this means being clear from the outset about where I speaking from and how this affects the process of interpretation[13] but it also requires attention to how scientific concepts and everyday concepts are described in relation to each other. This, as we shall see, has directly informed the way I decided to interpret and present the research findings.

The research spiral: Working through a double hermeneutic

My contention is that reflexivity and criticality are, as Bourdieu claims, necessarily interdependent and reflexivity is not just about reflection on method and themes but is also fundamental to the process of interpretation. The paradigms and categories used to make sense of data cannot be treated as neutral or unproblematic (Bourdieu, 2000) and as I have already suggested this also involves a sense of history as pregnant with unrealised possibility and of ideas, practices and social relations as historically conditioned. I think we have in this way arrived at a refined definition of a critical research not as a set of principles and precepts but as a situated process which reflects on itself. One of the main objectives in developing a

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13 I found it particularly important to reflect upon my own educational trajectory and aspirations in my research diary in order to disentangle my own experiences and conceptions of HE from what the interviewees had to say.

methodology is to frame the object of inquiry in as much depth as possible and then to problematise this initial framing through a structured and open process of inquiry. Critical reflexivity is therefore defined as the capacity to trace links between ideas and phenomena and to make clearer intellectual distinctions as you progress *through* the research. Precision comes from a recursive loop and becoming aware of 'uncritical given' in our own theorisation and through each movement through the limits of your own understanding an analysis acquires greater nuance and sociological depth. In Marxism and early versions of Critical Theory this would be described as a dialectical movement through concrete and abstract moments. Less grandly it could be described as hermeneutic process in which the researcher shuttles back and forth between concepts, evidence and context (Finnegan, 2010a, 2010b)**.**

When the research is dependent on intensive, qualitative methods-as this thesis is- the double hermeneutic relies on "the interpenetration of the frames of reference of the observer and the observed, for mediation of their respective understandings" (Sayer, 1992, p. 35). To do this the researcher has to move "between particular empirical cases and general theory" (Sayer, 2000, p. 23) and a core activity in critical research is recursively attending to the data through theory and the theory through the data. This is why the literature review in this thesis is not seen as 'preliminary' to empirical research but is integral to the thesis and is the *result* of the working through this double hermeneutic in which my position, the interviewees' accounts and the conceptual field were reflected upon together in order to produce new knowledge.

Summary: A critical methodology

I understand critical social science as reflexive, historical situated form of knowledge production that tries to identify both the cause of suffering and possibilities for human flourishing. This relies on the historical contextualisation of the phenomena it seeks to understand, including the researcher's own practices, within an egalitarian and libertarian perspective. Being critical demands an analysis of power and equality but this alone gives us little sense of what the practice of critical research might involve except that it should concern itself with broad socio-political critique alongside the more commonsensical ideas that research should be intelligible, reliable and consistent. It is obvious though that progressive values do not guarantee good research so while it has been suggested that experience and values shape academic work this does not mean that declarations of intent and

passion is the same as rigorous research and worthwhile scholarship. With this in mind I elaborated upon how a piece might be judged to be adequate and emancipatory-it *has* to have explanatory value and depth. This depth requires reflexivity about self, context and theoretical categories and the creation of double hermeneutic in which the researcher interprets phenomena through a shared horizon of meaning with research participants while engaging is sustained theoretical conceptualisation. This research perspective should be distinguished from empiricist or positivist approaches which think of the world as unmediated and self-disclosing or postmodern theories it which nothing lies 'outside the text'.

Section II

Research design and the process of inquiry

The type of critical research perspective I have outlined is pluralist about the use of specific methods and the task is to choose the most appropriate tools with the question and the context in mind. For this research project an intensive, qualitative method of data collection was chosen- in-depth biographical interviews- and this data were gathered longitudinally. Although the process of analysis and interpretation drew on a wide variety of data sources it was primarily grounded in the interviews using a version of the critical hermeneutic described above. While some of the reasons for choosing this qualitative, longitudinal and grounded approach to the research question have been touched upon already in the last chapter or can be readily inferred from what has been written above I will now explain the rationale behind these choices and discuss the process of research in more detail.

The main methods of inquiry

I envisage research primarily as a recursive engagement with a specific question- and obviously the question in the present thesis is 'what is the nature of working class experience in Higher education and what does this say about Irish society?' How this is imagined, designed and conducted is dependent on a number of contextual and conjunctural factors. There has already been some discussion of the immediate context, viz, the clear gaps in the research field; the dearth of empirical research on working class experience and the relatively small amount work in Irish social science which critically exams the way class is conceptualised. To this we can add that from an egalitarian perspective the absence of working class voices within extant research is both socially significant and a cause for concern. I also believe that an understanding of the texture of everyday experience is vital to

emancipatory education (Freire, 1972) and crucial to social science (Bhaskar, 1979; Lefebvre, 1991b; Mills, 1959). For all these reasons I knew that I would primarily use intensive. qualitative methods and this interview data would then be used to explore the quantitative and conceptual models of class and education that currently dominate the field.

For the reasons that I mentioned in Chapter One and will explore in greater detail in the next chapter, I believe that class analysis cannot take its founding assumptions for granted (see also Savage, 2000). Consequently, I was anxious to ensure a high level of openness in the way the data was gathered and analysed and there are two particular approaches to qualitative research which can be readily used within a critical research paradigm to gather rich data in an open manner-ethnography and biographical research. Both methods had a bearing on the research design.

Since the 1970s some of the most impressive research examining education and class has used ethnographic methods (McLaren, 1998; Reay, 1998a; Skeggs, 1997; Willis, 1977). The present study is not an ethnography but I have learnt a good deal from these works on how to use observation, field notes and interview data within a double hermeneutic. One of striking things that these educational ethnographies is they demonstrate a respect the individuality of agents yet convincingly explore how collective realities and social structures impact on learning by tracing the continuities and discontinuities between work, culture and education. For example Paul Willis'[14] famous study of working class schooling *Learning to labour* explores why the 'lads' in the study engage in behaviour which, especially if one take the promise of meritocratic education at face value, limits their post-schooling options. I am not concerned here with detailing Willis' findings so much as citing it as an example of a research approach which takes lived experience seriously and foregrounds the fact that "social agents are not passive bearers of ideology" but appropriate, struggle and reproduce culture within a structured social context (Willis, 1977, p. 175). Similarly, I think Reay and Skeggs' offer particularly powerful examples of this approach in a contemporary context and their work will be discussed in Chapter Four

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14 Through observation and interviews he documents the lads' 'counterculture' as they smoke, joke and relentlessly trying to snatch time and control away from the school authorities. His argument is that this maintains itself through a shared sense common identity *and patterns* of disidentification and according to Willis the action of 'the lads' needs to be understood as part of an intelligent, purposeful and meaningful culture. Their behaviour is a form of resistance based on their class position and on a *realistic* assessment of their future prospects. I note this because I think a great deal of work on class and education, including this thesis, remains deeply indebted to the way Willis teases this out.

The rich explorations of subjectivity and social action given in biographical and life history studies have had an even greater influence on the research design, the conduct of the interviews and the process of interpretation. According to Chamberlaye, Bornat and Wengraf, (2000) there has been a discernible 'biographical turn' in social scientific research and there are now a wide variety of 'schools' using biographical methods. What all biographical researchers share is the belief that open, in-depth interviews, in which participants are given space to fully explore their own experience in their own terms yields enormously valuable data (Alheit, 1994a, 1994b; Bertaux and Kohli, 1984; Chamberlaye, Bornat & Wengraf, 2000; Merrill & West, 2009; Plummer, 2000; Wengraf, 2001; West, 1996). In my case the use of this approach is based on a notion of human beings as meaning makers and lives as 'storied' (Bruner, 1986; Harre & Gillet, 1994; Wertsch, 1991) and the conviction that the open exploration of subjective experience does not just yield rich data but is in fact fundamental to understanding society (Archer, 2007; Freire, 1972; Harre & Secord, 1972). This is because each individual's story- in all its complexity- offers one of the most effective ways of examining how broad social structures impinge upon and enable action in everyday life (Alheit, 1994a) but also because self-understanding and intentional agency have causal power. From a critical and humanist perspective (Plummer, 2000) biographical accounts- including strategies of action, passions and patterns of belief, modes of thought and ethical engagement and descriptions of social relations are crucial to understanding society (and of course these are precisely the issues that are neglected in most studies of class in Ireland).

Rather unsurprisingly, a similar method has often been used by egalitarian researchers who have an interest in hidden social experiences and subaltern agency and one can trace some of the roots of the recent turn to biographical methods to explicitly emancipatory research in what is often called 'history from below' and in the work of journalists and oral historians who have set out to explore working class experience (Bertaux and Kohli, 1984; Bertaux & Thompson, 1997; Terkel, 1975; Thompson, 1988). I think this approach has been further enriched and encouraged by the growth of feminism which renewed our interest in how modes of experience and ideas of self are important resources in thinking about society (e.g. Gilligan, 1982). This general emphasis on how biographies are shaped within social relations (Mills, 1959) can easily be likened to the work of other contemporary scholars in the field of 'working class studies' (Russo & Linkon, 2005).

I have borrowed widely, and learnt a lot, from other biographical researchers- especially a number of writers on education-in my use of methods (Alheit, 1994a, 1994b, 2005a; Dominice, 2000; Merrill & West, 2009; West, 1996). Like these thinkers I am also interested in the changing structure of biography in the modern world and believe changes in how we construct and envisage the life course are individually and sociologically important (see also Beck, 1992; Gray, 2010; Plummer, 2000) and Chapters Six and Seven will explore this proposition through the data.

Inevitably, my research-like any intensive, qualitative inquiry- in a culture in which empiricism and positivism has shaped our notion of valid knowledge and what constitutes reliable scientific methods brings up questions about 'generalisability'. I have already argued within a critical research paradigm that numerical coverage is less important than explanatory power and that specific nature of the social world often requires an exploration of phenomenological knowledge. While biographical research does offer an approach to data collection which makes very few a priori assumptions it would be a mistake to treat this method as wholly unproblematic. Furthermore, I do not think concerns about how representative a relatively small-scale piece of research can be ignored or dismissed out of hand so I want to make some remarks to clarify exactly how this issue is viewed here.

Sennett and Cobb (1977, p. 45) in their study on class in the US, which was based on a sample of a 150 people, addressed this issue and made the case

> The only way we can generalize is to turn the matter around and ask what is representative or characteristic of American society in its impact on the people interviewed. It is not so much as a replication of other workers that their lives ought to be bear a larger witness, but as focused points in human experience that can teach something about a more general problem of denial and frustration built into the social order

I think Sennett and Cobb are basically correct here– the important issue is how generalisability is understood in the first place and the *type of claims* that are made on the basis of research. So I want to be as explicit as possible about this. In this thesis biographical accounts are used as the main source of empirical data; and I think my primary role is to understand these accounts in their full depth in order to understand the impact of society on individual lives. My findings are based on commonalities and corroboration within the data and building outwards from individuals' accounts but these are not viewed as

predictive or replicable findings. Like Sennett and Cobb I think these lives bear witness to what happens in society and that it discloses important information about injustice, unmet needs and how people act in the face of particular restrictions and enablements within social structures. Ultimately, the validity and the explanatory power of the research rely on treating the biographical accounts with the serious attention they deserve and also how these accounts are then contextualised and theoretically reconstructed. So my concern is not so much with 'representativeness' as this is typically understood but identifying what a given set of biographical accounts disclose about a particular field of practice (university education) and using this to interrogate a given body of knowledge (scholarship on class and education) in order to further develop a critique of social relations in general (Irish social structures). In my mind this is best defined as contingent, situated and partial attempt to unearth the social significance of everyday experience in a conceptually rigorous manner. I think this is what is largely absent from studies of class in Ireland. This obviously aims to do something very different to research on class which is based solely on quantitative methods. However, this does not mean that such work cannot be used alongside quantitative work and the thesis will use some of this type of data to frame the biographical findings in various ways.

Using grounded methods of analysis

There is no point in pursuing intensive biographical research unless one also uses an interpretive and analytical approach which maximises the possibility of unforeseen empirical discoveries within the data. This is precisely what Grounded Theory sets out to do through its inductive approach to social science (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1968; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The research borrows ideas from these writers and shares their concern with paying very close attention to empirical data. The stress grounded theorists put on engaging in the constant comparison of the different parts of the data-that is to say seeking out significant relationships within empirical data-at each stage of analysis is also useful. I believe that findings only emerge slowly through a hermeneutic process and they are right to stress how important it is not to prematurely force data to into pre-given categories. In this type of research analysis is indeed a slow, reflexive reconstruction of meaning which calls for reflexivity, patience and scepticism.

The exact use of these ideas will be discussed below but what should be noted is that while grounded *methods* of analysis proved invaluable to the research, especially the constructivist version advocated by Charmaz (2006) the notion of *theory* advanced by leading figures within this field is not tenable from a critical perspective. Some grounded theorists have argued that theory and knowledge of a field can somehow contaminate data (Glaser & Strauss, 1968). This suggests a notion of atheoretical reality 'out there' which is not commensurable with argument I made earlier that social practice is inherently theory laden and intensely mediated. With this in mind I would that contend the only way of guarding against premature forcing of data is to be reflexive about concepts, field and self as well as the primary data. So this requires both immersion in the interview data and knowledge of the relevant scholarship. Thus the research- which is based on biographical interviews and grounded analysis and interpretation- is underpinned by my belief that my primary and most pressing task in this researcher was to grasp the internal logic of interviewees' choices, actions and beliefs. However, there is no 'white room' in which we can practice pure inductive research and this process cannot be separated from the context or the theoretical and experiential background of the researcher. 'Pure' research is impossible but a critical and reflexive research hermeneutic- strongly grounded in empirical data which moves between 'subjects' and 'researcher', 'data' and 'theory' , and 'subject' and 'field'-does, does I believe offer the basis for reflexive and rigorous inquiry.

I will now describe the process of research; this will include an overview of the preliminary work, explain the selection of the case study institutions, describe sampling methods and the composition of the research cohort, and outline the range of primary data sources used in the project. This will be followed by a more detailed description of interviewing procedures and the methods used in the analysis and interpretation of the data. I will conclude with a discussion of research ethics.

The research process: Preliminary work

Through previous research and study I had a good working knowledge of the main currents of class analysis, the direction that widening participation had taken in Irish HE and the main theories in the academic field which have influenced the way the relationship between class and education is conceptualised. Nonetheless, some of this material was revisited in the first phase of the research. As an aid to reflexivity I then wrote up a series of memos on potential themes and wrote about the possible directions I anticipated the research might take. Some

time was also spent exploring my motivation for choosing the research question and how I understood the purpose and value of the research. At this point I began keeping a research diary-which included biographical reflections as well as thinking through more traditional issues of method and design. I also identified possible case study institutions and 'gatekeepers'. I also drew up a draft document on ethical guidelines for interviewing. At this point I decided that the longitudinal aspect of the data collection would be central to the research design. It made sense to me to explore student experience as a process rather than an event and I believed that this would maximise reflexivity and allow me to build good research relationships. In time this proved to be true and this process created as sense of trust and shared concern between me and research participants. The generosity and insights of the eighteen participants who took part in the longitudinal aspect of the research have been absolutely crucial to this project in every sense and on a personal and intellectual level this extended dialogue has been a very valuable and enriching experience for me.

In the preliminary stages as a follow up to the memos written on possible themes and findings I decided to choose a number 'sensitising concepts'- that is concepts that "offer ways of seeing, organizing, and understanding experience" (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 259) which offer invaluable departure points for interpreting data. The main sensitising concepts in the first stage of the research were *class consciousness, habitus, pedagogy, lifelong learning, precarity, class cultures and resistance*. This helped to further clarify how my assumptions might affect the direction of the research and to refine the conceptual framework for the research. Following this two biographical pilot interviews were conducted. A provisional research schedule was drawn up and I decided to base the study on five to ten in-depth interviews each year in each of the three different institutions over three years and supplement this with interviews with other cohorts selected through purposive sampling. I should mention that all of this work drew on on-going discussions on methodology and theory with other researchers in the Department of Adult Education and within formal and informal research networks most notably the RANLHE project.

The case study institutions
Three different case study institutions were chosen to ensure the research drew on a wide variety of student experiences and also to explore the impact of the diversification of Irish HE on students (McCoy & Byrne, 2011a). The state funded higher education sector is a binary system comprised of the university sector (seven universities and a number of teaching and

art colleges) and the Institute of Technology sector (fourteen Institutes of Technology[15]). This basic binary division has been complicated by the proliferation of new types of courses and fields of study across the tertiary sector since the 1990s and I think this diversity cannot be ignored in any attempt to analyse Irish HE. Consequently the three case study institutions- the National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIM) Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (ITB) - were chosen because they are very distinct places in the contemporary landscape of Irish HE. I would argue, based on quantitative data and background information on the sociogenesis of these institutions, that TCD, NUIM and ITB are best characterised as an elite university, a non-elite university and non-elite IT. Just as importantly gatekeepers in each of the three HEIs proved to be amenable to research being conducted in their colleges. Desk research on the institutions was completed and written up (Fleming & Finnegan, 2011b) once permission was given to do the interviews and the most pertinent information on these colleges will be now be briefly outlined.

Trinity College Dublin, Ireland's oldest university, is the largest and most elite of the three case study institutions. I considered it elite because of its history, its current place in international university rankings and the fact that entry requirements are high for most courses. In 2009/10 there were 10,975 undergraduates (approximately sixty per cent female) 3,415 full-time postgraduate students (fifty seven per cent female) enrolled in TCD. There were 181 part-time undergraduates and 1,602 part-time postgraduates registered that year. In 2005 TCD fulfilled its commitment to reserving fifteen per cent of it places for non-traditional students. The access programme's target group include working class students and those with disabilities but the majority of these non-traditional students were mature. In fact, mature students accounted for 71 per cent of the non-traditional students registered in 2005. By 2009/10 five hundred access students were enrolled in undergraduate studies accounting for 17 per cent of the student body (Hannon, Edge & Keane, 2010). The exact breakdown of the various target groups that make up this seventeen per cent is not available. Recent research suggests that number of working class students in TCD remains low- only 14 per cent of new entrants (the average across the sector is just under twenty three per cent (HEA, 2010a).

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15 For the purpose of simplicity I am including the Dublin Institute of Technology as an IT here even though this institution is quite distinct.

The National University of Ireland Maynooth is a much smaller university and had a student population of 8,800 students in 2009/10 (6,647 were full-time of which 1,194 were postgraduates. A small majority of students in NUIM in 2009/10 were women (approximately 55 per cent of undergraduates and 54 per cent of postgraduate students). NUIM has grown rapidly in the past eight years and has doubling the student's numbers between 2004 and 2011 (NUIM, 2011). It promotes itself, and is widely perceived, as a university which has, in comparative terms, high numbers of non-traditional students (especially mature students-who numbered 800 in 2010). Previous quantitative research on mature students in NUIM suggests that a small majority of these mature students are working class (Fleming, Loxley, Kenny & Finnegan, 2010). As a consequence of this, its international rankings, entry requirements and the absence of some high status faculties- such as medicine- NUIM can be characterised as a non-elite university which still retains some of the aura and prestige of a traditional university. Overall in 2009/2010 working class students accounted for 29 per cent of new entrants (HEA, 2010a)[16]. In the same year NUIM had 220 access students of school leaving age who have entered Maynooth through a programme aimed at bringing in working class students to college.

The IT sector has always enrolled, and continues to cater for, more working class students than the universities (for a current overview see HEA, 2010a, 2010b). The Institute of Technology Blanchardstown is the newest of the ITs and opened in 1999. In 2009/2010 ITB had 1,500 full time (of which 664 were female) and 1,312 part-time students (of which 259 were female). The college gender mix is skewed by the high number of apprenticeship programmes it runs which remain almost entirely male domains but a slight majority of the students enrolled in arts and social science courses are female. ITB is situated in a rapidly growing and largely working class area with historically low levels of participation in higher education and was specifically chosen as a site in order to overcome social disadvantage through education. The mission statement and long term strategy of ITB put a marked emphasis on active links with industry and a strong advocacy of lifelong learning policies that encourage non-traditional students into third level education in order to obtain the skills necessary for a competitive knowledge economy. The number of students from designated working class access groups is 29 per cent (above the average of just under 26 per cent for the IT sector as a whole (HEA, 2010a). Relatively few students come in through school access

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16 It should noted that this is unusually high for the sector and is also higher than previous years 24 per cent in 1998 and 22 per cent in 2007/08 (HEA, 2010a).

programme but the access office has stated that as many as 41 per cent of entrants onto undergraduate degrees through the CAO come through non-standard entry routes.

The students from these three HEIs were contacted through a variety of means depending on the role the gatekeepers had in the institution and the protocols and procedures that are followed in each place. In NUIM a general email to all new students was sent out asking for volunteers who once they replied were then contacted by phone. Later a second general email was sent out to third year students. In TCD the access programme contacted second year students via email and then gave us volunteers' contact details. A year later a handful of new contacts were later generated through the access office and through snowballing. In ITB class presentations on the research were held with students in two different faculties. After this people filled in a form and students, who indicated they were willing to participate, were then contacted individually. Subsequent interviewees were contacted through snowballing and another round of emails and presentations in the second year of the research. It is worth mentioning that the institutional position of each of the gatekeepers-respectively in student records, in an access office and a lecturer-necessarily had an impact on the first contact with potential participants and in all likelihood affected the composition of the various research cohorts.

Sampling and the research cohort

Eighty one in-depth, biographical interviews were conducted with fifty one students of all ages between 2007 and 2012 with two thirds of interviews conducted between 2009 and 2011. As the data was gathered as part of the work of the Centre for Research ten of the interviews were conducted by Dr Ted Fleming. Eighteen of the fifty one students participated in the longitudinal part of the study. The average length of an interview was an hour but the second and third interviews with the longitudinal participants often lasted longer and sometimes went over two hours. Forty three of the participants came from working class backgrounds and eight came from middle class backgrounds and this small middle class cohort was included for comparative purposes. Nearly all of working class interviewees were the first generation in their families to attend HE. Thirty three of the cohort were women and seven were migrants from Eastern Europe, the UK, Africa and America. Over half, twenty eight, of the total cohort were mature students.

This sample was built incrementally and was drawn from larger group of 'non-traditional' students interviewed for a study on retention. This working class sample was selected on the basis of occupation or parent's occupation (that is manual or routine non-manual jobs) and/or by participation on specific access programmes aimed at encouraging working class students into HE. The sample also included working class people who relied on social welfare payments (for example Lone Parent's Allowance, Unemployment Assistance etc.)[17]. In time a fuller definition of class was *developed from the student interviews* examining cultural resources, educational and work history and family and community experience.

As noted earlier the aim was to create as open a process as possible and to use the empirical findings to think through and problematise established sociological categories rather than ensure the cohort was fully representative. However, it transpired that the original sample was too heavily skewed towards mature students and women an effort was made to contact greater number of young working class students and more men in the first year and a half of the research. This was done and the final group includes roughly equal number of young and mature students and although there is a slight majority of women within the sample this reflects the complexion of the case study institutions and in the case of ITB the particular faculties through which contact with students was facilitated. At this point the sample included twenty four students of which eighteen people decided to participate in the longitudinal dimension of the research and the remainder elected to do once off interviews. In total forty five interviews were undertaken with the longitudinal cohort with each participant being interviewed two or three times.

As the longitudinal research progressed over the next three years the main cohort snowballed in size as I conducted twenty five further once off interviews with working class students including three students who had left college before graduation. A small sample group of eight middle class students was included in order to compare and test findings. I also became concerned whether the main findings-which were overwhelmingly positive about HE-reflected the fact that the interviewees were in the middle of their courses. To explore this I

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17 The difference between various models of class- for example given by Wright (1997), Goldthorpe (1996) and the Irish Central Statistics Office and the Higher Education Authority- are important -and will be discussed in the next chapter but in terms of criteria for sampling here all these various definitions of who constitutes the working class could be followed and the sample would be the same. However, the very expansive and frankly unworkable, position held by some Marxists that wage labour defines who is working class was not considered useful.

conducted a focus group in an inner city community education project in 2011. The significance of this group is that they were non-participants in HE and this helped me explore to what extent the activity of *doing* a degree affects the way you talk about HE. It also allowed me to think through many of the other findings. The final cohort includes eight interviews with graduates from NUIM conducted in a previous research project (Fleming, Finnegan, Loxley & Kenny, 2010) which were recoded in order to see if these yielded significantly different findings and to add to the longitudinal dimension of the study. The focus group, the longitudinal cohort, and the graduate cohort allowed me to trace educational experience as a continuum from community based courses through to college and how this is then seen by ex-students after graduation.

The main aim of the thesis is to explore HE from the perspective of working class students but to augment the researcher's comprehension of the institutional context twelve interviews were conducted with managerial, access, teaching and student support staff from the HEIs. This was later supplemented with four other interviews with community activists and educators in working class communities. The background interviews were in-depth and semi-structured but were not analysed in the same fashion as the student interviews and were only selectively transcribed and coded. The total number of interviews used in the research is ninety seven.

It should be noted that throughout the research process it was easier to maintain the longitudinal aspect of the research with mature participants. One can only speculate what the various reasons are for this but it in all likelihood the fact that because of my age I was more successful in building relationships with this cohort. Also, throughout the research generating new contacts proved very easy in NUIM-largely, I think, because the work of the research centre was strongly supported by gatekeepers. On the other hand the initial sample was smaller in TCD and it was consistently more difficult to recruit new volunteers there compared to ITB and NUIM (so excluding the graduate cohort this amounted to respectively eight participants from TCD, thirteen from ITB and twenty two from NUIM). Across the three HEIs it was impossible to identify a significant number of students enrolled in high status disciplines and the majority of students were studying Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences with a large minority in Natural Sciences. In the process of interpretation an effort has been made to think through these various issues connected to sampling and the

vicissitudes of longitudinal research and through the thesis I will make it explicit how these various factors might have affected the findings.

Table 1. The interview cohorts

Main cohort 1	18 Working class students-longitudinal group (45 individual in-depth interviews)
Main cohort 2	25 Working class students (25 once off individual in-depth interviews)
Comparative cohort 1	8 Middle class students (11 individual in-depth interviews 6 once off and 5 longitudinal interviews with 2 people)
Comparative cohort 2	10 students in adult education (single focus group)
Framing the research cohort 1	12 HE staff (individual once off interviews)
Framing the research cohort 2	4 community activists and educators (individual once off interviews)

Other primary data sources

I have had a great deal of personal and professional experience in two of the three institutions-TCD and NUIM- but nonetheless field notes were taken in all three HEI's describing formal and informal settings. Extensive participant observation was not possible. Three students made diaries available to me and I had discussions and contact with twelve of the interviewees outside of the interview process. I also had a large amount of quantitative data on mature students in two of the three HEIs gathered for a previous research project (TCD and NUIM). Keeping a research diary became fundamental to thinking through these various elements together in an integrated yet exploratory manner.

Conducting the interviews

Interviewees were asked to discuss their learning and life stories in their own terms. The whole aim of this was to facilitate in-depth interviews in which subjects could explore their own experience in as spontaneous a fashion as possible. I have noted already there is a range of ways of approaching biographical interviews (Apitzsch & Inowlocki, 2000; Alheit, 1994a; Bertaux & Thompson, 1997; Bertaux & Kohli, 1984; Chamberlaye, Bornat &Wengraf, 2000; Merrill & West, 2009; Plummer, 2000 Thompson, 1988; Wengraf, 2001; West, 1996). All these researchers agree that it is important to create interview situations in which the story is actively constructed by the participant with as little interference as possible by the interviewer. The differences between these various authors on how interviews should be

ideally conducted are worth mentioning. In fact, there are varying notions of what constitutes a 'proper' biographical account; for instance Alheit (1994a) has developed highly sophisticated procedures and guidelines for biographical interviews in which the interviewer offers minimal signals of understanding and encouragement deploying what Alheit has termed 'a strategic reserve'. The argument is that otherwise interviewees will often seek to avoid the challenges of spontaneous storytelling-which is viewed by Alheit as a specific mode of communication with its own form and structures. Similarly, Wengraf (2001) an advocate of the Biographical Interpretive Method (BIM) uses extremely detailed procedures with much the same aim and both Alheit and Wengraf argue that maintaining a clear boundary between the interviewee and the interviewer is crucial to getting full and untainted biographical accounts.

Much of what Wengraf and Alheit write is instructive but in a pilot interview and to a lesser extent in two early interviews I employed a version of this approach with mixed results. The specific context-people were offering their time to an interviewer who was at that point unknown to them-my own predispositions and, I strongly suspect, patterns of communication embedded in Irish culture which depend on a sense of immediacy and dislike formality meant that too much strategic reserve results in very stilted exchanges. Following this I decided to use a slightly less formal approach which nonetheless retained the aim of encouraging interview directed spontaneous storytelling.

Over time I noticed most of the interviews followed a distinct pattern of communication. More often than not the first part of the interview was tentative and had somewhat superficial content because, in my experience, the participant is assessing the interviewer's ability to listen and judging their trustworthiness. Understandably, the interviewees wanted some sense of who was listening as well as why they were listening. This often took the form of contextual reflection-for instance a discussion of something in the news and so forth. I think there is a great deal of tacit assessment by the participants going on is this small talk which sets the basis for relationship building and boundary setting. Once trust, interest, attentive listening and warmth were established the interview would deepen and often lead to spontaneous storytelling. So instead of- as Alheit recommends- the interviewer remaining largely invisible it was found that they most effective approach way of conducting interviews was to build trust through everyday exchange and non-threatening open questions. This often meant revealing something about my own life and my interests. Usually, but not always

following this I could efface myself more and more as the interview progressed. It would be untrue to say that this approach worked all the time and there are interviews in which I misjudged the situation occasionally through either too much strategic reserve or through too much direction and encouragement and regrettably in one interview through inattentive listening.

On the basis of early research experience I decided that one has to retain a clear sense of the specificity of a research interview and contextual constraints under which it takes place. I would suggest that an approach which does not foreground the relational and *tacit* content of this process is, at the very least, incomplete. Through the research became apparent that the interview is perhaps best envisaged as creative space between two people (Merrill &West, 2009) in which the researcher has to attend to the tone and context and establish the conditions for dialogue. This is emotional, embodied and inevitably involves power dynamics. To offer a banal but useful example- most of initial interviews occurred in HEIs often in the first weeks of term in first year in places with which, as an academic researcher, I am familiar and at ease in but for most of the people I met were entirely new. My class background, gender and age also affected the interviews and it is interesting how the assumption of varying degrees of shared experience exerts an influence on the telling of stories (I will expand on this a little in Chapter Six and Seven). It is hardly accidental that a lot of the richest research material- interviewee led, highly reflective and personal accounts emerged after a sense of trust had been established over years and where there was a bond based on shared reference points and of knowledge of each other.

I would like to mention one other germane aspect of this process. It is significant that when class was explicitly foregrounded the interviews either became very rich and reflective or on a few occasions almost seized up altogether. In-depth interviews rely on trust and empathy and given the open structure of the interviews-this seizing up was always palpable, the discussion becomes less fluid and exploratory and more defensive. In these circumstances the interview becomes centred on what the interview is *meant* to be about and whether this is both clear and shared rather than the unfolding of somebody's story on their own terms. I think this in part reflects a completely understandable sensitivity about power and categorisation. After all the sociological interview is a very specific type of practice- a specialised mode of understanding and exploring the world- and an enormously rich one-but nonetheless it needs to be thought of in relation to all the other official and semi-official

interviews encountered by people in everyday life. One should also bear in mind how the function of social science as a whole is broadly understood as a taxonomic and primarily quantitative effort to tabulate and categorise the social world[18]. So in a research interview, which of course does not follow the exact patterns of everyday discussion, the introduction of diffuse but powerful term such as class can threaten to weigh down and drag the familiar world of everyday concern into the world of the census taker and officialdom. As a result, although participants knew social background and class was integral to the research I usually did not ask people directly about class or class identity, unless they chose to discuss it themselves, until the latter part of the interview. With the longitudinal cohort I tried to highlight what I thought I was discovering in greater depth but even so I tried to avoid clogging or strongly directing the discussion. While this approach goes some way to addressing serious concerns about positionality, reflexivity and 'forcing' data it certainly does not resolve the issues of working between everyday accounts and social theory. What I think needs to be acknowledged, and kept firmly in mind, is there is an unavoidable responsibility, and a good deal of necessary difficulty, which comes with interpreting other people's lives. It is in many ways an act of translation which has the aim of presenting everyday experience in sociological terms. The possibility for distortion and misunderstanding is considerable and because of this I think it is right to frame biographical research as an extended ethical encounter and I will return to this theme again below.

Analysing individual interviews

In terms of coding and data analysis there was a certain amount of experimentation with a variety of approaches but as I have already mentioned I relied on many of the techniques and methods developed by grounded theorists (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1968; Strauss & Corbin, 1997; see Strauss & Corbin, 1998 for various applications of these ideas). This approach was first used in the analysis of a pilot interview and initially I chose to adhere closely to the procedures of grounded theory (i.e. I used very simple descriptive codes to break the data into discrete parts). However, the move from simple codes to categories and to theory-which is how grounded theorists describe the move towards higher level of abstraction-, threw up a number of challenges and questions. Solving this took time and involved false starts and mistakes through the process of research but these problems can be classed under three interrelated rubrics. They are (1) identifying

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18 Just how common this idea is indicated by the fact that several participants in the first phase of research process indicated surprise at some point that the research was *not* primarily a quantiative exercise.

the 'correct' use of literature during research (2) attending to the interview as a narrative whole while thinking through the relationship between discrete parts in the form of codes (3) the need to develop instruments that encourage researcher reflexivity especially in addressing the social context of the interview, the role of the researcher and the imagined purpose of the research.

Attempting to analyse data in a number of disaggregated codes on their 'own', that is without reference to other data sources, including literature from the field, has the merit of making the researcher examine the material very carefully and obviously lessens the temptation of indulging in grand theorising based on little or no empirical grounding. Leading grounded theorists (Glaser & Strauss, 1968) have advised against researchers using literature during the initial research as this may distort findings. After some experimentation with this 'pure' approach and consideration of what the broader philosophical implications of treating data in this fashion were (see above) I decided to read literature in related fields while at the same time gathering data. I believe this enriched the secondary coding and the theory building aspect of the research and allowed me to trace links between specific empirical findings and broader theories of social structures with more acuity. Obviously this departs from the practice of leading grounded theorists but it is arguably compatible with some of the more constructivist versions of this approach (Charmaz, 2006).

Based on this experiment and my reflections upon it I developed my own realist approach to analysis which I will now describe. The formal process of analysis began after each interview when I wrote a short description of what had occurred and noted impressions, concerns and possible issues including how I felt I had impacted upon the interview. The next stage was transcription. Half of the transcripts were done by a professional transcription service and half by me but a number of the professionally done transcriptions had to be corrected because of contextual errors or for the purposes of consistency[19]. In the latter stages of research selective transcription was used mainly because of the pressures of time. However, at this point the main findings had emerged and selective transcription has been used by other qualitative researchers at a similar point in the research process (Strauss & Corbin, 1997).

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19 The transcripts excerpts included in the thesis have sometimes been edited for clarity. Occasionally certain biographical details have been amended to ensure the anonymity of participants. In general I have included hesitations, pauses and some repetitions and have included material that gives some sense of how the interviews are the product of a contextual dialogue.

After transcription was completed I would engage in close reading of the text and begin basic thematic coding. This is a dual process of testing possibilities in meaning and very simple noting of content. The easiest way to illustrate this process is to use an excerpt from a transcript. This in an interview I did with David and here he is talking about his schooling. The transcript is on the left and the basic codes are noted in the right hand column.

Table 2. Example of basic coding

Transcript	Basic codes
For me, it has been a gradual process. If you asked me during my 20s did I want to come back to college, or continue education, I would have said no. I left school after the inter-cert. I did a little bit of car mechanics, maths English and engineering through the school for a year after I left. It was kind of like transition year. I was first in my family in the educational system. I have two brothers who were two or three years older than me. So even for me to get to that level.... I went further than they did. I failed the inter-cert and I found reasons for that, one of the reasons was, I was a clever enough person, I was able to pick up on the stuff that was given to me, but I had no idea how to study. Plus the inter-cert came around just at the time I was going through that childhood awakening, women, and alcohol. That altered my attention. I didn't do any study, the exams were difficult and if you don't study for them, you're going to fail. My folks were fine, my parents were proud I had gotten that far, because as I said my brothers had not gotten as far as me in the education system. My parents had not been in the system at all,	return to education (process) changing educational ambition leaving school school-subjects family experience in education going further than brothers failing inter-why? capability-how does he see this? no knowledge of how to study becoming a teenager-distraction reasons for failing exam family expectations family experience

I would also reread contemporaneous field notes and jot down general impressions and write short memos on ideas and possible themes. These basic memos were important in testing possible meanings and identifying ambiguities. Memos on the segment above were-

Memo 1-compare with earlier description of subject choice in college. Very different. Now feels in control?

Memo 2-biographical time-back and forth? Childhood-teens. His 20s and now. How does this work right through transcript. Is this typical?

The second reading concentrated on the narrative as a whole and would ask myself what stories are being told here and how do they fit together. This involved thinking through the significance of the form and patterns in interviews (Alheit, 1994a, 2005a; Chamberlayne, Bornat & Wengraf, 2000). Attention was also given to the way people would choose to extend, condense or link stories and I would carefully following the temporal loops and connections made between parts of a life story. Following this I would segment data into episodic and thematic blocs if possible and identify which parts were biographically significant and which elements were less relevant for the participants. In general, I viewed high levels of particularity and densely structured first person accounts of specific events or exchanges with reported speech or internal dialogue as indicative of rich biographical data and as personally important to the interviewee. Recurrent themes and issues especially those which emerged again and again in different periods of the life course and different domains were also seen as being biographically central. Clearly the emotional content and intensity and the mode of narration are important and this is crucial to discern what the students main concerns are in a way that straightforward content analysis does not address. In working through the transcript I paid attention to key transition points, significant others and important spaces and events. Having done this I would sketch out a short biographical timeline.

Once I have concluded this I would then examine the basic content and themes and the narrative form in relation to each other through secondary analysis. So I would ask myself how specific content, the general thrust of an account, recurrent themes and levels of engagement would be examined together exploring possible connections and lines of significance within the interview. I would also try to test out the limits and contradictions of my analysis. The layering of the various aspects of people stories- in content, form and tone- is often telling and I think a straightforward thematic content analysis is not sufficient. The next table illustrates what this involves and uses the same portion of the transcript.

Table 3. Secondary analysis   Testing meanings and notes on narrative

For me, it has been a gradual process. If you asked me during my 20s did I want to come back to college, or continue education, I would have said no. I left school after the inter-cert. I did a little bit of car mechanics, maths English and engineering through the school for a year after I left. It was kind of like transition year. I was first in my family in the educational system. I have two brothers who were two or three years older than me. So even for me to get to that level.... I went further than they did. I failed the inter-cert and I found reasons for that, one of the reasons was, I was a clever enough person, I was able to pick up on the stuff that was given to me, but I had no idea how to study. Plus the inter-cert came around just at the time I was going through that childhood awakening, women, and alcohol. That altered my attention. I didn't do any study, the exams were difficult and if you don't study for them, you're going to fail. My folks were fine, my parents were proud had gotten that far, because as I said my brothers had not gotten as far as me in the education system. My parents had not been in the system at all,	Is this significant part of David story? Yes, I think so-concern about leaving school mentioned earlier. -see field notes –this was big part of interview and this was foregrounded in other parts of his life. Strong sense of being in dark in this period. Go back to his discussion of going to work for first time and see how it fits. Narration-short sentences Main focus-self and family. Not really segmented into episodes It is temporally layered. Three horizons? Family then, David then, David now? School as neutral setting or at least in background? Is he seeing things he and his family could not see then? Moves quickly in interview from decision to go to college to an account of the end of his school career so how are these related in the narrative as whole? I think the movement here might be one of slow affirmation of own capability but is this process complete for David? Is this mainly about his expectations and aspirations now rather than an account of past events? Check these questions against other parts of transcript. How does he conceive of the education system-mentions word system three times-perhaps important that father and mother not part of system? In interview as whole his father is an important figure. Phrasing that deserves consideration why childhood not teenage? and '*kind of like*' transition year

The testing of possible meanings and the synthesis of content and narrative analysis revealed thematic patterns and suggest key biographical concerns. So in the excerpt above although in terms of basic content family looms as the most important issue but after secondary coding I began to think the most important thing being discussed by David is how he views himself now.

At this stage I would begin to decide what I thought was most important in a given biographical account but try to maintain a sense of this as only a provisional interpretation. All the information was then entered into a spreadsheet and this included relevant biographical data, notes on key themes in the narrative along with some indication of intensity given to various topics. At this stage more abstract descriptive codes could be selected. These remained open to revision and were often amended later. Once more abstract codes were chosen and then sub-themes were clustered under these main codes and were given dimensions. The selection of these codes requires a reading of the transcript as a whole but I think an example will nevertheless illustrate how this was done.

Table 4. Abstract codes

Transcript	Abstract codes
For me, it has been a gradual process. If you asked me during my 20s did I want to come back to college, or continue education, I would have said no. I left school after the inter-cert. I did a little bit of car mechanics, maths English and engineering through the school for a year after I left. It was kind of like transition year. I was first in my family in the educational system. I have two brothers who were two or three years older than me. So even for me to get to that level.... I went further than they did. I failed the inter-cert and I found reasons for that, one of the reasons was, I was a clever enough person, I was able to pick up on the stuff that was given to me, but I had no idea how to study. Plus the inter-cert came around just at the time I was going through that childhood awakening, women, and alcohol. That altered my attention. I didn't do any study, the exams were difficult and if you don't study for them, you're going to fail. My folks were fine, my parents were proud I had gotten that far, because as I said my brothers had not gotten as far as me in the education system. My parents had not been in the system at all, they're both illiterate.	**Learner identity-** new sense of capability-tentative … schooling-truncated-very important Family expectations-quite significant **Agency —** unexercised cos of family? not clear **Personal identity** Transition from child to teenager very important

Once this is completed I began to explore how the codes and sub-themes are related to each other throughout the transcript. I often used spider diagrams to trace the relationship between abstract codes in this phase of analysis. Again this is about testing out ideas and lines have been used here to explore how some of the interrelationships in David's account were mapped. Full lines mark a direct relationship and broken lines indicate a possible relationship. The interconnection and breaks between the codes was explored through memos. I also sometimes used colour coding to mark where in the transcript material relevant to specific abstract codes were located (i.e. so say mark all germane segments blue for agency, yellow for learner identity etc.). In the transcript above this type of colour coding was crucial to identifying for me the close association David sees between education and agency. The comparison between abstract codes was vital to developing a sense of the internal relationships between notions of self, significant others, transitions and events that structure a biographical account.

Most importantly these three stages of coding-basic, secondary and abstract- accompanied by drawing up a biographical timeline, memoing and completing a detailed spreadsheet ensured that I built up a more in-depth knowledge of the perspective of each participant and

examined the fine grain of their stories. This is a process of immersion in the data usually gave me a firm sense of the way the interviewees saw things. Regularly as part of this I would read up on something the interviewees talked about which I realised I did not know much about (a specific locality, a book, a sport etc.).

After abstract coding I discovered that it was very illuminating to go back to the interview by listening to the digital recording again or reading a clean transcript. So rather than simply pushing on to further disaggregation and abstraction I would remind myself of the shape of narrative as a whole and quite often parts of the story would appear in a different light through this rereading and this also allowed me to reflect on whether the main abstract codes needed to be adapted. Any further information or the amendment of previous codes would be entered in the spreadsheet and if I perceived there were unsolved issues or puzzles in the data I would write a brief memo. This is similar to West's (1996) emphasis on maintaining a sense of 'gestalt' and retaining a sense of the integrity of a life story as a whole. Following this I would ask how the story related to research questions and sensitising concepts. For example I asked myself how did David's conception of agency relate to class, habitus and care and so forth. This immersion in the data- which is broken, disaggregated and abstracted and then returned to as a coherent whole was vital to how I developed a sense of what the data meant and this set the basis for a full comparative analysis.

Table 5. The stages in interview analysis

Stage 1	After the interview make notes on impressions, on events, process and the tacit dimension
Stage 2	Listen again to the interview
	Transcription
Stage 3	Begin basic coding of content and writing memos
Stage 4	Close reading and narrative analysis-segmentation of data, note recurrent themes, key figures, ideas and places, life transitions, note where intensities are in narratives, begin to characterise narrative as whole. Synthesis of content and narrative analysis. Test meanings. Draw up biographical time line. Write memos. Enter data into spreadsheet
Stage 5	Abstract coding- selecting key themes, internal relationship between themes and events (including dimensions) analysis through colour coding, and spider diagrams etc.. Writing memos on internal (dis)connections within parts of biographical account.
Stage 6	Getting gestalt -Listen again or read clean manuscript. Examine data in relation to sensitising concepts and key research questions. Write memos and enter relevant data into spreadsheet
Stage 7	Use material in cross and intra cohort analysis (see below for details)

Cohort analysis and interpretation

Grasping the overall logic of individual students' stories and various elements within these narratives was only the first stage in analysis and theory building. This process entailed six interlinked but distinct interpretive processes: 1) to examine the student interviews in relation

to each other through the identification of common themes and through cohort differentiation (this also required desk based research on various topics that surfaced in the data), 2) to identify and correct the limits of the research design through purposive sampling, 3) to enhance my knowledge of individual stories through longitudinal research, 4) to integrate the new material gathered from the various cohorts and construct a model of HE from the students' perspective (this also required further desk based research), 5) to explore what bearing the research findings as a whole have for established theoretical models of class and education, and finally 6) to think through the five aforementioned elements of the research in a relational way and to synthesise this into a fully sociological account of student experience .

Intra and cross cohort analysis: Using the principle of differentiation

Memoing, keeping a research diary and summarising and entering the data on individual interviews meant that shared themes and differences often emerged organically. On the most basic level as the body of research built up it was possible to discern thematic correspondences by reading across the spreadsheets. To enliven and test these perceived commonalities I mapped them physically on large sheets trying to grasp the logic behind the clustering of themes amongst sub-cohorts. For example many interviewees discussed their experience of schooling and I was able to chart school experience along various axes- for example age of school completion, types of learner identity, gender, age etc., in relation to individual interviewees and begin to see how their stories were related to one another.

But "there is a continual tension between theoretical generalisation and a multitude of differences experienced in practice" (Skeggs, 1997, p. 32) and there is a persistent temptation to ignore differences and force data into premature unified themes. To ensure I did not do this I paid particular attention to differences or apparent anomalies within the data and actively tried to find counter examples to emerging shared themes. I also tried to identify how sub-cohorts might be differentiated from each other and checked for patterns according to institution, age, gender, academic discipline, intraclass position, ethnicity, urban/rural backgrounds and academic success etc. Here, as part of a more general reconstructive analysis, I sought to distinguish between contingent and necessary commonalities in the data.

The research required that I understand the limitations and strengths of a small scale, intensive qualitative piece of research and answered practical questions about the research sample and more theoretical questions about how this fits with quantitative accounts of class.

As I have already mentioned part of this was addressing imbalances in the sample (gender, age and less successfully by academic discipline) and non-completing and middle class cohorts were included for further comparative work.

Having examined the interviews in detail, developed abstract codes and searched for patterns of commonality and differences I would ask what this indicated about the socio-cultural context and the key research questions concerning class and education. Again this was reconstructive and I would ask myself 'what are the necessary social conditions for the participants' emphasis on certain themes, concerns and modes of action?' This also required thinking about how theoretical concepts in the literature needed to be used, amended or discarded. Moving back and forth between disaggregated codes and full interview transcripts, between cross cohort commonalities and differences, and between the primary data and literature in the field "nourished some preconceptions and let others atrophy" (Wexler, 1992 p 6). At this point if new ideas occurred they were noted and the key themes were then considered through the sensitising concepts and literature in the field. The fit or lack of fit between the literature and concepts allowed me to notice gaps in my knowledge and suggested directions for further research. On this basis new sensitising concepts based on the data such as *identity and self, recognition, care, family and space* were developed.

The longitudinal dimension

As I have already mentioned the longitudinal aspect of the research created invaluable opportunities to reflect on preliminary findings in dialogue with the interviewees. In most cases, but not all, as these relationships developed this led to more generative exchanges. As noted earlier it also builds a different picture of HEIs and a richer sense of how the various elements of personal identity get articulated according to context and circumstances. So for example in David's case he came back to the event described above-leaving school- several times in different ways and this added to and amended to how I interpreted this. The longitudinal aspect of the research has also afforded me the opportunity to consider in a critically reflective way my strengths and weaknesses as an interviewer. Certainly returning to interviewees a second and third time means that you become attentive to the way certain modes of interviewing can force and shift meanings in dialogue or eve deaden an interview. For these various reasons the longitudinal data proved to be invaluable and some of the richest gathered during the project. The following table explains how these interviews were integrated into the process of research.

Table 6. Stages in the analysis of second interview and third interviews

Stage 1	Before interviews reread notes and summaries in spreadsheet, selectively listen to the recording of the last interview. Note ambiguities, unfinished stories and points where interview worked or failed.
Stage 2	Conduct interview following model discussed above with the difference that at some point in interview, usually towards the end I would ask more specific questions based on my analysis and I would summarise the way I understood their story and discuss this.
Stage 3	Analysis as above but noting continuities and difference in the stories and particularly checking abstract codes

From field construction to theory building

Overall, this effort to see HE through the eyes of the interviewees led to a "melding of perspectives" (Wexler, 1992, p. 6). As I have already indicated this also was shaped by the other aspect of the double hermeneutic the careful conceptualisation of core theoretical concerns. I attempted to unearth as much material as possible-quantitative data, other empirical research or theory that might illuminate or frame the stories people told me. In line with my definition of critical research, it was also necessary to examine the accounts through and against other forms of sociological knowledge which was not directly related to themes in the empirical data but helped frame these stories within a general logic of social power. Over time this melding of perspectives and broad social analysis leads to the reconstruction of how one's views the field of study (in this case HE). This then laid the basis for the final stage of analysis- a more systematic exploration of the findings against established theories in the field of educational scholarship. In the final stages this took an increasingly propositional form the final stage of which is, of course, the writing of the thesis.

It would dishonest to say this stage of the interpretive process was always straightforward. Interpretation is value laden and situated and I have already described how I think my experience and preconceptions are an integral part of the research. The thesis presentation aims to retain a strong sense of the individual stories and multiplicity of voices which lie behind the study but ultimately these stories have been selected and interpreted by me. Furthermore, there were sometimes differences between how I construe things and how a particular interviewee might chose to describe certain issues. For example, quite early in the inquiry I began to notice how often interviewees framed their narrative in a way that suggested "the social is always past" (Williams, 1977, p. 128) while the future was often seen as endlessly open and subject to the will of individuals. Similarly, institutions and history were described in a more fixed way than I believe they are. I will explicitly highlight where

these differences in interpretation occur in the thesis so the reader can make their own judgement on the hermeneutic process.

Yet by and large the work of theory building has not been mainly about negotiating these gaps based on a substantially different interpretation of issues and events but rather a less dramatic reconstruction and contextualisation of these accounts through a broader theory of power. It is I feel very important that whether an analysis builds or breaks with an interviewee's own conclusions that it remains underpinned by a deep respect for people's own self-understandings. In this sense my thesis seeks to consciously beak with a certain type of social science which primarily seeks to build theory by proving that agents "know not what they do" (Finnegan, 2010a). In this model one gains knowledge by discovering the limits of others' understanding (I will identify how this idea has affected theories of class and education this in Chapters Three, Four and Seven). In retrospect I believe my initial research approach carried a trace of this idea but the recursive loop- between self, interviewees, field and literature I think has allowed me to break with such patrician ideas and the presentation of the material in the forthcoming chapters reflects this. The theoretical implications of this approach, which is grounded in a more tentative and less absolute claim about the value of sociological knowledge over everyday knowledge, will therefore be explored throughout.

Table 7. From analysis to theory building

Stage 1	Formulate question, design research, identify assumptions and important sensitising concepts
Stage 2	Interview participants
Stage 3	Listen to interviews, transcription, memoing, open coding, narrative analysis, secondary coding.
Stage 4	Abstract coding and developing a sense of gestalt. Memoing
Stage 5	Cross cohort comparison through themes, mapping and tabulation. Identifying limits of research. Draw up new sensitising concepts, examining the significance of the emerging findings for the research questions
Stage 6	Repeat process with longitudinal cohort
Stage 7	Second stage of cross cohort analysis – identifying commonalties, cohort differentiation, noting exceptions and beginning field construction
Stage 8	Further field construction through double hermeneutic using interviews and non-interview data. Identifying where melding and breaking has occurred with research participants. Falsifying and testing key findings
Stage 9	Writing up research findings

Ethics

Interviewing people demands ethical awareness and sensitivity from a researcher. Much of the data collection was done under the auspices of a departmental research centre. As the ethics of research was a foremost concern of the centre this topic was discussed in detail in a

number of formal meetings and innumerable informal occasions. Research projects undertaken by the research centre required ethical approval from the university ethics committee before the research began and this process was helpful in highlighting key concerns.

Informed consent is the cornerstone of ethical research using in-depth interviews. Accordingly the nature, aim and broad methodological approach to the research was discussed in advance of every interview[20].Each interviewee volunteered on the basis that all data would be held securely, treated confidentially and fully anonymised[21]. It was stressed that if a participant wished to stop the digital recorder or the interview at any time they could do so. Both before and after the interview the interviewees were told they could withdraw their consent following the interview. It was also emphasised that interviewees were in the position to direct the course of the interview as they saw fit and if they did not want some aspect of their story recorded or included in the research to indicate this was the case. Data was made available whenever it was requested by the participants. Each time I met with interviewees from the longitudinal cohort these conditions were discussed again. If it became clear that interviewees felt reluctant to participate a second or third time, but they somehow communicated that they felt they had committed to the process, this was discussed openly and in most cases, after some assurance, the research with that particular participant was discontinued.

These ethical guarantees are fundamental to good research but informed consent, as important as it is, does not cover the range of ethical issues and dilemmas that confront a qualitative researcher. There is also the issue of care which, in cases of conflict, has to take precedence over the research process. Over the course of the research very sensitive personal issues did surface. On such occasions there is an ethical demand to think carefully of the implications that discussing these issues might have for the interviewee. When appropriate it was stated that if the interviewees wanted to stop the interview they should do so and/or the

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20 The research was introduced as a longitudinal study aimed at exploring non-traditional students experience of HE, access and retention. Non-traditional students were defined as students who were mature and/or working class, students from ethnic minorities and students with disabilities. It was stated that the research was concerned with students' perspectives and was interested in how education impacted on student lives in general. It was also mentioned that the research was particularly concerned with social barriers to participation.

21 This was by far the issue that most concerned the interviewees. There second most often voiced concern was whether research could be used to help widen participation and make access easier for others.

interviewee was reminded again that they did not have to disclose anything they were uncomfortable discussing. On several occasions follow up calls were made to check in with a participant and in one interview concerns about care led the interviewer to address this directly with the participant. In this case the boundaries of my role were stressed but I felt it was important to establish that professional and informal support was available to this interviewee.

More subtly there is the question of how interviewees' voices get constructed through interviews and especially during the writing up of research. This is often treated simply as question of interpretation but given my commitment to a critical and reflexive emancipatory inquiry it would be absolutely nonsensical not to see interpretation as a deeply ethical issue. Just as the interview situation is an ethical encounter the interpretation of voice-of how a story gets edited and deployed has to be seen as an ethical concern (Reay, 1996a). This is perhaps especially the case when dealing with working class students whose voices are less commonly heard in the public sphere. This is part of the reason why I am so concerned with my own assumptions, and with guarding against the forcing the data into pre-established categories. This is also what lies behind my concern about the disaggregation of data into thematic codes. I have sought to keep the integrity of each individual's lived life, and the knowledge that is produced through that life, at the forefront of my mind at all times. With this in mind found it useful to discuss the research findings whenever possible with the longitudinal cohort. The particular research design I chose meant that the ultimate responsibility for interpretation is mine. I have borne this responsibility in mind right through the research and analysis. Finally, in writing the thesis I have constantly transcripts and recordings to check if the context and tone of a specific excerpt or remark has been respected in the way and I have chosen to represent it and to ensure that what is being asserted through the presentation of the life and learning stories in the thesis is fair and accurate.

Conclusion

The research methodology is based on a conception of critical research as reflexive, realist and emancipatory. Research undertaken within such a paradigm plots the field of inquiry as a set of dynamic relationships between the researcher, their values and assumptions, the other subjects involved in the research, the object of study however defined, and the method of

research which allows one to imagine the connection between these things. This paradigm also demands assiduous and careful conceptualisation of the academic and social field in which the research occurs.

The biographical and grounded research methods chosen for the project reflects the importance I give to empirical research and the open testing of received ideas about class and education. The sample has been drawn from three very diverse case study institutions and the longitudinal dimension of the research added another layer to the findings as did the inclusion of sub-cohorts within the sample and the decision to conduct intra-cohort and cross cohort analysis. The analysis and interpretation of the data used a recursive form of coding- which uses disaggregation, abstraction, differentiation but seeks to respect the integrity of people's life stories. The approach to coding ensures careful and detailed knowledge of individual biographies was used as part of a double hermeneutic-based on extensive desk research and the interpenetration of the perspectives of interviewees and the researcher-which led to the reconstruction the field of inquiry and theory building. The research has been designed to 'turn and turn in a widening gyre' in order to place interviewees' experience in its political and cultural contexts and links personal accounts to larger scale social narratives and structures.

Part I

Literature review: Contexts and concepts

The first part of the thesis consists of a literature review which is divided into three chapters each of which deals with a key topic within the research; Chapter Three looks at theories of class and class identity, Chapter Four examines learning as an activity and education as a system in relation to class and Chapter Five looks at class and education in an Irish context.

This departs from the most common format used in theses in which a single chapter is used to formulate a hypothesis which is then 'tested' through the empirical data. I have chosen to take quite a different approach due to the way I understand the task of critical research as outlined in the last chapter. Here the literature review is envisaged as a theoretical reflection on education and class which helps to frame the findings but has also been *informed by the research process.* This is because, from a critical perspective, I do not believe it is sufficient to treat a literature review just as 'background' to fieldwork rather the aim should be to give a detailed account of the concepts that have emerged by thinking through the empirical findings in relation to scholarly knowledge in the field and through an analysis of the political and historical context in which the research was undertaken. The approach taken to the literature review clearly reflects the weight and importance I give to three specific characteristics of critical research; first, that critical social science has to give sustained attention to the work of conceptualisation (Sayer, 2000); second, this critical research requires a mode of inquiry that captures a sense historical contingency and possibility and imparts some sense of what the French historian Ferdinand Braided called the 'longue duree'-that is to say a theory of the development of social forces and processes over long periods of time; and third, that this historical and theoretical material has to be used to fully contextualise the core arguments made in the thesis as a whole and flesh out in what regard the research can claim to be egalitarian and libertarian.

So the next three chapters provides the conceptual groundwork for the analysis of the empirical research offered in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight and places the research as a whole in its full theoretical, social and political context. In one sense the literature review is perhaps best likened to a set of Russian dolls: Chapter Three is the largest of the Matryoshka -it explores class through the lenses of history, sociology and social movement theory;

Chapter four is less expansive and focuses on class, learning and education, mainly through educational theory and history, and Chapter five explores these various lines of investigation into class, identity, learning and education in an Irish context.

We think and write through certain intellectual traditions and we are obviously situated, enabled and constrained by the bodies of thought and lines of inquiry which help us make sense of the world. The various strands of thought which have helped me make sense of my research-Marxism, Critical Theory, Bourdieu's reflexive sociology and Critical Realism- are all characterised by their scope and ambition. By approaching the literature review in this manner I want to retain a modicum of this ambition and hold firm to the emancipatory intent which lies behind this while remaining firmly grounded in what the empirical data discloses about everyday experience, human needs, education and society.

Chapter 3

Clearing some ground: Class, classification and the politics of knowledge

Sociological language cannot be either 'neutral' or 'clear'. The word class will never be neutral as long as there are classes: The question of the existence of classes is at stake in the struggle between classes (Pierre Bourdieu)

Class is a communist concept. It groups people as bundles and set them against one another. (Margaret Thatcher)

You can have a hell of a time nowadays just trying to answer very simple questions. What, for example, is a family? What is a household? What is a class? I call these zombie-categories because they are dead but somehow go on living, making us blind to the realities of our lives [..] sociologists keep on collecting data to prove the reality of class. But how do they define class? [..] Today there is no simple answer. (Ulrich Beck)

Introduction

As the quotes above indicate class remains a hotly contested and much disputed topic. The tangle of political and social scientific interests that lie behind any discussion of the subject means that "class analysis is almost overwhelmed by a variety of contending theories which produce a remarkable array of definitions of class boundaries, fractions and locations" (Pawson, 1989, p. 235). Consequently the literature on this topic is far too vast to usefully synopsise here (for useful overviews see Bottomore, 1991; Crompton, 1993; Giddens & Held, 1982; Joyce, 1995; Grusky, 2001; Scase, 1992; Scott, 1996). Rather the purpose of this chapter is to develop conceptual framework which is critical- i.e. historical, normative and egalitarian- and that properly reflects my engagement with the main themes that have emerged through the empirical research.

In order to do this chapter will outline why class became a central concept in politics and social science in the first place and discuss what Mike Savage (2000) has called the recent 'travails of class theory' and why so many social scientists, including Ulrich Beck, quoted above, think that class no longer has much explanatory value in the study of society. I will begin with a brief historical overview of modern class relations and the role that political and symbolic struggles play in class formation. The chapter will then turn to the ideas of Marx and I will argue that elements of Marx's theory remain valuable but that the Marxist approach to class and identity has enormous political, historical and theoretical limitations that cannot be ignored. Both class experience and class identity are far more complex than is allowed for

by many Marxists and because of this I believe these ideas need considerable qualification and reframing to be anyway useful in a contemporary context. On that basis I will examine other theories of class alongside Marx, including some of the work of Weber. Yet despite the limitations of Marxism I will also argue that the giddy claims about the 'end of class' made by theorists of post-modernity and late modernity in the 1990s were mistaken. It is important nonetheless to work out why announcements about the 'death of class' became such a common refrain in social science in the 1990s and the chapter will offer reasons why I think this occurred and what we can learn from these debates. The penultimate part of the chapter will engage with the work of Pierre Bourdieu whose ideas about class will be used extensively and critically amended in later chapters. The final section will synthesise Bourdieu, Marx and other critical theory in order to elaborate a theoretical framework for thinking about class which will be interrogated and developed through the thesis.

The weight of history: Some notes on class formation

From my perspective it is fruitless to adjudicate on the explanatory validity of the diverse concepts of class that predominate in contemporary social science without paying attention to the socio-historical context from which these ideas emerged. Following Thompson (1980) I think any account of the working class has to acknowledge that it is first and foremost a relational and historical phenomenon (see also Levine, Fantasia & McNall, 1991; Hobsbawm, 1963; Katznelson & Zolberg, 1986; Mann, 1986; Przeworski, 1985; Thompson, 1993). In the preface to the *Making of the English working class* Thompson (1980, p. 8) writes

> By class I understand a historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness. [..] The notion of class entails the notion of historical relationship [and] the relationship must be embodied in real people in a real context.

I share these sentiments but approach the question of consciousness from a slightly different position; Thompson and other theorists of class formation have overwhelmingly concentrated on how the making and remaking of the working class has occurred through political struggle (Katznelson & Zolberg, 1986). This is understandable and remains a subject of massive importance but as we shall see there are limits to theoretical approaches that focus exclusively on the making of collective and explicitly political class identities. Before I examine the complex, and often problematic relationship, between specific individuals' classed experiences and the aspirations and notions of identity articulated through organised

working class politics I think it is necessary to give brief account of the large scale structural forces which underpin class relations and to discuss the role of working class self-activity and organisations had in shaping modern democracy in Western Europe.[22]

Sharply delineated social hierarchies based on power, resources and status have been a common, and perhaps defining, feature of many complex societies and civilisations (Harman, 1999; Mann, 1986, 1993; Marx & Engels, 2002; Ossowski, 1963). Despite the fact that subordinate groups are frequently 'hidden from history' and leave very sparse or non-existent records of their social experience from their perspective we know that conflict over the ownership of resources and social power have been a recurring, if irregularly visible, feature of history in a wide variety of social formations and contexts (De Ste Croix, 1981; Federici, 2004; Graeber, 2010; Gramsci, 1971; Harman, 1999; Hill, 1991; Mann, 1986, 1993; Marx & Engels, 2002; Rowbotham. 1973; Scott, 1990;Vaneigem, 1994). Yet modern class relations have their own distinctive genealogy and are most accurately described as the outcome of a multi-layered process of economic, social, cultural and technological change which led to` the breakdown of feudalism and the development of capitalism (Marx, 1990; Wood, 2002).

One of the most fundamental changes within this larger process of transformation is that waged labour became increasingly prevalent between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries (Wood, 2002). Becoming a waged worker was, as Robert Castel (2003) points out, initially seen as a terrible form of bondage; in time wage relations would afford working people some freedoms but the establishment of this new form of social relations was accompanied by the violence of the enclosures, the privatisation of common land, and the criminalisation of vagrancy (Polanyi, 2001). Of course the spread of wage relations was only one, albeit defining, aspect of the development of modern capitalism and Brenner (1993) has highlighted the burgeoning power of merchants in creating integrated national markets, which are now assumed, pace Smith (1776), to be 'natural' phenomena. This in turn could not have occurred without the emergence of the modern state (Mann, 1993; Tilly, 1990) which created legal and institutional structures based on a new conception of property and rights. The emergence of capitalism also relied on the invention of novel types of cultural practices and forms of knowledge especially in commerce, finance, science and politics (Arrighi, 1994; Foucault, 1977; Habermas, 1992; Tilly, 1995). The beginning of wage labour and the development of

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22 This overview is based on a variety of perspectives but relies mainly on Marxist historiography, world system analysis and to a much lesser extent neo-Weberian sociology.

innovative models of governance and law was also accompanied by European colonial expansion. Together these developments, in market, state and class, laid the foundation for what Immanuel Wallerstein has called the 'modern world system' which established, and was large extent defined by, capital accumulation reliant on the circulation of commodities, including of course human labour, between the metropolitan centres of Europe and colonial 'peripheries' (Amin, 1976; Wallerstein, 1974, 1979).

However, Raymond Williams (1988) has made a convincing case that a truly 'modern' conception of class emerges somewhat later in the wake of important changes in eighteenth century Europe, in the 'age of revolution', most notably in France and Britain (Hobsbawm, 1973). Hobsbawm has in mind two different types of revolution; the first is the birth of modern industrial society, based primarily on new forms of the organisation of labour and technological innovation, which ushered in, what the Austrian economist Karl Polanyi has described as the 'Great Transformation' (2001).The second type were the political revolutions which occurred in America, France and Haiti which gave the discourse of political rights, based primarily on Enlightenment thinking, a new world significance. As a result of these two revolutions class became one of the dominant ways describing social division in society and a crucial part of what Charles Tilly (1995) has described as the new 'politics of contention', between the popular classes, the growing middle class and the established elites, that dominated Europe in the nineteenth century. This was a seismic change in which issues that "had long fallen under the nearly exclusive jurisdiction of the ruling classes became regular and accepted objects of popular influence [and] the means by which ordinary people made collective claims on other people [..] underwent a deep transformation" (Tilly, 1995, p. 13). Since then this pattern has been repeated across the globe and, I would argue, laid the basis for many of the positive aspects of modern 'mass' democracies (Chomsky, 2004; Eley, 2002; Tilly, 1995, 2004; Thompson, 1980).

So how did this occur? Obviously each national context has its own characteristics but I can sketch out a general picture of this process. Thompson (1980, 1993) alongside a more recent generation of historians such as Linebaugh and Rediker (2000; see also Rediker, 2007) have argued that it was the shared social experience in ships, workshops, servants' quarters, factories and mills that provided the basis for these changes. This new working class culture took shape at work and in the community, especially in taverns and churches, and was expressed through ballad, song, pamphlets and newspapers. The roots of organised working

class politics can be traced to these developments and in the nineteenth century an ever more dense and visible network of working class organisations emerged in the form of corresponding societies, co-ops, mutual societies, unions and political parties (Abendroth, 1972; Davis, 2010; Negt & Kluge, 1993; Schmidt & Van der Walt, 2009; Tilly, 1995; Thompson, 1980; Zinn, 2001). Within this network of spaces, organisations and thinkers a set of new practices were developed and discourses, images and concepts of a just society were articulated which popularised and consolidated a political notion of working class identity which continues to influence the shape of debates on this subject to this day.

There is a good deal of evidence that the workers movement wedded to a political notion of collective identity and shared interests helped to define Western European history in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century (Eley, 2002;Mason, 2007; Tilly, 1995; Thompson, 1980). Trade unions and working class parties helped to secure social protections and rights and established the rudiments of what would become the welfare state (Aronowitz, 2003; Eley, 2002). While historians and cultural critics have very fruitfully explored the fractures and limits of this narrative of working class politics and identity as the *whole* story(see below) I think a description of class formation- which has a dual focus on socio-economic change and political movements- remains the most illuminating place to begin any discussion of what class means.

Capitalism, classification and social science

Social transformation and the political efforts of the organised working class led to the creation of a large committed, intelligentsia concerned with social inequality. Many of these intellectuals emerged from the working class –people such as Proudhon-or decided in some sense to join the workers movement-for example Robert Owen or Marx (Aron, 1965; Buber, 1971; Wilson, 1960). The rapidly changing nature of society also intensified the interest of the state and dominant social groups in social regulation and control (Foucault, 1977, 1980, 2003, 2004, 2007, 2008). Foucault's historical philosophy offers a unique perspective on the changes discussed above; he is less concerned with the politics of mass mobilisation and instead examines how capitalism has produced institutions, sciences and techniques for creating 'docile bodies', through what he calls disciplinary power (1977), and controlling the health and welfare of the population, which he distinguishes from disciplinary power, and calls 'biopolitics' (2004, 2007, 2008). Foucault's work is both immensely suggestive and

deeply problematic[23] and I do not to intend to engage with Foucault's work here beyond claiming that his writing forcefully alerts us to the fact that the foundation and early development of social science involves a deeply ambivalent relationship to the working class as a subject of inquiry and as an object of control which appears both as *the* revolutionary subject and the cause and symptoms of whole host of real and fantasised social problems.

I want to suggest that Bourdieu offers a generative way of thinking about this ambivalent and fraught relationship between the working class and social science which fits within the theories of class formation that have already been sketched out above[24]. Bourdieu (1984, 1985, 1986b) is less sceptical than Foucault about the use of reason and the potential of critical social science. He asserts that academic arguments about class are one, albeit sometimes very important, element of incessant and ongoing struggles over the meaning of class in society as a whole-what he calls 'classification struggles'[25]. Reading historians of class formation and Bourdieu together we can posit that class cannot be treated as category or a single idea; class is *made and remade* through a variety of overlapping processes-most notably socio-economic transformation and historical and political formation struggles-but this is also shaped by smaller scale cultural battles over class and this, I think, is the best way to understand the purpose and role of social scientific theories of class including empirical research such as this.

With this larger canvas of socio-economic transformation and political and cultural struggle in mind I want to over the remainder of the chapter to engage with four perspectives that have been particularly influential in social scientific debates about classification and class. There are the 'political arithmeticians' who approach class as primarily a question of quantitative description and taxonomy; there are the Marxists and other radicals who link the study of class to the politics of emancipation; there are the Weberians who think that class is a major topic of sociological inquiry but this does not necessarily involve political commitment; and finally there is a diverse group of thinkers who argue that class was never useful or has

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23 It is open to dispute whether Foucault epistemological assumptions can be integrated within the critical paradigm. See Habermas (1998) Dews (1987) and for more sympathetic readings Honneth (1995b) Federici (2004) and Hardt & Negri (2004).

24 Although my emphasis on the gains of working class political struggle and political economy differs from Bourdieu see below for details.

25 See quote at the beginning of this chapter for a pithy summary of Bourdieu's take on this question.

become, as a consequence of recent social transformations, more or less irrelevant to the study of society.

Before I turn to what I regard as the richer theoretical terrain of Marx and Weber I want to make a couple of brief remarks about what I think is the flimsiest, but most widely used, notion of social class which comes from the 'political arithmetic' tradition of social inquiry. In this approach an individual is allotted a class position based on a minimal set of descriptive criteria. This exercise in social taxonomy is usually based on classifying people according to status, employment or income which is then plotted on gradational scheme of varying degrees of complexity. This information is then used to construct models of large aggregate groups. Census data, government records, marketing organisation and opinion polls all employ a version of this (for example the A to E socio-economic classification systems which are used in advertising). As Foucault would no doubt point out the most important political arithmetic model of class was devised by the state as it expanded its capacity for mass data collection. In Britain and Ireland this happened in the nineteenth century; initially the state only collected of basic information on occupation and sectoral activity but this morphed into a tripartite model based on status (upper, middle and lower class) and in the early twentieth century this was replaced by more complex schemas, with typically 5 and 7 main classes, based on occupational 'skill' levels (Rose, 1996)[26].

There are clearly valuable things to be learnt from datasets which explore correlations between income, occupation and social conditions and the use of such data is an inevitable and integral part of research on class and will be explored in later chapters. The question here though is whether it is sufficient in and of itself; I think from a critical perspective the political arithmetic tradition finishes precisely at where the most important work begins-examining how social structures create and sustain class relations. The presentation of data on socio-economic groups tends to dehistoricise and depoliticise class inequality and ultimately lends itself to a reified notion of class identity. Even today nearly all the substantive

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26 As we shall see there is now a large overlap between the political artithmeticians and some of the work of neo-Weberian class theorists. This Weberian analysis has given ballast and theoretical depth to the data gathered by the state and has helped Weberians enthrone stratification theory in social science. Nonetheless, the definition of what constitutes 'skill' and what is included or excluded in a given notion of competence in such schemes is often questionable (see Breathnach, 2007).

explanations of class mechanisms which go beyond this sort of political arithmetic approach use, in amended form, the ideas of Marx and/or Weber.

The surpassable horizon? Karl Marx's theory of class exploitation and emancipation

Any discussion of class inevitably brings us to Marx and Marxism[27]. Some of Marx's ideas have already been briefly sketched out in Chapter Two and the historical overview above is deeply indebted to the work of Marxist historians but I now want to bring the key propositions of Marx into much clearer focus. Marx spent most of his life actively involved in working class politics and his contribution to class analysis can only be accurately assessed in relation to his commitment to the nascent workers' movements (Wheen, 1999)[28]. As such, class, or more accurately class struggle, is the cornerstone of Marx's theoretical work and it is impossible to discuss his critique of political economy, his theory of history or his vision of human emancipation without referring to how he understood class[29]. In fact, Marx believed that class inequality and exploitation is constitutive of capitalist societies and any attempt to understand class is inevitably tied up with the question of social justice. This is of course part of what he meant when famously declared that heretofore "philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it" (Marx, 1964, p. 84).

This concern with class inequality, justice and emancipation was commonplace in the early socialist movement. Marx's innovation lies in his argument that "it is the level of analysis that is important here [and] that class inequalities in say for instance income health or education are not the ultimate source of inequality but [are] rooted at a deeper level (Keat & Urry cited in Pawson, 1989, p. 169). So Marx's approach to class can be provisionally summarised in the form of three interlinked propositions; 1) that one has to understand class relations to comprehend how society really functions, 2) that social analysis should therefore aim to

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27 The following section uses Marx name for ease of reference even though it is more accurate to present these ideas as the joint work of Marx and Engels but the invocation of both names is stylistically awkward and because of this I will only use Marx & Engels only when referring to co-authored work.

28 Much of Marx's genius lies in the way he articulated, problematised and synthesised knowledge made within working class and socialist organisations. To develop a point made briefly in Chapter Two I think Marx is most usefully treated as *one* intellectual position, albeit a particularly influential and insightful one, within a diverse and often fractious social movement which sought to understand the dynamics of capitalism and social change (see Buber, 1971; Guerin, 1998; Polanyi, 2001; Schmidt & Van Deer Walt, 2009; Wilson, 1960).

29 Besides Marx and Engels work this overview draws on a wide range of sources but especially Giddens (1971), Harvey (2010b), Kowalkowski (1981) and Wilson (1960).

uncover the deeply hidden mechanisms of class reproduction, and 3) that such theoretical work has to be directly linked to efforts to advance emancipatory politics.

I shall now take a closer look at how exactly Marx conceptualised class. Before doing so it should be noted that despite forty years of political writing in which the main aim was to explain the significance of class struggle within a broader analysis of history and economics there is no definitive account given by Marx on this topic. It is one of those minor, but striking, ironies of history that Marx never completed the section in the third volume of *Capital* in which he was going to outline his mature theory of class (Wright, 1985). Instead, he writes about class in three ways; first there are propagandistic pieces such as *The Communist Manifesto* (Marx & Engels, 2002) which sought to rally and mobilise the working-class through descriptions of class conflict between capitalists and workers. Then there are the journalistic accounts and historical descriptions of events which offer more nuanced and contextually bound examinations of how class forces operate in multiple ways within a particular historical conjuncture. A good example of this is the *Eighteenth Brumaire* (Marx, 1973) which maps out the struggles for power in Louis Bonaparte's France and acknowledges the existence of multiple class and class fractions. Last of all are the theoretical descriptions of how the capitalist 'mode of production'[30] is fundamentally based on economic exploitation and class conflict (1859, 1990) and I think these texts are the crucial ones for the present discussion.

According to Marx (1859) each historical mode of production is characterised by a particular structure of exploitation and pattern of class relations based on ownership of the means for sustaining and transforming human life. Previous modes of production relied on direct forms of appropriation, i.e. coercion, custom, tithe or tribute, but in the present era, under the capitalist mode of production, Marx (1859) argues that exploitation occurs more indirectly through the exploitation of waged labour. Through a critical reading of Proudhon, Adam Smith and David Ricardo, Marx (1971, 1990) had come to the conclusion that human labour is the source of value and consequently that human labour, collectively managed and

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30 Marx (1859) identified five major modes of production in history: the Asiatic, the primitive, the ancient, the feudal and the capitalist. The term mode of production denotes both the organisation of productive forces (this includes the use of natural resources, technology etc) and the relations of production (the technical and social division of labour and patterns of dependence and expolitation). The limits of a particular mode of production, are analysed both in terms of the barriers put on the development of the forces of production and in terms of class inequality. Marx later changed his theory in relation to the Asiatic mode of production (Giddens, 1971).

directed, is the basis of power and wealth. In this analysis under capitalism there are two major classes-the working class, the proletariat, who own nothing but their labour, and the capitalist class which own the 'means of production'[31]. In other words, the ability to buy and direct labour power for some and the compulsion to sell one's labour for the majority is the most significant axis of power within capitalism. Marx also argued (1990) that the nature of the wage system also makes the appropriation of the surplus value of labour invisible. Outlining the full implications of his theory of hidden exploitation based on the commodification of labour occupied Marx for most of his life and remains his most important contribution to our understanding of class.

In *Capital,* his most complete and developed theorisation of these issues, Marx (1990) uses this dichotomous theory of class to explore in detail the dynamics of the capitalist mode of production and the role the circulation and exchange of commodities play in this process of exploitation. Marx argues the ceaseless movement and exchange of commodities facilitates the appropriation of surplus value and the further accumulation of capital (Harvey, 2010b; Marx, 1990). He thinks that the commodity form in capitalism has a use value, which reflects the labour expended upon it and its use in subsequent consumption, and it also has an exchange value, which is based on its value in relation to other commodities on the market (Marx, 1990). So commodities, produced through organised human activity, answer social needs but nonetheless through the circulation and exchange of commodities the conditions and relations of production, and the origins of wealth, are effaced and appear simply as a 'collection of things'. This includes the most important commodity of all human labour and Marx (1990) believes it is only by entering "the hidden abode of production" (p. 279) that we can begin to understand how the commodity form is linked to alienation and exploitation and begin to think about alternatives to capitalism.

By establishing the commodification of labour as the defining characteristic of capitalism and the root of class division Marx transformed our understanding of what class means. In this theorisation of class is not about income or occupation but one's place in the relations of production. For Marx to be working class is not simply about being subject to the power of a particular capitalist in a specific workplace, it is to be subject to the power of capital. Thus Marx links immediate and local experience of class to the circuits and flows of capital as a global system. This is noteworthy because Marx viewed capitalism as a simultaneously very

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31 Marx acknowledges the existence of other classes-landlords peasants etc- but he regards the working class and the capitalist class as the *historically significant* classes.

dynamic and a deeply unstable mode of production (Marx, 1990). According to Marx this is because the logic of capital, the drive for profit and accumulation, is expansive but this process inevitably encounters, and is hindered by, natural and social limits which it will always seek to overcome (Harvey, 2010a, 2010b). This logic of capital and the limits to accumulation- in particular Marx's belief that there is an inherent the tendency of profit to fall- means that capitalism is characterised by systemic disequilibria and crises which leads to what Schumpeter would later term 'creative destruction'(Harvey, 2005, 2010a).

Marx anticipated this would lead to social polarisation along the central axis of social power-ownership over the means of production. Marx (1990) maintained this process would give the new 'mass' spaces of capitalism such as the factory a dual character and they would serve both as the site of appropriation and the seedbed for new forms of working class solidarity. Two 'great hostile camps' would emerge-the immiserated proletariat and the capitalist class-and confront each other and because of the centrality of the working class in the labour process and in cycles of accumulation the radicalised proletariat would prove to be the 'gravediggers of the old world'(Marx & Engels, 2002). To reach this goal Marx maintained, as he put it in *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847, Section 2, Part 2), that the proletariat must shift from being a class 'in itself' to becoming a class 'for itself' – that is, from being objectively located in a subordinate position in the relations of production to collectively recognising the nature of exploitation and shared interests and then acting collectively on that knowledge through independent working class organisations (and here we see the full elaboration of the three interlinked propositions that I outlined at the beginning of this section).

The limits of Marx's formulation are now quite evident and very well known. The key argument that class polarisation would lead to mass revolutionary mobilisation has proved to be largely mistaken (Burawoy, 1979; Wright, 2010). Even sympathetic commentators have argued that his labour theory of value because is an inadequate basis for understanding the nature of exploitation (Cohen, 1979) or have radically altered the key theoretical propositions because they argue it does not offer an proper explanation of how profit is accumulated through global circuits of commodity exchange and financial speculation (Arrighi, 1994) . It has also proved difficult to adapt Marx's conflictual and dichotomous theory of class to explain in any sort of convincing way the growth of the middle class in the twentieth century

in Europe and America or use it to offer any sort of compelling account of the political and social role the middle class plays in society (Wright, 1985).

I think these blind spots can be linked to a more general problem in Marx's argument about the nature of material interests in shaping ideas and society and the primacy of the economic in social life-most famously explicated in Marx's base/superstructure model in which the economic base is described as the foundation for ideological and cultural activity (Marx, 1859).[32] This economism can very easily lead to the adoption of a deterministic approach to society in which social logic and historical tendencies are presented as laws. This is particularly true of the use of Marx by other Marxists such Karl Kautsky who believed "socialism was but the enlightened expression of historical inevitability. To be a socialist was to be scientific" (Przerworski, 1985, p. 50; see also Eley, 2002). This economism, and the concomitant vainglorious notion of socialism as a predictive science, had a number of deleterious effects and helped to lay the basis for a wholly misplaced intellectual arrogance and disastrous forms of political leadership by Marxists (Chomsky, 2004). This peculiar blend of science, economics and politics used to explain political mobilisation and social change also led to a body of theory which has systematically underestimated the importance of the normative aspects of social life (Honneth, 1995b; Sayer, 2011). The effects of this can still be seen in Marxist influenced social science and politics and as I stated in the first chapter the retheorisation of class offered in this thesis will, to a large extent, be based on reintegrating this normative dimension of social life into class theory.

Furthermore, in tracts such as *the Communist Manifesto* Marx adapts Hegel's account of the inevitable progress of history into a proletarian drama in which the working class is tasked with glory and burden of the abolition of a class society (Marx & Engels, 2002; see also Marx, 1847, 1971). There is a strong residual teleology in the way this is presented and Marx's heroic conception of the working class reflects a strange, but very typical, admixture of ideas drawn from European Romanticism alongside a more hard-headed empiricism and

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32 Orthodox Marxism makes the claim, with varying degrees sophistication and qualification, that the economic 'base' informs what happens within the cultural 'superstructure'. For the classic account of base/superstructure see Marx (1859), where Marx states "The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life-process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary it is their social being that determines their consciousness" (see also *Capital* chapter one). It may well be one of the most influential metaphors in social science which is difficult to discard because of its parsimony and superficial clarity. See Williams (2005) for useful appraisal and Gramsci (1971) and Thompson (1980) for very suggestive and extended rebuttals of this idea.

faith in science that characterises much of his work (MacIntyre, 1981). I think that both economism and romanticism have cast a long shadow over much class analysis since then especially in various theories of class consciousness which were often, in the work of less subtle thinkers than Marx, hopelessly simplistic.

With these caveats about a tendency to determinism, intellectual vanguardism and teleology in Marxism in mind and the inaccuracy of Marx's prognostications about the 'ripening of the time' we need to ask what is worth retaining from Marx's approach to class? I think Marx offers an exceptionally powerful example of how to develop an egalitarian and emancipatory approach to social theory and that his critical historical method and his insights into the dynamics of capitalism, exploitation and the commodity form are both incisive and relevant. In particular I think his description of class inequality as a deeply structured, relational and dynamic phenomenon linked to ownership and the accumulation of capital rather than just a question of income, cultural markers or working in specific occupation is, remains the most useful way of analysing the macro processes of class formation. Overall, Marx's contribution to a historical and critical analysis of class is enormous and has left a rich, if often somewhat ambiguous, legacy for contemporary sociology. However, a teleological approach to class identity, consciousness and working class politics and a reductive and sometimes mechanistic account of economics and culture, affiliation and human need means that Marx's work on its own is not a sufficient basis for theorising class.

Beyond teleology and against reductionism: Reading Marx through Weber

The second great founding figure of the sociology of class is Max Weber and, like Marx, his impact on class analysis has been, and continues to be, enormous. In fact arguably, Neo-Weberian models of class now in modern professional sociology internationally (e.g. Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992; Marshall, 1997; Parkin, 1974, 1979 etc.)[33]. When we examine the field of class analysis in Ireland, in Chapter Five, we shall also discover just how significant Weber's ideas have been in shaping Irish sociology and policy. His influence is also discernible in the writings of many of the thinkers that share the egalitarian perspective that underpins this thesis -for example Erik Olin Wright, Pierre Bourdieu, Charles Tilly, C. Wright Mills and Critical Theorists, like Habermas. In this respect reading Marx through Weber is hardly unusual but I would contend because Weber is such as useful counterpoint to the ideas

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[33] See Savage (2000) for insightful comments on neo-Weberian sociology and see Crompton (1993) Giddens (1971) and Habermas (1984, 1987) for very stimulating readings of Weber.

discussed above this remains a necessary element in an adequate conceptual model for exploring class in Ireland

Famously in *Economy and Society* (1978) Weber deals explicitly with some of the main conceptual issues in class analysis in two pieces entitled *Classes, status and party* and *Status groups and classes*. Weber (1978) is clearly convinced of the salience of class and in many respects he does not differ from Marx is viewing a theory of class relations as indispensable for an analysis of modern society and also believes that class is embedded in inequalities in ownership. However, Weber thought that sociological analysis should take account of multiple sources of social power and he famously distinguishes between economic forms of power (class), power based on rank and honour (status) and power based on political mobilisation and representation (party). Furthermore, according to Weber, economic and symbolic sources of power are not necessarily interchangeable and he notes that in many circumstances and in certain societies economic resources may not even be the primary basis of power. So according to Weber, as befits a thinker influenced by Nietzsche, social divisions based on ownership and the appearance of waged work are simply "special case of a universal trend" the struggle over, and the division of, power (Gerth & Mills, 1991, p. 50). This obviously calls into question the primacy given to economic explanation in Marx and points the way towards a more multidimensional theory of power creating space for an analysis of the politics of culture and various forms of social domination and how this intersects with modes of exploitation. We can see general argument being made in longer works such as the *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (2001), which uses detailed research on Protestant sects, to advance an argument about the formative role of certain confessional cultures in the making of capitalism. Similarly, Weber's (1978) seminal accounts of bureaucratic rationality and the calculative spirit in modernity are compelling arguments for acknowledging the plural, and complex, nature of power and social organisation and the varied ways this is culturally mediated.

As noted already Weber does nonetheless recognise the specificity of class relations in capitalism though and thinks modern class relations are best described in terms of an individual's position in the labour market and one's typical chance of obtaining goods and advantages (Giddens, 1971; Weber, 1978). So ownership of property, accumulated wealth, and the skills one brings to the labour market all have a role in determining one's class

position and shaping class situations. So although class is conceived as an important social phenomenon which is relational, and often conflictual, it is not embedded, as Marx would assert, in the relations of production, rather one should examine the opportunities available to the member of a given class in the *market*. Thus for Weber, and even more explicitly, in the sociology of class that has followed Weber's lead since (e. g. Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992; Parkin, 1974, 1979), the working class are defined as those propertyless waged workers who are more likely to face 'social closure' and encounter barriers created and maintained by more powerful social groups in the market. Notably for my research a large portion of literature on class and education adapts Weber 's theory of class-linked to a notion of cultural and economic power in the market and forms of social closure- to describe educational institutions and the role of credentials in modern society (for example Ball, 2003; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Goldthorpe, 1996).

Weber's methodological individualism and his concern with the market rather than the mode of production as the central mechanism in reproducing class relations and his awareness of the multiple sources of power lays the basis for a very different model of class relations and mobilisation than the one offered by Marx. For Weber "classes are not communities they merely represent possible, and frequent, bases for social action" (1978, p. 927)[34]. Similarly, in developing his definition of status groups and classes he states that "the mere differentiation of property classes is not "dynamic", that is, it need not result class struggles and revolutions" is evidently a direct criticism of a Marxist theory of class consciousness (Weber, 1978, p. 303). I think Weber's agonism about the relationship between class location and identity is both more realistic in the light of history and is also, if the world is viewed as stratified, open and subject to emergence this is also more a *theoretically* plausible approach than those Marxist theorists who posit 'the ripening of the time' and make confident predictions about the direction of social change.

So in reading Weber schematic, condensed but quite fragmentary analyses of class in *Status groups and classes* and *Classes, status and party* alongside a number of other longer pieces of historical sociology here I would argue that Weber offers an account of class in which it is a central feature of society but what this might mean and how this is interpreted, struggled

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34 See also Weber's wry reference to Lukacs in the section dealing with power in political communities in which he refers to "the talented author' (1978, p. 930) who insists that 'while individuals from a class maybe wrong the class can never be wrong".

over or even disregarded is largely contextual. Weber's theory acknowledges the 'irreducible plurality of values' and the diversity of forms of power in modern life (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 103). I would argue that it is this pluralism and the fact that his theory of class is also explicitly anti-teleological and makes no grand claims about history partially explains why Weber's ideas have so much currency in contemporary class analysis. In simple terms a sceptical approach to class and class identity is far more in tune with the 'spirit' of the times; after all it is the relative stability of the class societies and the dynamism of capitalism in the face of its own contradictions that now needs to be explained (Marshall, 1997). From my perspective Weber's ideas are important because it offers a way of recognising the centrality of class while decoupling such an analysis from teleological models of history and oversimplified ideas of class consciousness.

Having said this I also believe Weber's approach is only fully useful as a way of rereading rather than completely abandoning Marx. Not least because without Marx those deeper structures of ownership and power which lie outside of the market, what Marx called 'the relations of production', become entirely invisible. I believe there is strong evidence, both in my empirical data and the broader literature, of market based cultural and economic inequalities-or if you prefer social closure- but the functioning of the market itself relies on larger structures of ownership and authority which operate according to the dynamics of capital accumulation (Sayer & Walker, 1992). So although his methodological individualism and focus on the market is well placed to explain certain phenomena i.e. the behaviour of credentialed professionals creating barriers of entry to their profession, or middle class struggles to advantage their children through education, or certain patterns of intraclass differentiation it is far less well adapted to explain for instance the organisation of the workplace, the labour process or the flows of capital (Harvey, 2010a; Sayer & Walker, 1992). Both foci are necessary. Towards the end of this chapter I will develop these points through a theory of social space which will be elaborated through a critique of neo-Weberian stratification theory in the next chapter and between Chapter Six and Eight these ideas will be fleshed out empirically.

Furthermore, while I share Weber's scepticism about teleological politics and social theory this does not mean that one can, or should be, 'neutral' about the workers movement or class inequality in either the past or the present. The breadth and range of his work, his openness to

complexity and pluralism and his advocacy of 'value free' research makes Weber almost an 'ideal type' of the liberal scholar but critics such as Allen (2004) have argued that Weber 'neutrality' was deeply disingenuous and reflects quite directly the antinomies and contradictions of a bourgeois liberal in an autocratic state who felt threatened by an organised working class and a growing socialist movement (see also Callinicos, 1999; Gerth & Mills, 1991). While I think Allen is too dismissive of Weber's achievements as a sociologist he is correct to suggest his 'neutrality' is far from innocent.

I want to suggest that it is possible to read Marx through Weber and retain Marx's depth critique of political economy while acknowledging the complex reality of class and history. My contention is that the ideas of Weber and Marx can be integrated into a historical theory of class formation, which is non-teleological but in which the achievements of the workers movement are fully acknowledged. Interrogating Marx through Weber lays the basis for a version of class analysis which looks at power based on both exploitation and domination and in which ownership-of the means of production and of wealth- and authority- based primarily on one's position in the labour process, in organisations and networks of social decision making are all important aspects of class division. This is cultural materialist approach which acknowledges the existence of a variety of sources of social power and moves away from a dichotomous treatment of economics and culture (Castoriadis, 1987; Chomsky, 2004; Mann, 1993; Moran, 2010) but nonetheless sees ownership of the means of production and the dynamics of capital accumulation as fundamental features of capitalism and key to grasping the significance of class. This will be expanded upon in further detail at the end of the chapter more fully synthesised through the ideas of Bourdieu[35].

Farewell to all that? Rethinking class in a contemporary context
Yet over the past forty years and most sharply since the 1980s the idea of class politics and the value of class analysis as an intellectual project have been repeatedly called into question. In my opinion some of the thinkers who announced the 'death of class' had really very little

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35 This formulation is similar in certain respects to Wright (1997, 2000, 2010) and Savage (2000, 2010; Savage, Barlow & Dickens, 1992). My approach differs from Savage in that I frame working class history, emancipation and the role of social science from a more politically engaged position than he chooses to advance. It is distinguished from's Wright's approach in that I am far more critical of Marxism than he is and in that I make very different methodological assumptions about the normative bases of human action and culture (his are more traditionally, and I would say narrowly, 'rationalist'). As we shall see I also ascribe a more central role to domination in the maintenance of structures of power than Wright who, at least in his more recent formulations, argues for the primacy of exploitation for the purposes of analysis.

of worth to say and the stock response from Marxists was to dismiss all such criticisms as ideologically motivated claptrap (Wood, 1986). But I believe some of the criticisms of class theory, and in particular of Marxism, were very well founded and cannot be brushed away so easily and furthermore that the more substantive interventions in these debates indicate that some of the most widely shared notions of working class identity were, in some ways, distorted and distorting. This section will place this debate over class in its socio-political context, look at the reasons why class analysis was called into question by social movements and social scientists and discuss some of the implications of this for this thesis.

The debate over the salience of class was, to a large extent, prompted by profound changes within capitalism since the 1970s (Harvey, 2005, 2010a; Sayer & Walker, 1992). Widespread occupational restructuring in the global north and the deployment of new technologies has massively increased the complexity of the division of labour across the world and the fluidity of capital. Sayer and Walker (1992) note the increasing importance of the circulation of goods and the growth of 'indirect labour' in modern economies and that the "hands on work of processing, assembling, and moving materials has diminished relative to the work of regulating, administering , organizing and improving production systems" (1992, p. 74). This led to the recomposition and reformation of what many people understood as the 'traditional' working class -that is manual workers based in factories and industries who were generally male and often unionised (Savage, 2000). The changes in the division of labour and the types of work available to people has led to a situation where although wage labour has become more and more common over the past forty years (Davis, 2007; Mason, 2007) the diversity and significance of *specific* forms of wage labour in terms of types of contracts, conditions and future rewards has multiplied (Castells, 2009; Ehrenreich, 2002a, 2002b, 2005).

Partially on this basis theorists began to ask whether they were witnessing the formation of a new working class (Mallet, 1975) or whether the time had come to bid farewell to the ideas about the proletariat and much cherished notions about historical change (Gorz, 1982). For some ex-Marxists these signs were taken for wonders and they began to countenance the possibility that capitalism was simply becoming more inclusive and meritocratic which famously led to a new form of breezy techno-idealism which proclaimed the bright new dawn of the post-industrial age (Bell, 1973). As Henwood (2003) has noted there is now a long, and not particularly distinguished, history of social scientists making grandiose claims about

advanced capitalism but if we strip away the bombast I think something important was indeed happening. The shift away from manual work, the concomitant rise in indirect labour and the growth of work that demands some form of specialised knowledge or training has I think undoubtedly changed class the way we think about and experience class in the modern era (Ehrenreich, 1989, 2002a, 2005 Sayer & Walker, 1992; Silver, 2003).

Just as importantly class politics, at least in the traditional form imagined by orthodox Marxists, was on the decline for most of the second half twentieth century (Eley, 2002). It has already been noted that between the early and the mid-twentieth century the organised working class won a share of institutional and state power and secured a range of social guarantees which lead in time to the development of comprehensive social welfare systems in in many countries (Eley, 2002; Cowie, 2010; Habermas, 1987). Post-war economic growth also meant that by the early 1970s most members of Europe and America's working class had experienced a rise in the standards of living and the material benefits of the new consumerism. Besides which, as a matter of historical record, sectional interests had often trumped a supposed general class interest (Mann, 1995) and the exigencies and affinities of national politics often proved a far more compelling than international class solidarity in organised working class politics (Aronowitz, 2003; Eley, 2002; Mann, 1973, 1995).This, along with reality of everyday life in the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc and the intellectual cirrhosis of communist parties internationally led to the complete degeneration of the communist movement and concluded in the spectacular collapse of what used to be called, often without it seems intentional irony, 'actually existing socialism'.

In the same period national liberation and anti-colonial movements proved to be one of the major 'anti-systemic' movements of the twentieth century (Arrighi, Hopkins & Wallerstein, 1989). The social composition of these movements meant that it became much harder to maintain the myth that Western industrial workers were some sort of revolutionary vanguard. Instead, social change came from a 'multitude', primarily made up of peasants, and this of course affected how people thought about class politics. This was part of more general shift in political gravity away from the workers movement which is often linked to the growth of what some social scientists have deemed 'new' social movements (Touraine, 1981; Melucci, 1988). The multiplying number of such social movements- most notably the peace movement, the women's movement, ecologists, gay rights activists etc., led to a reappraisal of theories of mobilisation, civil society and social change and created new resources for social

critique all of which challenged established notions of inequality and ideas of class identity (Fraser & Honneth, 2003). Feminism in particular altered the way both social science and social movements theorised social reproduction and argued that the exclusive focus on the workplace hid the nature of gender inequality *and* occluded the workings of capitalism (Federici, 2004; Hartsock, 1983; Rowbotham, 1973).

Socio-economic change, new patterns of social action and new resources of critique made traditional notions of power and the working class seem less and less tenable. A very valuable body of sociological and historical research has enriched our understanding of the complexities and limits of assuming a causal or predictable relationship between class position and self- understanding (Mann, 1973, 1995). Researchers discovered that the working class tradition of mobilisation, class pride and collective class identities and demand for dignity and equality was far more complicated than history from below had suggested (see for instance Joyce, 1990; Jones, 1974, 1983; Steedman, 1986; Ranciere, 1989). We now know that despite the unequivocal social gains brought about by the action of the organised working class (Eley, 2002) that the conception of equality enacted through working class politics was imperfect, and at times sectional, and even sectarian, and very often neglected and excluded women and subaltern ethnic groups and races.

Just as importantly for the present thesis a portion of this work demonstrates that there were, and are, histories *within* working class history -histories of exclusion, of refusal, private longing, flight and subversion that have been hidden within these larger narratives of struggle against class domination and for class emancipation (Steedman, 1986, 2009; Ranciere, 1989). These private narratives-which do not take place on the great stage of history-sometimes fit very poorly into this grand and bigger story but I think need nonetheless to be acknowledged and integrated into a fuller account of everyday class experience.

In short, the past forty years have intensified scepticism about what C. Wright Mills once called the 'labour metaphysic' (Mills, 1960). Mills was referring to a tendency amongst sections of the left to frame social analysis and theories of social change entirely through a highly mythologised notion of the organised working class. In fact, I think there are good reasons to believe that the creation of a politics and a mode of theorising which ascribed too much significance to the industrial working class may well have limited the effect and popularity of the workers movement (Mann, 1995). As a result, the notion that class is a

useful way of *predicting* the concerns, hopes and intentions of large groups of people is now, quite rightly, seen as a deeply contentious idea. It would be egregious in the face of the changing nature of work and culture, the discoveries of new labour history, the arguments of feminism and post-colonial studies and the political failure of Marxism not to be somewhat sceptical of tidy and neat ideas about class identity. This means that, despite the enduring nature of socio-economic inequality-and the continuing salience of class- it is impossible to treat class as a master category by which all social phenomena can be interpreted. The forthcoming findings and this theoretical overview are therefore grounded in the assumption that class identity is neither as complete and straightforward, or as illusory and ideologically inspired, as some of the various protagonists in the debate over class and identity, from Marx to Hayek to Beck, have maintained. This is, of course, one of the major reasons why the research is committed to a methodological approach which makes as few assumptions as possible about class identity and why I chose an approach that carefully grounds itself in lived experience and empirical research.

The cheque is in the post: The 'death of class' and post-modernism

As a consequence of these changes much of social analysis since the 1970s has struggled to work out if this all heralded the beginning of 'new times'. This it should be said has led to a number of impressive attempts by Marxists to renew class analysis through a more adequate theory of class and class consciousness (Braverman, 1974; Burawoy, 1979; Thompson, 1980, 1993; Williams, 1977, 2005; Willis, 1977; Wright, 1985, 1989, 1997; see also Poulantzas, 1975). This is also, I think, what lies behind the rediscovery of Gramsci (1971) in the 1970s and 1980s. We have benefitted greatly from a sustained effort to overcome the distorting and distorted old notion of the working class by integrating class and gender analysis (Federici, 2004; Hartsock, 1983; Rowbotham, 1973), by analysing the division of labour as a global phenomenon which is not separable from modern colonialism and imperialism (Amin, 1976; Silver, 2003; Wallerstein, 1974, 1979, 1980) and by exploring the dynamics of profit accumulation from new perspectives (Arrighi, 1994; Harvey, 1989).

But has this meant leaving class behind altogether? In a review of the contribution of contemporary Marxism to class analysis Savage (2000) has noted a general tendency to downgrade the importance of the labour theory of value and displace the centrality given to class struggle within contemporary Marxist theory. Savage states that Marxists now depict class "as the effect of structural processes and have little independent force (2000, p. 12). In

terms of specific individual theorists this is certainly open to debate[36] but I would argue that Savage's overall assessment is correct. Class has undoubtedly been reframed in a more plural way which seeks to grasp the intersectionality of various forms of domination, such as gender and race with class (Federici, 2004; Linebaugh & Rediker, 2000) and has been acknowledged that power and organisational and cultural assets are important dimensions of class division (Wright, 1985). Just as importantly I think this body of work has offered a more realistic account of the dynamics of late capitalism and highlighted that accumulation can occur through dispossession, financialisation, 'spatial fixes' achieved through the increased mobility of capital and technological change and through the increased commodification of everyday life (Arrighi, 1994; Debord, 1994; Harvey, 1989, 2005, 2010a; Lefebvre, 1991a, 1991b). There is no doubt that this breaks with some of the founding tenets of Marx's critique of political economy and as a whole I think the evidence points to a highly differentiated and complex world system- the logic of which is based on accumulation and commodification- that relies on the exploitation of labour but that this is not the only source of profit and social power.

I think this 'decentering' was positive in many respects and the unravelling of orthodox Marxism led to a new generative heterodoxy in theories of power, agency and freedom and a more realistic analysis of capitalism. The plural, sometimes incoherent but nevertheless fecund, arguments within the new social movements inevitably changed the terms employed by critical social science (Sayer, 2000). The subsequent development of post-Marxist, post-structuralist and post-modernist ideas can to a very significant degree, at least in their first iterations, be characterised as the work of a generation of radical, and frequently ex-Marxist, thinkers who wanted to pursue new lines of inquiry into the nature of society and develop analyses capable of grasping the direction of change in the post war era[37]. For example this is I think the most accurate way to describe the work of thinkers such as Castoriadis, Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari, Ranciere, Badiou and Negri. For obvious reasons one of the main concerns of this generation of writers, stated with varying levels of clarity, was how best to effect

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36 For example David Harvey's (2005, 2010a) historical and geographical theory of accumulation does have a clear focus on class but argues the terms under which effective collective action can occur has radically altered since the 1970s.

37 See Dews (1987), Jameson (1991), Anderson (1998), Harvey (1989) Habermas (1998) Best and Kellner (1991) Norris (1992) Sayer (2000) for useful discussions of the changing nature of social theory in this period.

egalitarian social change and to assess whether the working class still had a central role in achieving this.

On the other hand there were many theorists associated with these intellectual currents who were far less careful in their analysis of social change. I think Lyotard is wholly typical of this carelessness and in many ways was a pathbreaker in this regard. In his report on the nature of knowledge in the modern era Lyotard (1984, p. 12) is deeply critical of the "desire for a unitary and totalising truth", what he calls "grand narratives". He traces these narratives back to Enlightenment ideas and aspirations but the main target of his critique are more recent theories of emancipation and especially socialism and Marxism (as one might expect of a writer who had decided to break with the ideas he has earlier developed in the group *Socialisme ou Barbarisme)*. In the fashion of the times Lyotard (1984, p. 5) states matter a factly "it is widely accepted that knowledge has become the principle force of production over the last few decades in highly developed countries" and then links this to class and class politics. He summarily dispatches with the idea of class without having to go to the trouble to work through this in any depth or offer any empirical basis for his claims. (he offers a couple of references and one set of statistics which indicate the growth of technical and white collar work in the US between the 1950s and 1971). In fact the topic merits less than two pages and instead of social analysis we are given an aleatory, rhetorical, and wholly ungrounded account of social change.

Despite this Lyotard does at least manage to say some things of genuine interest about knowledge, the university and critical theory. I think the real nadir of this particular approach to social analysis was reached in the writings of Jean Baudrillard. Despite some fascinating early work on the limits of Marxist conceptual categories (1975) in later books (1994, 1995, 1999) Baudrillard relentlessly pursued a certain version of postmodern thinking to its logical, and I would argue ludicrous, conclusions[38]. With the disappearance of the old left and the diminishing value of a familiar conception of the working class we were invited to embrace the impossibility of emancipatory knowledge, the inevitability of power, the death of history and the triumph of simulacra. This was all announced with great gusto and very little evidence. The giddy sense of that everything, and nothing, is possible in the post-modern hall of mirrors eventually led Baudrillard into faddish provocations which degenerated into the

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38 As an aside I think a case can be made that the most interesting aspects of Baudrillard's theory are borrowed from Debord (1994).

worst sort of scholastic nihilism when he declared the Gulf war has not in fact 'happened' (Baudrillard, 1995; see also Norris, 1992).

Why should we care about such careless and hyperbolic claims? I believe the simple answer is that cumulative effect of shifts in production, politics and culture discussed earlier and the collapse of the old left in the 1980s and 1990s created space for a number of high postmodernists to air these sort of ideas and set the tone for arguments about the 'death of class'. Baudrillard may have only be a court jester but analogous ideas began to take bizarrely firm hold in the humanities and social sciences in the 1990s and far more careful social scientists than Baudrillard began to argue that class was no longer relevant to sociology at all (Pakulski & Waters, 1996). As I have already suggested important changes were afoot but the peremptory dismissal of class analysis by Lyotard, Baudrillard, Pakulski and Waters and many others was based in an over-identification of class analysis with Marxism and the manual working class and considerable exaggeration of the velocity and novelty of recent social change.

Reflexive modernity, class and the neoliberal project

I think some of these observations also apply to the theories advanced by some of the most prominent sociologists of our time such as Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman and Ulrich Beck. The cluster of ideas synthesised by these thinkers in various iterations a theory of 'reflexive modernity' are I think far more significant, in terms of influence and intellectual weight, than the more aggressive strains of academic postmodernism. What is pertinent is that they have all argued that class is less and less relevant to understanding contemporary society (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1992, 1999; Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994; Beck & Willms, 2004; Giddens, 1990). This is all the more noteworthy in the case of Bauman and Giddens as this involves a disavowal, or at the very least a clear shift away, from earlier positions and preoccupations in which class played a central part in their analyses (Bauman, 1972; Giddens, 1971, 1981).

These thinkers all discern a change modern society in which collective identities have given way to new forms of individualisation and the fragmentation of older notions of community. Due to these change they argue, the way individuals negotiate and make meaning in everyday life have been radically altered and consequently the old politics of solidarity and community no longer have the same relevance. This is an important argument and one which will be

engaged with throughout the thesis. I do not intend to deal with all these theorists here and I will concentrate on Beck because he is very explicit about the implications of reflexive modernisation for class analysis and he also makes a number of intriguing arguments about the nature of contemporary biographies and education. Beck argues that modern society has been detraditionalised and individualised and is increasingly dominated by concerns about risk which are shared across the class divide. The disembedding of communities and the growing importance of individual and reflexive modes of action means that "society can no longer look in the mirror and see social classes. The mirror has been smashed and all we have left are the individualized fragments" (Beck & Willms, 2004, p. 107). Beck describes class as a residual category with less and less explanatory power; it is, he says, 'a zombie concept'-endlessly brought back to life by social scientists numbed by the habitual use of their *professional* categories of analysis but of scant relevance to the experience of everyday life or even the most pressing tasks of sociology (Beck, 1999; Beck & Willms, 2004).

This cluster of ideas-which brings risk, reflexive individualism, the detraditionalisation of work and gender roles and the increased bureaucratisation of society together is very suggestive and has helped create a new sociological 'common sense' including in educational scholarship. Beck has come under sustained criticism for, amongst other things, his lack of clarity about causal processes-especially in terms of the source and specific nature of the reflexivity he discusses (Archer, 2007); his tendency to argue from a privileged position in society with little indication that this position might affect how he construes society (Skeggs, 2004); and a pronounced habit of generalising without offering enough empirical evidence (Savage, 2000). Despite these valid criticisms-which I will develop in later chapters- Beck's theory of reflexive modernity does capture something of great import and the empirical data gathered for the present research project confirms some of Beck's arguments; namely the increasing significance of individualism and the importance given to educational careers in constructing biography in contemporary society.

Nonetheless, I think Beck is absolutely mistaken in the way he theorises class processes in the era 'reflexive modernisation'. The most fruitful way of illustrating the limits and insights of Beck's theory is through the interview data and the substantive points I want to explicate will be made in Chapters Six and Seven. At this point I will simply make two general preliminary arguments about the reflexive modernisation thesis which will help frame the analysis later. First of all I think Beck has a common predilection amongst sociologists of a

certain type of consistently overestimating the 'shock of the new' and therefore overlooking continuities within modernity and capitalism over the 'longue duree'. For example Charles Taylor (1989) has argued that three of the main features of the modern age -the affirmation of ordinary life, the democratisation of social relations and a new form of individual reflexivity are very deeply rooted and *longstanding* tendencies rather than wholly novel phenomena (see also Berman, 1983; Castoriadis, 1987; Habermas, 1984). The second problem with Beck's work, and again this is a characteristic shared by other reflexive modernists, is that although it is thought provoking about recent social transformations it is extremely vague in the way it analyses the political processes which lie behind these changes.

In order to avoid falling into the same trap I want to begin to outline how these political processes are understood in the thesis. I would argue that the most insistent challenge to working class politics and ideas of collective class identity did not come from Parisian poets of hyperreality, nor was it a function of a powerful, but vaguely described, autopoietic move towards reflexive individualisation within modernity. Instead, the challenge came from a new type of class warrior-politicians such as Reagan and Thatcher and intellectuals like Milton Friedman- fierce advocates of a neo-liberal free-market who built on the work of von Hayek and von Mises (Friedman, 1982; Harvey, 2005). These thinkers and politicians aggressively promoted what Polanyi (2001) has called the 'stark utopia' that is a society entirely subordinated to the market. This was based on a conception of human behaviour as naturally, and fundamentally, acquisitive and individualistic and consciously sought to undermine the power of the organised working class. Hayek (1976) despised the collectivism which characterised working class politics and vociferously argued that it led us down the 'road to serfdom' and Reagan and Thatcher blamed the organised working class for stagflation and the extended economic and political crises that beset Europe and the USA in the 1970s. It is not a coincidence that many of the most famous episodes in the rise of neoliberalism- from the bloody coup led by Pinochet in Chile, to Reagan's showdown with the air traffic controllers, to Thatcher's long battle with the miners- were about publicly disciplining the organised working class (Harvey, 2005). In each case the neoliberals won a decisive victory and this frontal attack was accompanied by less confrontational but just as significant swathe of reforms aimed at market deregulation and the privatisation of state services (Bourdieu, 1998b, 1999). I think the history of neoliberalism-as a set of quite defined political and economic struggles- is just as important as changes in the division of labour and class

composition and the increasing awareness of the complexity of class identity highlighted earlier in explaining 'the travails of class theory'.

The global impact of neoliberal ideas could not have occurred without technological innovations in manufacturing, transport and information technology to ease and speed up the flows of international capital. This period also witnessed the creation of a wide range of new types of market including the massive growth of the financial markets (Graeber, 2010; Harvey, 2010a; Henwood, 1997, 2003). The increased mobility of capital, deregulation, the subsequent financialisation of capitalism and the attack on the organised working class resulted in higher levels of inequality and a massive redistribution of wealth upwards over the past thirty years (Dumenil & Levy, 2004; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Westergaard, 1995). These changes also resulted in new forms of flexible and precarious labour in many working class and some middle class jobs, both in terms of contract and conditions, and the dismantling of social welfare guarantees which has led to greater levels of social insecurity and anxiety[39] (Bauman, 1998a; Bourdieu et al, 1999; Ehrenreich, 2002a, 2002b; Standing, 2009; Wacquant, 2008, 2009). This increased precarity within a more flexible regime of capital accumulation has led some thinkers to speculate that the new conditions have been set for the 'corrosion of character' in which necessary narratives about one's place and value in society have been undermined (Sennett, 1998).

The increased mobility of capital also resulted in the deindustrialisation of many established working class communities in Western Europe and the US (Bourgois, 2003; Charlesworth, 2000; Linkon & Russo, 2002). This along with the attack on the trade union movement and the hollowing out of the welfare state and social guarantees (Harvey, 2005) and the promotion of acquisitive individualism (Giroux, 2004; Sennett, 2006) has had an enormous impact on how we understand class and in how the working class is valued in society. Arguably, the net result of all this has been a diminution of the economic and cultural resources to live a dignified and productive life in many working class communities (Bourgois, 2003; Charlesworth, 2000; Sayer, 2005; Sennett, 2004). Not coincidentally in the exact same period a now widely diffused public discourse about the 'underclass' (Murray, 1994) was promoted which allows structural and social forces to be read in terms of individual's 'moral' flaws and facilitated the scapegoating of the most vulnerable sections of

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39 For an interesting counter-argument on the changing nature of work see Doogan (2009).

society (Bauman, 1998a; Jones, 2011; Skeggs, 2004). In this sense neoliberalism has not just led to the redistribution of wealth to the elite but has created a culture in which tropes and images about the feckless and disreputable poor have multiplied and this has served to justify inequality (Jones, 2011; Skeggs, 1997). I would argue that this attack on the organised and then the most marginal sections of the working class has diminished our sense of collective responsibility for society and impoverished our sense of political possibility (Finnegan, 2007, 2008).

The effect of the neoliberal revolution has to be borne in mind when examining theories of class inequality and individualism. So instead of a recent lurch to a reflexive society concerned above all with risk which has come about through the intensification of modernity that Beck (1992) advocates I want to make the case that there are well established tendencies within modern culture, many of which are potentially emancipatory, which encourage individual and collective reflexivity (often linked to the idea of self-actualisation and personal autonomy) but that much of the sense of increased insecurity, alienation and anxiety in contemporary society can be linked to the politics of neoliberalism and the defeat of the organised working class.

The return of the repressed: Class analysis today

At this point I want to summarise the argument that has been made in this review of theories of class thus far. Class relations have been a feature throughout history but take on a specific significance in the development of capitalism. The modern era has seen an endless struggle over class and classification as both the middle class and the working class mobilised in political social movements and made claims and demands which have shaped our whole idea of politics. Linked, but not wholly subordinate, to these struggles in civil society and in the new public spheres was the formation and growth of social science. Class formation is best understood as a layered historical process based on large scale socio-economic change which is defined, shaped and understood through classification struggles in politics, everyday life and the academy. As a consequence for much of modern history class has been a much debated and politically sensitive subject which has helped define the very meaning of social science.

A momentous series of cultural and economic changes in the post-war era radically altered the political and intellectual landscape and, amongst other things, this crystallised into a

series of new approaches to social analysis-many of which decentred established ideas about class. The most interesting of this work- most notably by feminists such as Federici but also thinkers such as Ranciere and, with some qualifications, Beck offer valuable new coordinates for understanding power and inequality from an egalitarian perspective. However, one particularly self-aggrandising node within the humanities and social sciences, associated with certain post-modern thinkers such as Jean Baudrillard, in abandoning the idea of class and emancipatory struggle also decided to give up on critical analysis altogether. This occurred in the midst of an elite political revolution-neoliberalism- in which the stakes of the game were largely defined in terms of class power and the distribution of wealth and authority. It is hardly irrelevant that the long-term social impact of this 'revolution', an increase in precarity and inequality, and the fragmentation of solidarity, hardly registered in the theorising of deeply anti-realist forms of postmodernism.

But this postmodern world of endless possibility now seems, if it was ever otherwise, hopelessly disconnected from reality. Class inequality remains a fundamental aspect of contemporary society (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992; Ehrenreich, 1989, 2002a, 2002b, 2005; Goldthorpe, 1992; Goldthorpe, Llewellyn, & Payne, 1987; Goldthorpe & McKnight, 2004; Lamont, 2000; Linkon & Russo, 2002; Marshall, 1997; Russo & Linkon, 2005; Savage, 1987; Savage & Miles, 1994; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Wright, 1985, 1989, 1997, 2005; Zweig, 2001, 2004). Over the past decade class analysis has been renewed and articulated in ways that carries little of the teleological or political baggage of orthodox Marxism and in which there has been a more careful conceptualisation of intersectionality of class with other forms of oppression and social division (Anthias, 1998). In some cases this has created the space for thinkers to go beyond simply reinforcing Marxist or Weberian positions and draw on critical theory and the experience and knowledge of new social movements and which acknowledge the scale of the recomposition which has taken place (Aronowitz, 2003; Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Hardt & Negri, 2004). Probably the most significant contribution, in terms of offering an empirically grounded retheorisation of class has come from Pierre Bourdieu and a number of thinkers who have drawn critically on his ideas (Adkins & Skeggs, 2004; Bennett et al, 2009; Bourgois, 2003; Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009; Charlesworth, 2000; Devine, 2004; Reay, 1998a; Savage, 2000, 2005, 2010; Sayer, 2005; Skeggs, 1997, 2004, Wacquant, 2008, 2009).

Developing theoretical tools for research: Pierre Bourdieu on social space and class

Bourdieu constantly returned to the question of class throughout his long career and his best known book *Distinction* (1984) and a number of articles (1985, 1986a, 1986b, 1989) are first and foremost enormously rich contributions to class theory. Reading these various pieces together it becomes evident that Bourdieu's reputation as a sociologist and a theorist of class stems from six things. First, Bourdieu's interrogates the 'classical' sociological legacy of Marx, Durkheim and Weber in a genuinely critical way and refuses to be beholden to any one particular tradition. By drawing on his time as an anthropologist and his early training as a philosopher Bourdieu also brought field work techniques and conceptual tools not typically deployed in class analysis and here one thinks particularly of his use of the anthropology of Mauss and the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty. Second, he demonstrated a firm commitment to working *through* theory empirically within a range of contexts. Third, his theory of class is orientated to both broad structural description *and* everyday experience. Fourth, his theory of social space, capitals and habitus (see below for details) goes a considerable distance in overcoming the false antinomies between cultural and economic dimensions of class that have so bedevilled research on this topic. Fifth, Bourdieu never acceded to either the faddish relativism (Baudrillard, 1995) or the pure theoreticism of his peers (Althusser, 2008). Sixth, Bourdieu forcefully argue that class analysis cannot be simply treated as the handmaiden of ideological struggles and this allowed him to avoid reducing class experience to pre-determined and often highly idealised, political terms of reference. Given the broader socio-political changes reviewed above I think this scepticism about the necessary connection between class inequality and political mobilisation is of fundamental importance in understanding Bourdieu's subsequent influence on class theory.

So Bourdieu recognises ownership as the main axis of class division but he resolves the culture/economy problematic is a less reductive way than Marx and many Marxists. For Bourdieu "culture is not the product of class relations but is itself a field in which class relations operate" (Savage, 2000, p. 106). In other words cultural processes enforce and reproduce class relations. To move beyond a false opposition between economy and culture and base and superstructure, Bourdieu argued, *we need a theory of social space* (1984, 1985, 1989). Furthermore, in one of the most densely suggestive pieces on class and classification Bourdieu contends social space (1985) it is best conceptualised as a field of forces in which the amount of capital, both cultural and economic, at one's disposal defines one position

within that space. It should be added that Bourdieu (1984) envisages social space as multi-dimensional and argues that class positions should be plotted relationally according to the distribution and differentiation of various sorts of power.

Thus far this description of social topology may sound like a modernised and more integrated version of Weber's idea of a 'class situation' but while Weber is certainly a major influence on Bourdieu's theory of class he is far more adept at describing cultural struggle in class formation. It may also seem, from the description I have just given, a little static, but much of his work is devoted to developing sociological tools capable of charting *movement* through social space which he believes is basically driven by the desire of individual agents and collectives to accumulate social and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1990). To fully explain the patterns which our trajectories through classed social space follow we need to turn to the concepts of habitus, capitals and field which need to be deployed relationally and reflexively alongside each other (1984, 1986a; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Notions of habitus can be traced back to Ancient Greek philosophy but Bourdieu's theorisation of habitus (given in its most extended form in 1977, 1984, 1990, 2000) was initially developed by adapting Mauss' concept of habitus in his anthropological work with the Kabyle in Algeria (1977). This formulation was reviewed and extended in *Distinction* (1984) and I think has its most its richest and most complete expression in *Pascalian Meditations*. Bourdieu developed this concept to avoid "the complementary fallacies" of iron determinism or a free floating voluntarism that predominate in social theory (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 138). Bourdieu (1990, p. 53) defines habitus in the following way

> The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations, that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.

So for Bourdieu habitus is formed through agents historically conditioned confrontation with social reality- or if you prefer their movement through social space-a process which results in the formation of durable and generative dispositions. By necessity this involves actors' adaptation to and an internalisation of social structures. .Significantly, this theory of embodied social cognition "has the primordial function of stressing that the principle of our

actions is more often practical sense than rational calculation" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 64). So to understand social interaction we have to grasp how the logic of practice, and practical reason, depends 'on a feel for the game' and how immersion in that game profoundly shapes agents' schema of perception and action. Bourdieu claims that we should pay attention to how this leads us to absorb at a very deep level certain principles of vision and division of how social world is and should be. Thus Bourdieu stresses the *situated, embodied* and *practical* nature of both conscious and subconscious social action (Finnegan, 2010b). This is part of his more general contention that the desire and need to adapt to social reality is a more significant phenomenon than Marxist theories of class consciousness might suggest (Bourdieu, 2000).

Bourdieu does not envisage social space as unitary and undifferentiated rather he claims it is divided into various fields and each field has its own specific logic of practice with its own stakes and rewards (1984). So for example investment bankers and literary critics work in different fields with varied conceptions of what it means to accumulate capital and this affects both the type of interactions and strategies used by agents in their respective fields of endeavour. Bourdieu also maintains that the boundaries and practices which constitute a field get redefined through struggle over time. To link this to the preceding paragraph it is crucial to note that Bourdieu believes that an individual's habitus, and the collective social habituses through which an individual's sense of habitus is shaped, affects our patterns of social action. He is particularly interested in how dispositions are activated or neutralised in a given field (1984, 2000): to use one of Bourdieu's favoured similes the relationship between habitus and field can be likened to respectively to one's feel for the game and the game itself (2000, p. 151). A field is also defined by how the various form of capital, i.e. cultural, economic, symbolic, and social, circulate and are employed within that field (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986a; Calhoun, Lipuma, Postone & Bourdieu, 1993). By examining how well a given habitus functions in response to the demands of a given field and the sort of capitals that are required to succeed in a specific field, Bourdieu believes, we can begin to properly understand the social dynamics underpinning the choices, preferences and strategies of social actors.

Thus the "position of a given agent within the social space can thus be defined by the positions he [sic] occupies in the different fields" (1985, p. 724). Bourdieu thinks this offers the best way of thinking about what defines class experience, how it shapes identity and how social inequality gets reproduced. According to Bourdieu both the formation of habitus and

possession of capitals are largely determined by one's early class position; shared class conditions leads to the development of shared social dispositions and these classed habituses are further shaped and confirmed through experience. Of particular importance to this process is how the hierarchies and enduring structures of social space are internalised and often naturalised and reproduced through uneven access to valued, and putatively neutral, cultural practices including, crucially, education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; see Chapter Four for further discussion). In other words the dominated sections of society, who Bourdieu largely identifies as the working class, have less capital at their disposal than the dominant class and have this dispossession naturalised through early socialisation. This is confirmed and reinforced by limited upward movement through social space and restricted access to valued social fields.

By paying attention to the function of culture in society, in particular by a developing a demystifying analysis of non-economic capitals (Sayer, 2005), Bourdieu provides a penetrating analysis of class reproduction. Overall, what Bourdieu outlines is a complex, fluid and relational theory of class that eschews a false dichotomy between structure and agency and I think the concepts of social space, habitus, capitals and field allow for a more nuanced form of sociology of class than offered by most Marxists, Weberian and political arithmeticians. To return to an earlier point much of the significance of Bourdieu's work derives from the fact that it provides a compelling way of exploring social class that does not rely on either static, socio-economic categories based on occupational hierarchies or 'heroic' models of class that seek to explain class experience solely in relation to political mobilisation. Class is first and foremost about socio-cultural power and questions of politics and class identity are contingent and historical issues shaped by cultural struggles.

Bourdieu's class theory is the product of a synthesis of sophisticated theoretical ideas, drawn from a variety of intellectual disciplines, with empirical data. I think that it is this characteristic dialectical movement between data and theory that allows Bourdieu to avoid falling into either a reified abstraction or a naive positivism and lends force and depth to his account of classed social practices. In this way Bourdieu's basic framework-which draws on the best of Marx and Weber- is critical and non-teleological but helps extends the definition of class offered earlier (based on ownership and authority) as it puts far greater stress on the role of legitimate cultural capital in class processes. This three tiered notion of class as

structured through overlapping relational differences in ownership, authority and legitimate cultural capital is, I think, the most generative way of conceptualising class division.

Before I conclude I want to point out that despite this I think Bourdieu theory needs to be critiqued and amended. Bourdieu's conception of social space, habitus and capitals is too strongly orientated to explaining structural reproduction and regulatory adaptation and tends to underplay the way people reason, value and intervene, often in unpredictable ways, in their own lives (Archer, 2007; Finnegan, 2010b; Honneth, 1995b; Sayer, 2005). Over the rest of the thesis I will argue that the notion of habitus in particular needs to be retheorised and that Bourdieu's arguments are based on limited and faulty ontological assumptions (Finnegan, 2010a, 2010b, 2011a; Sayer, 2005). Moreover, despite the fact that Bourdieu has repeatedly argued for a theory of class formation (1986b) and a 'socio-genetic' explanation of phenomena his sociology is often weakly historically contextualised (Calhoun, Lipuma, Postone & Bourdieu, 1993). Besides which I think it has been convincingly argued that Bourdieu's work does not offer a clear theorisation of capitalism or pay enough attention to the dynamics and logic of capitalism as a system (Burawoy, 2008; Rikowski, 2007).

I believe some of these limitations can be overcome by synthesising elements of Marxism with Bourdieu's theory. There are three things the radical tradition can offer which are not readily found in Bourdieu's work- a strong sense of the creativity and agency of ordinary people, and richer knowledge of history from 'below' and a more incisive theory of capitalism and the commodity form. Based on an analysis of the empirical data I think this can be achieved by reworking and extending Bourdieu's idea of social space. Much of the literature cited in the first half of the chapter is directly relevant to this synthesis. For example Thompson (1993) has documented the way the experience of shared spaces- in communities and workplaces-laid the basis for collective identities based on affiliation and solidarity. This is a useful corrective to Bourdieu and we will see how a notion of space, linked to everyday practice of concern and mutual aid, will be required to make sense of even the most individualistic accounts of space and identity in the empirical data. It will also be argued, again based on the data, that Bourdieu largely neglects workplace experience in his conception of social space and the thesis will draw on some of the Marxist literature which looks at of how everyday experience is linked to the labour process (Burawoy, 1979; Marx, 1990; Sawchuk, 2003; Willis, 1977).

By far the most useful bridging point between Bourdieu and Marxism though is the work of Henri Lefebvre (1991a) who also developed a theorisation of social space as a key to an analysis of power. Like Bourdieu he thinks we should be begin with sensuous, embodied experience and is also interested in how cultural representation, forms of socialisation and shape experience, mental schema and our cognitive maps of social space. A major difference between the two thinkers is that Lefebvre is less occupied with the specificity of fields and far more attuned to explaining the connections that exist *between* spaces. He also maintains that any theory of space has to be attentive to the way space is produced on different scales, according to different rhythms and how the flows of capital and commodities move *through* space to produce everyday experience. Lefebvre (1991a, p. 87) likens this to hydrodynamics

> Great movements, vast rhythms, immense waves - these all collide and 'interfere' with one another; lesser movements, on the other hand, interpenetrate. If we were to follow this model, we would say that any social locus could only be properly understood by taking two kinds of determinations into account: on the one hand, that locus would be mobilized, carried forward and sometimes smashed apart by major tendencies, those tendencies which 'interfere' with one another; on the other hand, it would be penetrated by, and shot through with, the weaker tendencies characteristic of networks and pathways.

I think this layered idea of social space as subject to small and large movements, of the interlacing of the local and the global, shaped by the flows of capital captures certain aspects of the structuring of social space in modern capitalism far more accurately than Bourdieu. Lefebvre is also clear, in a way that Bourdieu is not, that space is never simply about social reproduction and domination and argues that there are tightly defined areas of social space as well as looser and less controlled spaces which we move through, and are shaped by, and in which we can act in both small and significant ways in our own lives (see also Certeau, 1984; Scott, 1985, 1990). These ideas will be explored intensively in relation to the empirical data and Chapter Six will give a full account of this theory of social space based on the interviews.

Conclusion: Class and class formation

The main contention of this chapter is that class is poorly explained *solely* through patterns of macrosociological change- for instance the spread of wage labour and the development of capitalist markets, the process of commodification, industrialisation, urbanisation etc., - and such explanations are only one element in the process of class formation (Levine, Fantasia & McNall, 1991; Katznelson & Zolberg, 1986; Przeworski, 1985; Thompson, 1980). Classes

are made on a number of levels which of course includes broad socio-economic transformations but also depends on patterns of collective action and other social and cultural struggles; that is to say "class struggle is in the first instance a struggle *over* class before it is a struggle *between* classes." (Wright, 1989, p. 29).

Clearly the position taken here is that a historical theory of power is a necessary element in understanding the political formation of individual and collective class identities. Drawing on Marx we can say the capitalist mode of production is built around the imperatives of social regulation and profit accumulation through commodification but that this takes very diverse forms in given historical contexts. However, theories of social reproduction and class which focus solely or mainly on the workplace are insufficient- the question is I think how human creativity is managed as a whole (Federici, 2004; Foucault, 2007; Hardt & Negri, 2004). It is structured by overlapping inequalities in ownership, authority and access to legitimate cultural capital and the experience of "historically constituted power and powerlessness" in social space (Aronowitz, 2003, p. 141). Therefore class is not simply about the exploitation of workers or doing a specific jobs, or a given level of income but is based on a relationally defined, and structurally maintained, experience of differential access to material resources, valued modes of being, and opportunities for collective and individual development (Sayer, 2005, 2011; Sayer & Walker, 1992; Sen 1999, 2009).

I also have suggested that it is a mistake to stop with histories of collective action; class structures social space, and therefore our *personal* experience and dispositions, in a profound way (Bourdieu, 1984). Class is also embodied, and affective; it affects our unconscious and unconscious sense of self, our ways of being and patterns of meaning making and because of this class is a political issue but is not necessarily experienced in that way. As a consequence the 'meaning' of class is not given, let alone self-evident, but is historically contingent, culturally mediated experience made and remade through continuities in everyday experience based on the structuring of social space and through various forms of symbolic struggle. I am also suggesting that class can be framed on several levels of abstraction and conflating these will necessarily lead to conceptual problems. So macroeconomic analysis or accounts of history, institutional critique and personal experience are related but distinct phenomena, and I think the aim of a critical class theory should be to trace the interconnections between the

historical, the political, the cultural and the personal, without prematurely collapsing then into each other.

I have also argued that the history of the past sixty years demands great scepticism towards teleological notions of history or class consciousness or any a priori notions of how class identity might be articulated. It is also necessary to abandon notions of the working class as it represented itself, and was represented by others, in the past especially ideas that associate class mainly with manual and industrial work. So despite the enduring nature of class inequality and the continuing salience of class, it is impossible to treat class as a master category and because of this class requires extensive theoretical and empirical investigation in any given socio-historical context to arrive at a genuine understanding of how class works.

Chapter 4

The eternal return? Class, learning and educational inequality

> I turn my eyes to the schools and universities of Europe
> And there behold the Loom of Locke whose Woof rages dire,
> Wash'd by the Water-wheels of Newton, black the cloth
> In heavy wreaths folds over every nation; cruel works
> Of many Wheels I view, wheel without wheel, with cogs tyrannic
> Moving by compulsion each other, not as those in Eden, which,
> Wheel within wheel, in freedom revolve in harmony and peace.
> (William Blake)

> The meritocratic ideal of equality of opportunity [..] would have us believe that
> by virtue of getting an education a working class child becomes something else;
> that you cannot be working class and at the same time educated and civilised.
> (Annette Kuhn)

Introduction

This chapter will examine the relationship between class, learning and education. As Stephen Ball (Apple, Ball & Gandin, 2000) points out social inequality has been one the key concerns of modern educational theory and for many years inequality in the sociology of education was almost exclusively discussed and theorised in relation to class inequality. As a result, there is a huge amount of literature available which is potentially germane to this research project. Building on the analysis of class outlined in the last chapter this part of the thesis will examine a small portion of the work examining class, learning and education either because it is directly relevant of the empirical findings or helps to extend and explore the implications of the analysis of class offered in the previous chapter in relation to education. In particular one of the major concerns of this chapter is to further develop a theoretical framework which is capable of linking large scale socio-historical analysis to the making of modern biographies. The aim is to outline how everyday experience, and especially how the normative and affective nature of contemporary working class experience in education, is related to broader class processes

The first section of the chapter outlines a critical theory of learning linked to reflexivity and identity. This will be followed by a very brief historical account of the development of the modern education system in relation to the working class. It will argue that the formation of this system in Ireland, Britain and beyond was largely steered by elites concerned with social regulation and the imperatives of economic development but that the expansion of the system

also reflected the growing power of the organised working class and the desire and demand for education for non-elite purposes (Williams, 1961).

The second half of the chapter will cover a familiar set of arguments within educational scholarship; it explores whether the recent expansion of the educational system, especially at tertiary level, has created new opportunities for working class students. It will review the evidence in relation to two of the most influential contemporary approaches to inequality in education-the human capital approach and neo-Weberian studies of social mobility. It will then look at the various frameworks used for explaining educational inequality and contemporary educational experience. This will involve a critical account of the ideas of John Goldthorpe, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, Pierre Bourdieu and Paulo Freire. This review will provide the opportunity to lay the conceptual basis for the theory of education used throughout the rest of the thesis. As part of this process these ideas will be interrogated and I will outline what I think remains valuable in this work. This body of work is however in some respects lacking, or at least incomplete, and in the light of my empirical research and recent history the final section of the chapter will look at some of the other key concepts used to make sense of the main themes in the interview data- based on a reading of Diane Reay and Beverley Skeggs' feminist interpretation of Bourdieu.

Basic premises of a critical theory of learning: Practical activity and reflexive change
The conceptual framework of the thesis is underpinned by a materialist paradigm. Within this critical tradition there is a fascinating line of cultural investigation-which stretches from the work of Marx (1964, 1990), through to Vygotsky (1962, 1978), Gramsci (1971) and Bourdieu (1990) right up to contemporary theorists such as Yrjo Engestrom (1987)- and has explored the role of learning in human society. Learning, they argue, needs to be understood as a fundamental human activity which is central to both social reproduction and human creativity.

Within this body of work the key tenet is that all human activity is "based on material production, mediated by technical and psychological tools as well as by other human beings" (Engestorm, 1987, p. 48). From this perspective, on the most basic level learning, is best conceived as a fundamental human capacity used for adaptation, change and self-monitoring in the collective and collaborative organisation of social activity (Engestrom, 1987; Gramsci,

1971; Luria 1976[40]; Reich, 1972; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). Learning thus has to be understood as a historically evolving capacity that is basic to human survival which is linked to practical activity and is thus to a large extent *embedded in the division of labour*.

Of course the nature of learning has altered over time and formal learning has become an activity with its own structures and objects which allow us to maintain, adapt and transform culture in conscious and complex ways (Engestrom, 1987). In this sense, learning is both the basis of much of everyday activity but also becomes a distinct form of activity in and of itself in human culture. Organised and self-conscious learning was enhanced and transformed in the pre-modern period through a series of cultural and technological revolutions. In particular, the development of the alphabet, writing, reading and methods for disseminating text fundamentally changed the nature of representation, memory and the role of learning in society (Goody & Watt, 1968; Ong, 1967). Above all what I want to highlight here is that the nature of human learning has altered through history and has become an increasingly *differentiated* set of activities which is mediated through a larger and larger body of symbolic tools.

There are many ways we can frame this differentiation of learning and I will later suggest how I think this can be best described in the light of the empirical data gathered for this research project. One of the most intriguing formulations of this idea has come from Gregory Bateson (2000) who maintained that the most useful ways of differentiating between types of learning is the degree and extent to which a given form of learning is reflexive. He identifies five types of learning (0, I, II, III, IV) each of which is defined by its level of complexity and reflexivity. The simplest form (0) is a basic stimulus and response model of learning and the highest (Learning IV) is a perhaps wholly ideal type of learning, which completely transcends the paradigms within which learning happens. If we approach Bateson's proposal historically and sociologically we need to examine how reflexive learning, linked to symbolic practices and new technologies, becomes a source of power for maintaining and transforming human culture. The logic of this position is that in many ways our capacity to recursively adapt human culture has changed and as might be expected there has been considerable debate on what this means. For example the radical Greek philosopher Castoriadis has argued that

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40 The way learning is conceived in Luria is generally useful but the specific conclusions he makes about 'primitive' cultures are highly questionable.

increased reflexivity in learning has developed a "capacity for internal contestation" in human culture which allows us to question dogmas and ultimately to reimagine the social world (1987, p. 42). While others within the critical tradition are more sceptical of such claims about the power of reflexivity and describe learning mainly in terms of its adaptive social function (Bourdieu, 1990).

In terms of the general arguments that will be pursued throughout the thesis, I want to highlight two things at this juncture. Learning, in the first instance, is envisaged as a fundamental human capacity and activity used in collective and collaborative processes which has developed in highly differentiated ways and is, especially in highly reflexive forms, a source of social power. The second issue is that, I think, one of the main tasks of critical, educational research is to trace how these *collective* forms of learning are related to individual experiences of learning and notions of identity. This is a massively important issue and will be given extensive attention in later chapters, but I will restrict myself to a couple of brief preliminary remarks for the time being by drawing on the work of Lev Vygotsky (1962, 1978). Vygotsky maintained that learning, by its very nature, is collective, cultural and historical and once this is understood we can see *socialisation and individualisation* as interlinked processes which occurs through intersubjective interaction which depends upon language, context and the range of symbolic tools at one's disposal. Therefore, according to Vygotsky (1962, 1978), the formation of individuals, and all meaningful learning, occurs through a movement from the cultural resources to individual acquisition (in his terms from the interpsychological plane to the intrapsychological plane). We can also then posit that learning is central to the way we develop a sense of personal identity which is intersubjectively formed through interaction and cultural mediation (Honneth, 1995a; Vygotsky, 1978). Through time this creates a sense of "persistent sameness within oneself (selfsameness) and persistent sharing of some essential character with others" (Erikson, 1980, p. 109). From this perspective the question becomes how exactly individuals, through collaboration and intersubjective experience, use culture to make themselves and to make, and remake, identity and aspects of their lifeworld through learning.

If one accepts this critical theory of learning, and the ontological claims it is based upon, there are a number of important implications for how formal education might be understood. The first obvious conclusion is that one of the main challenges for a critical theory of

education is to conceptualise the *interconnection* between everyday learning activities and institutional education. The second is that learning is always, in some sense, both subjective and collective and the interesting question is how education allows us to imagine and sets boundaries on this process. To frame this in terms which are directly relevant to the empirical research, the question is how do we go about maintain and extend our sense of who we are through our experience within social structures mediated through cultural tools and institutions which form the basis for our internal conversations? This evidently involves a rejection of the sort of vision of the social world given to us by thinkers such as Hobbes (1996) and Freud (1963) who describe the social world as consisting of atomised individuals confronting an unrelentingly hostile world. Instead, it begins with the social and the educational question 'how do specific practices and institutions restrict or allow for creative forms of collaboration and self-making?'

More needs to be said though about the social processes that set boundaries and limits on learning, education and the intersubjective formation of self. Following on from the review of class in the last chapter we can say that the structuring of social space-based on the commodification and the division of labour and the unequal division of material and symbolic resources-are very powerful determinants on learning processes inside and outside formal educational institutions (Bourdieu, 1984; Engestrom, 1987; Sawchuck, 2003; Willis, 1977). As we have seen Marx (1990) believed control over one's own role in the labour process, as a waged worker, is very limited, and the value assigned to one productive capacity is primarily determined by systemic imperatives rather than human needs or moral concerns. In other words, how we learn to be and our sense of time, space and conception value are shaped by the commodification of labour. Furthermore, as Adam Smith (1776) pointed out, although the capitalist division of labour enhanced human productive capacity in an unprecedented way this also created new forms of unrewarding, tedious, dangerous and intellectually stunting work. Marx (1845) radicalised Smith's insight and in his early manuscripts explicitly links human emancipation to a complete reorganisation of the division of labour. His argument is quite simple; when creative productive activity-which includes both work and learning-is stifled through everyday routines there is a human cost. Marx also maintained that in a more just society distinctions between work and learning would be less strictly demarcated and all human activity would be orientated towards greater levels of autonomy and self-direction. The research suggests that Marx, Smith and more recent

thinkers (Sen, 1999, 2009) are correct to highlight the normative and political significance of the division of labour which sets powerful structural limits of what we learn to be, and what we can become.

My contention here is that the organisation of learning, both formally and informally, will inevitably reflect the limits and possibilities of a capitalist division of labour and social relations shaping society as a whole. The problem is that for some Marxists and other sociologists of social reproduction this becomes the *only* relevant point of concern. As Engestrom notes "the real contradiction is not of one dimensional repression and alienation", "there are competing forces within capitalist labor activity-positive as well as negative" (1987, p. 71) and I believe an exploration of these contradictions should be fundamental to any critical analysis of education. In the broadest terms this means acknowledging that the commodity system and the modern division of labour is the basis for a great deal of social inequality and unaccountable hierarchies but modern capitalism has also created certain freedoms and this needs to be borne in mind when tracing the connection between social structures and individual experience. The contradictions and possibilities that exist within everyday life are easy to overlook if parsed, and reparsed, solely on a structural and abstract level of analysis. Besides which I would maintain there is always space for agency in which commodities and practices are reassigned value through cultural practices which does not fully operate according to the logic of accumulation (Certeau, 1984; Graeber, 2010; Lefebvre, 1991b; Steedman, 2009; Willis, 1999).

To summarise-I see learning as a fundamental human activity necessary for social, cultural and economic reproduction and human creativity which has become increasingly differentiated over history. In this analysis learning is most usefully conceptualised, in the most basic sense, as a capacity for enacting, monitoring and altering practices and collective activity embedded in the division of labour. Learning has also become a fundamental human activity in its own right and learning and education has taken on a specific character under capitalism. This is necessarily characterised by contradictions of class: most notably between the use value and exchange value of commodities, between stimulating and stunting work, between individual learning and collective learning, between subordination and self-management, between lived experience and formal knowledge and ultimately between human possibility and the reality of domination, alienation and exploitation. Exploring how these

various learning processes-biographical, institutional and social- which operate on different tempos and scales intersect and modify each other can only be done through empirical investigation of a specific context.

Class and the historical formation of the modern educational system

To arrive at this specific context these preliminary remarks need to be historically contextualised and elaborated upon in two ways; first we need a clearer account of how education as a system is related to both a differentiated theory of learning and class formation processes and, second we need to pin down the specific relationship between learning, Higher Education, biography and social class. The latter concern will take up a large part of this and the following chapters so before we turn to this topic I want to sketch out some aspects of the historical emergence of the modern education system.

If one accepts the arguments about learning, social relations, the nature of the commodity form and the division of labour in capitalism there is no way that the emergence of the modern education system could be anything but classed. This is a very broad, system level description but the role of class inequality can be discerned on a much more immediate level –the exercise of direct political power over the institutions, practices and values of education. In her comparative study of the origins of the modern educational system Margaret Archer notes dominant classes "virtually monopolised educational ownership [and this] meant that [..] education was [..] firmly linked to only one part of the total social structure" (1979, p. 59)[41] I think this is reflected very clearly in elite discourses about what sort of education the working class 'deserved'. Some observers came to the conclusion that educating the working class would serve, at best, to distract them from their proper role in society or, worse still,

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41 I am interested here in succinctly summarising broad and complex developments over long periods of time. Clearly an overview like this involves a great deal of simplification and the formation of modern educational sytem was not a linear or unified process but was subject to the arrangement of varying forces, interests and alliances in different national contexts and in which varying dominant fractions held sway (Archer, 1979, 1982; Bourdieu, 1971; Gramsci, 1971). It should also be noted that historically educational elites have not always been identical to the property owning elites (Archer, 1979).

Most of the material used for this sketch is British and there are difficulties in applying this in an Irish context even though Ireland was subject to British law and was often the site of British educational experiment in both policy and provision in the formative period under discussion (Coolohan, 1981). The specificity of class in Ireland, both generally, and in relation to education, will be examined in the next chapter.

invite dissatisfaction and insubordination. For example in *The Fable of the Bees* Mandeville[42] opines (cited in Thompson, 1993, p. 3)

> You can make the Society Happy and People easy under the meanest Circumstances, it is requisite the great numbers of them should be Ignorant as well as Poor. Knowledge both enlarges and multiplies our desires. The Welfare and Felicity therefore of every state and kingdom requires that the Knowledge of the Working Poor should be confin'd within the Verge of their Occupations and never extended (as to things visible) beyond what relates to the Calling. The more a Shepherd, a Plowman or any other peasant knows of the world, and things that are foreign to his Labour or Employment, the less fit he'll be to go through the Fatigues and Hardships of it with Cheerfulness and Content.

Arguably the idea that working class education should be more or less contained 'within the verge of occupations' and ordinary people's desires should limited to what is immediately 'pragmatic' is still in circulation but the specific arguments Mandeville made in favour of this position now sound remarkably archaic. Instead, over the course of the nineteenth century a consensus emerged amongst the elite in Europe and America that some degree of education for the working class was important for society as a whole (see for example Arnold, 1960; Smith, 1776).

The cultural critic Raymond Williams (1961) has convincingly argued that the development of the modern formal education system was part of a more general reorganisation of society as the elite attempted to manage and direct rapid economic and social change. As part of this process, the expansion of the education system necessitated the development of new types of private and public organisation and practices and in time this required extensive intervention from the state through education policy. So as Ball (2008) notes educational policies in the nineteenth century had two main objectives "the need to manage the new urban working classes and to accommodate the social political aspirations of the new middle classes" (p 56). The type of basic education provided for the working class in the nineteenth century reflects this and was often moralising in both form and content and was envisaged as an effective method of preventing social disturbance and ensuring the 'lower orders' became civilised (Goldstrom, 1972; Skeggs, 2004; Tett, 2002). Outside of basic instruction and moral

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42 Mandeville has been used to illustrate a more general point. He is simply one of many. There is a hallowed and august tradition of patrician comment on the need to limit the education of the poor and the working class which runs from Plato to Locke through to T.S. Eliot. See Carey (1992), Ranciere (2004) and Macpherson (1962) .

education, vocational training, of varying degrees of breadth, was deemed the most appropriate form of education for the working class (Williams, 1961). This of course is connected to changes in the economy and ever growing need for technical expertise of and knowledge specialisation in the nineteenth and twentieth century but relied nonetheless on an ancient division between hand and mind (Dewey, 1916; Gramsci, 1971; Williams, 1961).

Over the past two hundred years the this has changed a great deal (Archer, 1979, 1982) but from a historical perspective there can be little doubt that the burgeoning middle class and the upper class managed to shape the new 'mass' educational system according to their own needs, interests and values and arguably this can be still discerned in the institutional systems, practices and main philosophies which inform education today. However, noting this should not lead one to be overly simplistic about this historical process; as I have mentioned already the formation of the modern education system is a complicated story in which classes, and class fractions, collaborated and struggled against each other to articulate a vision of culture and society using a wide variety of registers and rationales. As a consequence elite discussions of working class education have often been a strange concoction of promises and threats often linked to the idea of redemption-be that Christian salvation or the liberal secular idea of peaceful social integration (Skeggs, 1997; Tett, 2002).

This history has obvious ramifications for how we might chose to regard traditional pedagogies, mainstream curricula and institutional cultures and many radical critics have argued that the educational system is permeated by this history (Apple, 1982; Tett, 2002; Williams, 1961). What is certainly beyond dispute is that the formal educational system has canalised our capacity for learning and one of the most important aspect of this process has been that it has legitimated and established certain types of knowledge and approaches to learning, often on a classed basis, in a formalised hierarchy (Engestrom, 1987). This institutionally canalised learning necessarily stands in relation to, and often in conflict and tension with, emergent forms of non-institutional learning within the broader culture most notably linked to the community and the workplace (Gramsci, 1971; Illeris, 2007; Knowles, 1970; Sawchuk, 2003; Tough, 1967).

Working class education, democracy and the desire to learn
However, a historical account of class and education that only stresses the regulatory, defensive and elite driven nature of the formation of modern educational institutions is both

historically incomplete and theoretically limiting[43]. The cultural politics of early working class movements was very briefly described in the previous chapter and one of the most notable aspects of this working class political culture is the importance that was given to learning and education. This is evident in the writings of the first two generations of thinkers of the socialist movement such as Fourier, Owen, Proudhon, Marx and Bakunin and in general histories of the workers movement and education (Avrich, 1980; Harrison, 1961; Johnson, 1982; Martin, Shaw & Crowther, 1999; Mason, 2007; Ranciere, 1989; Silver, 1975; Venturi, 1960; Rose, 2001; Thompson, 1980). As a consequence of this the organised working class created numerous educational spaces outside of the formal system including autonomous universities, institutes, libraries, reading groups and political education circles. This was an integral part of radical history in both the nineteenth and the twentieth century and these educational 'proletarian public spheres'[44], were one of the reasons a collective notion of working class identity became so widespread. It is worth noting just how extensive this effort was-for example in the 1880s in the UK there were more co-operative libraries than public libraries (Rose, 2001). It also spanned a large portion of the world and this shadow educational system was a vast, if discontinuous and only partially visible, network which included for example autonomous universities in Paris and Alexandria and reading groups in Russian steel factories and US logging camps.

The growing power of working class social movements and their increasing social integration meant that the focus gradually shifted and there was a move away from autonomous educational experiments and increasingly forceful and effective demands for greater access to formal education (Johnson, 1982; Rose, 2001). For example the demand for 'schooling for citizenship' in the US and the demand for wider access to British universities at the turn of the twentieth century follows this pattern (Johnson, 1982; Brint & Karabel, 1989). Rose (2001) has argued that the institutionalisation of working class education meant the collective, mutual forms of learning that characterised earlier educational experiments and initiatives were slowly replaced by more individualised and traditional practices.

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43 For example Foucault (1977) and Skeggs (2004) despite offering stimulating critical analyses of the regulatory functions of education fall into a form of critique, which I think exaggerates the extent and reach of dominant power. This will be addressed below in more detail in relation to Skeggs below.

44 The term is Negt and Kluge's (1993)

This history reminds us that the demand for social equality has never simply about the distribution of wealth but also, as Ranciere (1989) documents, has been about access to culture and obtaining resources for dignity and intellectual stimulation. Thus it is also worth bearing in mind, as Ranciere (1989) and Rose (2001) have argued, in different ways, this was never simply about collective demands but also pleasure, social mobility and access to valued modes of self-development which included a 'desire for singularity'[45] and the practice of solidarity. The point I want to underscore here is these autonomous experiments and the demand for increased access had an impact, but certainly *not* a decisive influence, on the formation of the modern education system (for example the effect radical adult education had on the development of university extra mural courses see Rose (2001) and Williams (1989). More importantly, and this brings us back to one of the arguments of the last chapter, I think it is important to remember that the demand for educational equality was a part of more general claim for equality through access to universal social goods (Ball, 2008). In this regard one of the great achievements of the workers movement in relation is that by successfully articulating a set of demands and desires within the popular classes for education it helped to foster a more democratic conception of what *society as a whole* should be (Carnoy & Levin, 1985; Chomsky, 2004; Williams, 1961; see also Dewey, 1916 which is interested in the same phenomenon but offers a relatively undeveloped analysis of class divisions)

Why bring this up here? The working class demand and desire for education is often forgotten or left to one side in many critical theories of education which describe working class participation in education as an unleavened tale of misadventure and difficulty (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). But the empirical data and many other studies suggest that educational experience is not usefully conceptualised solely in terms of what has been imposed by elites (Apple, 1986; Freire, 1972; Giroux, 1983). Grasping the ambivalent and complex relationship between class and education today means that we need to pay at least some attention to the complex interplay of formal institutions and informal and semi-formal initiatives within civil society through history. What I think this history demonstrates is that grassroots solidarity, the desire for singularity and a hunger for education have all been an enduring aspects of working class learning lives.

45The phrase is Rose's (2001). It is difficult to say just how 'representative' this history of autodidacts and radical education is but nonetheless one cannot gainsay that it had an important impact on education and society.

Class and 'mass' education: The enduring problem of inequality

The terms of reference are now very different and the expansion of educational provision, which has been particularly rapid over the past sixty years, has radically altered working class expectations of education. Universal educational provision became a key feature of modern western societies and this process gathered momentum after the Second World War and in 1948 the UN enshrined education as a fundamental human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Free compulsory education has now become the norm at both primary and secondary level in all of the wealthiest countries in the world (OECD, 2001, 2011; UNESCO, 2000). Education policy is now an integral part of social and economic planning and over ninety per cent of educational spending in developed countries comes from the state (Attewell & Newman, 2010- citing 2008 OECD figures). As a consequence the average length of time spent in school has also steadily increased (Goldthorpe, 1996; OECD, 2001, 2011).

Increasing numbers of people are also choosing to remain within non-compulsory education in schools and third level institutions. According to the OECD in 2004 there were a hundred and thirty two million students enrolled in tertiary education worldwide which means the numbers have nearly doubled since 1991 when the figure stood at sixty eight million (Santiago, Tremblay, Basri & Arnal, 2008). This growth in tertiary education is particularly marked in Europe where tertiary students accounted for 15.7 per cent in 1980 and 23.4 per cent in 2005 of the total student body (figures cited in Vlasceanu, 2010 also based on OECD figures). The transformation of tertiary educational systems across the world, especially in the global north, from an 'elite' set of institutions to a putatively 'mass' system has been the focus of educational scholarship for several decades (Trow, 1973) and there is now an enormous amount of research dealing with the changing nature of higher education and the causes, effects, and future direction of non-compulsory education globally (see Attewell & Newman, 2010 for a recent overview).

This expansion of the educational system is related to demographic, social, political, technological and economic changes and I think the German educational sociologist Peter Alheit is right to present this as the most recent chapter in the longer story of class and

education. Alheit (2005b, p. 391) [46]describes the expansion as part of historical compromise which was based on

> a somewhat unusual alliance between social-democratic reformism and capital's drive to modernise both itself and society. What one side envisaged as an emancipatory opportunity for personal growth, especially for the working classes, was seen by the other side as the benefits of having the wide-ranging skills that were considered essential to remain competitive.

However, the idea that recent educational history is the product of a class compromise is certainly not the most common explanation for the development of mass education. Far more commonly, a bluff and hardy Whiggish optimism is preferred to class history. The notion which is most often found in mainstream global and national education policy is that educational expansion will foster social inclusion (CEC, 2000, 2001; OECD, 2008). It is maintained by these policy analysts that widening access to education promotes economic growth and offers a sound basis for a functioning meritocracy. This idea unifies a whole range of otherwise diverse approaches to education in much mainstream policy and scholarship- be they functionalist, liberal or neoliberal- which are all underpinned by the idea that non-conflictual and progressive social change can be facilitated through the linked phenomena of economic growth and educational expansion. In contemporary debates one of the most widely employed perspectives of this sort is offered by human capital theory (Becker, 1993). A pivotal claim made by advocates of human capital theory such as Gary Becker is that investment in education and training in individuals will yield gains in social cohesion by adding to the 'stock' of human capital. Becker (2007) holds that

> Apparently, the opportunities provided by a modern economy, along with extensive government and charitable support of education, enable the majority of those who come from lower-income backgrounds to do reasonably well in the labor market. The same opportunities that foster upward mobility for the poor create an equal amount of downward mobility for those higher up on the income ladder.

Becker sees education in terms of supply and demand and by increasing the supply of education we can come, at some point, to equilibrium. In this analysis class inequality is incidental rather than structural. This point of view is a common one and is perfectly credible, as are the analyses in the OECD and EU reports cited above, if one finds one or another theory of 'liberal modernisation' compelling. The British sociologist John Goldthorpe has

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46 Alheit was discussing adult education but the analysis can be applied to the educational system as a whole.

noted in a review of models of educational expansion and inequality that a key premise of such theories is that the 'logic' of modernisation would undermine class inequality so that "class formation gives way to class decomposition as mobility between classes increases and class-linked inequalities decline" (Goldthorpe, 1996, p. 482).

If this was true class- historically one of the most enduring forms of social division- would be less and less relevant both in society and education but liberal modernisation theory faces some real explanatory difficulties in the face of the empirical evidence. Large-scale international social mobility studies have repeatedly highlighted the persistence of class inequality (Breen & Rottman, 1995; Breen, 2004; Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992)[47] and in fact income and wealth inequality has increased in most of the developed world (Dumenil & Levy, 2004; Harvey, 2005; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Goldthorpe has argued that "the general withering away of class exclusion is [..] a historical outcome, that often scheduled, is yet to be observed" (1996, p. 483). Perhaps somewhat more surprisingly Goldthorpe goes on to argue that *educational inequality* has not substantially altered by the expansion of the system. On this basis Goldthorpe (1996, p 487) has made the case that

> Within national populations, the average level of educational attainment has thus risen substantially. However, empirical research across a wide range of societies has recurrently led to the finding that, once all effects of expansion *per se* are properly allowed for, class differentials in educational attainment have changed rather little across successive birth cohorts, from those of the early decades of the century onwards. More specifically, if one envisages educational careers as comprising a series of transitions, or 'branching points', then, as these successively arise, children of less advantaged class origins have remained, to much the same extent, more likely than children of more advantaged origins to leave the educational system rather than to continue in it; or, if they do continue, to follow courses that, through the kinds of qualification to which they lead, reduce their chances of continuing further.

Goldthorpe is deeply sceptical about the claims about educational levelling through expansion and the passage above also highlights one other issue which is very important in terms of framing the present research project. Goldthorpe believes that tertiary expansion *has* nevertheless changed the nature of 'educational careers'. I suspect this is large part of the reason that debates about class and equality in education, which twenty years ago were overwhelmingly focused on second level education, are increasingly concerned with studying

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47 Social mobility scholars argue that there is a relatively high level of social fluidity within developed societies but that class *structures* have remained stable.

what is occurring in non-compulsory and higher education (Attewell & Newman, 2010). If Goldthorpe is correct, and I think he is, that class and educational inequality has to be defined in relative terms rather than a numbers game. As an aside I would say this augments the need for longitudinal and biographical research by egalitarians capable of tracing education over the life course.

Similar findings to Goldthorpe were made in a thirteen country comparative study of educational participation and equality based on large scale, quantitative research (Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993). This international research group discovered strong patterns of intergenerational class inequality in education in ten of the thirteen countries and decreasing inequality in only two (Sweden and the Netherlands). The persistence of inequality has led these and other researchers of stratification and social mobility such as Raftery and Hout (1993) to advance the proposition that modern educational systems are characterised by a tendency to *maintain inequality* (the clunkily titled 'maximally maintained inequality' thesis). Other commentators have gone further and suggest that highly unequal competition for education may be copper-fastening and even generating inequality (Aronowitz, 2000; Attewell & Newman, 2010).

This international phenomenon of expansion *with* persistent inequality is, I would maintain, absolutely essential to understanding contemporary working class experience in HE. Once again this has to be seen it in its full complexity as there is also some evidence of changes in the morphology of class inequality (largely because the numbers of wealthy attending universities and colleges has steadily increased and in some countries elite social class participation has reached the point of 'saturation'). One recent study of participation and inequality in fifteen countries has led to a reformulation of the 'maximally maintained inequality' thesis and the authors argue that expansion has begun to have some positive impact on inequality (Shavit, Arum, Gamoran & Menchaem, 2007). This is to be welcomed but attention to 'branching points' and final destinations in educational careers; is the key to puzzling this out; the issue is no longer solely about access but rather access to what? I think this new situation requires a double focus- on the absolute participation rates of different social classes but also an awareness of which social groups dominate prestigious institutions, courses and tend to accrue the most highly valued credentials. Stat0ist0ically the overwhelming evidence is that there is now persistent inequality in participation rates *as well*

as in 'educational careers' and destinations. Attewell and Newman (2010) argue "the elaborated sequence [has] become: exclusion, saturation, expanded access via institutional differentiation, inclusion primarily through diversion to lower status institutions, [and] movement among the elite to yet higher levels of qualification" (p. 17).[48] The international tendency towards differentiation and diversification within HE adds another layer to the access and widening participation debates especially in terms of the relative value of credentials in terms of status and economic returns (Aronowitz, 2000) and this has obviously informed the choice of a variety of case study institutions for this research. This will be discussed at length in Chapter Seven.

To conclude to acknowledge the persistent nature of class inequality in education does not mean that HEIs have not been transformed [49] and it certainly does not mean that the composition of the students body is the same as it was a generation ago. What we need to be cognisant of here is that a wide range of data show that there are deeply embedded structural patterns of class inequality in society and education which economic growth or institutional expansion do not overcome through 'social evolution' or modernisation.

The limits of stratification theory in explaining inequality

Quantifying and measuring inequality is now commonplace in all economically developed societies and this work is invaluable in charting large scale patterns of change and continuity in the labour market and education. As we have seen this data contradicts the claims made by human capital theorists and others commentators about the end of class inequality. If one rejects arguments about the inevitability or the necessity of inequality, as I do, then the task is to explain the mechanisms which underpin inequality with the view to identifying strategies for overcoming this state of affairs. This is where the limits of most of the material discussed above becomes apparent because, despite the impressive scope and rigour of the work done by Goldthorpe, Hout, and others in measuring inequality, their explanation for the causes of inequality are I think far less compelling[50].

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[48] See Fleming, Finnegan, Loxley & Kenny (2010).

[49] Nor does it mean that the nature of inequality has not been altered in important ways -for instance the evidence from these large scale studies is that the level of gender inequality in education in many states has lessened quite dramatically.

50 See Goldthorpe (1996) for a riposte, based on the work of Boudon, to these sort of criticisms.

This is mainly because stratification theorists use a version of rational actor theory, however weakly defined, to theorise social action (Breen & Whelan, 1996; Goldthorpe, 1996). In this model class differentials are best explained as the cumulative effect of patterns of individual decision making based on the calculation of risks and opportunities. This posits the idea that working class students make a sequence of choices based on their social position and because participating in education is 'riskier' for such students, in terms of likely opportunities and costs, they are less inclined to continue in education or to be encouraged by their family to do so (Goldthorpe, 1996). On the other hand those who already enjoy social advantages seek to retain them through opportunity hoarding which happens as a result of the cumulative effect of a series of individual cost/benefit choices (this is of course a version of the Weberian theory of social closure in the market).

This is not entirely wrong but it is reductive. Goldthorpe-and all the other thinkers in this tradition like Breen or Hout- treat culture as a neutral variable or at least as irrelevant or completely subordinate to economic forces. But culture is poorly understood as just the container for the actions of homo economicus. Cultural life is not epiphenomenal in social relations. The limits of taking such an approach to the question of structure and agency are twofold and play out on two very different levels of explanation- the phenomenological and the macrosociological - and both are significant for the present research. During the data gathering there was very little evidence of the sort of decision making processes that Goldthorpe describes (1996). His 'non-cultural' explanation has little to say about the normative and affective dimensions of class experience or how people make decisions in light of their own concerns and attachments; but this is precisely how students described their own lives and their hopes for themselves and their families and this is also how they explained the meaning, and their response, to class inequality. Besides which the way risk was conceptualised by the interviewees was also more complex and culturally mediated than rational actor theory allows for. The research strongly suggests that class experience is affective, embodied and relational rather than rational, individual and based on the calculation of risk and opportunity and I believe Goldthorpe's position lacks plausibility, and to an extent trivialises, how people actually make decisions about their lives.

Moreover, a theory based on a rational actor model cannot readily grasp some of the structured, historically contingent features of class relations which do not operate solely at the level of individual decision making. Goldthorpe's approach rejects, as a matter of

methodological 'purity', the arguments made by Marx and other critical realists about the stratified and structured nature of the social world. Similarly, the conception of history as a dialectical space of structured events *and* immanent but unrealised possibilities is impossible using rational actor theory. Also Goldthorpe (1996; Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992; Goldthorpe & McKnight, 2004) is overwhelmingly concerned with the differences between the middle class and working class and ignores the role of elites because this group is 'statistically negligible' and cannot be included in large datasets.

One might be tempted to read this simply as a clash of paradigms which cannot be resolved in a meaningful way but I can point in realist terms to how this approach radically truncates what Goldthorpe can say about class. Amongst other things this means that Goldthorpe, and other stratification theorists, cannot begin to name or address the implications of the political and discursive shift in support of market orientated educational provision in national and international policy over the past two decades (Ball, 2007; Finnegan, 2008). In practical terms 'marketisation' has taken a range of forms; most notably the advocacy of greater private sector provision of education, through the type of voucher schemes proposed by neoliberal thinkers such as Milton Friedman (1982), the setting up of private public partnerships of various sorts and/or the securing of private sector funding and services for public education (Ball, 2007; Collini, 2012)[51]. Perhaps most importantly of all this this has led to the widespread use of marketised modes of objective setting and evaluation within education at all levels and led to the growth of a 'new managerialism'. Ball has concluded, in one of the most closely researched arguments about this phenomenon, that "the means/end logic of education for economic competitiveness is transforming what were complex, interpersonal processes of teaching, learning and research into a set of standardised and measurable products" (2007, p, 186). I think without a theory of the commodity or elite power these changes are barely comprehensible.

To summarise I think stratification theorists have done invaluable work in highlighting the ongoing nature of class inequality but, for the reasons outlined above, this approach is methodologically and theoretically incapable of giving a full account of why class matters, how it is experienced biographically or why class divisions in society and education are

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51 Marketisation in education has meant that many Higher Education institutions and new private colleges, especially non-elite colleges have a clear vested interest in expansion but private fees create another class barrier for the least well off sections of the working class. See Shavit, Arum, Gamoran &Menchaem (2007) and Ball (2007) for differing analyses of this issue.

deepening. For these reasons I would concur with Reay who has argued "an exploration of social class through the mechanism of a rigid theoretical framework grounded in occupational categorisation has ceased to tell a fraction of the story of social class" (1998a, p. 22).

Analysing working class experience and persistent inequality: Assessing the legacy of the reproduction and resistance debate

The relationship between education and social class inequality has been studied intensively in a wide range of national and institutional contexts (for example Althusser, 2008; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Gambetta, 1987; Halsey, Heath & Ridge, 1980; Jackson & Marsden, 1962; Karabel & Hasley, 1977; Livingstone, 1983; Young, 1971 etc.). One of the most prominent, and theoretically rich, strands within this broad field of research has explicitly sought to challenge deficit models of working class 'underachievement' and to explain persistent inequalities in education through various models of 'social reproduction' (Bernstein, 1960, 1971a; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Young, 1971). These writers believe inequality is one of the functions of the educational system rather than an inadvertent by-product of an otherwise largely meritocratic system and according to these authors, working class 'failure' is not so much grit in the cogs but the very oil which makes the machine run in the first place. Further insight into why the educational system continues to be characterised by sharp class inequalities came in a number of influential studies produced by quite a diverse group of scholars who were concerned with the interplay of social reproduction and student resistance and the implications this might have for pedagogy (for example Apple, 1982, 1986; Arnot and Whitty, 1982; Freire, 1972; hooks, 1994; Giroux, 1983; Livingstone, 1983; Lynch, 1989; McLaren, 1998; Shor, 1987; Willis, 1977 etc.).

The reproduction and resistance debate in education was part of a more general discussion in political and social theory in the 1970s and 1980s about the limits of social democracy, the capitalist state, culture and economy and the importance of new social movements for thinking through the claims of Marxism and the issue of inequality. The main lines of investigation within debate are very well known and the merits and limitations of the various positions within it have been discussed at length and with a good deal of acuity (Arnot & Whitty, 1982; Giroux, 1983; Lynch, 1989). Therefore there is no need to rake over well researched and familiar points here and I think the salient question is whether any of this

research is useful either in understanding the persistence of inequality or in conceptualising and exploring working class experience in contemporary education.

Overall, I think despite the fact that a large portion of this literature is primarily concerned with schooling and is the product of a different political conjuncture it does offer some valuable conceptual resources for this study. I will examine three of the most important interventions in this debate and outline how each of these approaches understands the persistence of class inequality and describes working class experience within education. I will look at; the work of Bowles and Gintis (1976) who examine education in relation to the labour process and the dynamics of capitalism; Bourdieu who approaches class and education through a critique of the institutional organisation of knowledge and a critique of symbolic violence; and Freire who is concerned above all with the issue of emancipatory pedagogy and subaltern agency. The reader will recognise that political economy, the politics of dominant culture and positive modes of working class agency were some of the main themes of the last chapter and these thinkers have been chosen to complement and extend the earlier discussion on these issues. It will also add another layer to another vital topic within the research-which was discussed in the methodology chapter- how I envisage the role of research and theory in addressing class inequality.

Bowles and Gintis' Marxist 'correspondence theory'

Bowles and Gintis (1976) analysis of the US educational system-*Schooling in Capitalist America* proved to be one of the defining texts in educational theory in the 1970s and 1980s (Cole, Bowles & Gintis, 1988). In this book Bowles and Gintis argue that the education is an "integral element in the reproduction of the prevailing class structure of society" (1976, p. 126) and the organisation of the school is *directly* shaped by the dominant logic of capital which is defined by Bowles and Gintis as the drive to accumulate profit and to subordinate and manage human labour. School stands in the long shadow of work and according to Bowles and Gintis there is a discernible 'correspondence principle' between educational social relations and the social relations of production. This theory imagines power functioning in educational institutions on two distinct levels which serve as both a sorting mechanism for the economy and a cultural space in which hierarchies of command and control and the experience of performing alienated work within a deeply unequal division of labour are normalised. Bowles and Gintis argue that the correspondence principle is observable across the whole education system and the expansion of US higher education in

the post-war period is, they argue, largely due to the intensification of the logic of capitalism. Bowles and Gintis (1976; see also Bowles, 1974) contend capital has fully co-opted HE institutions and are now necessary for the social reproduction of labour power and the maintenance of class divisions; as they memorably put it the university has gone from being an 'ivory tower to a service station'.

According to Bowles and Gintis the expansion of education reflects the changing occupational structure and the technical division of labour but this has not brought about any substantive change in social relations. Like other Marxists in this period-for example Althusser (2008) and Braverman (1974) - Bowles and Gintis want to explain the recomposition of the working class and delineate how this process is being managed by new forms of state power. The role of critical scholarship, they think, is to extend Marx's insights into the labour process, capital accumulation and the contradictions between the relations and forces of production and apply them to education. Thus for these authors achieving clarity about the nature of education is first and foremost about identifying the social interests of the working class and that means revealing how education is a *function* of political economy. They envisage their analysis as part of a broader political struggle in which the demystification of the nature of capitalist education will contribute to the advance of the socialist movement.

Thus they arrive at a familiar, and I think, deeply problematic position because the specificities of the educational field are collapsed into a description of general social logic. As noted earlier I think Marxism offers tremendous insights into the organisation of labour but this has to be seen as only *one level* of analysis. I think greater attention to the stratified nature of the social world and the specificity of social fields is called for[52]. Without this, as is the case here, there is little or no space for agency, volition, desire or passion or any sense of the importance of the principle of emergence in grasping social phenomena. The structuring of social space is far more uneven and contradictory than Bowles and Gintis allow for and without a theory which looks for both contradictions and correspondences there is a serious risk of falling into a form of radical functionalism (Carnoy & Levin, 1985; Giroux, 1983).

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[52] I would like to thank Marie Moran for helping me to clarify my ideas about the logic of capitalism and the specificity of fields in conversation and through reading her thesis (2010).

In response to criticisms such as these Bowles and Gintis have argued that the book was not intended as a "comprehensive theory of schooling, but rather as a theory of the linkage between education and economy" (Cole, Bowles & Gintis, 1988, p. 236). In these terms they succeeded and they manage to concisely map how class domination in education is linked to economic imperatives and persuasively sketch out a way of thinking about the 'hidden curriculum' and the sort of tacit lessons of power that are embedded in the daily life of educational institutions. However, I would argue although this sort of broad systemic critique is necessary it is not sufficient because it neglects students' experience and institutional specificity and ultimately flattens out the reality they want to explore.

Pierre Bourdieu: Symbolic violence and educational reproduction

As we have already seen Bourdieu does not offer any sustained theory of capitalism and starts from a very different set of assumption than Bowles and Gintis. His concern is with the sociology of practice which empirically investigates the interplay of cultural and economic power in a given context[53]. As part of this sociological enterprise Bourdieu (1971, 1996, 2000; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, 1990) repeatedly explored the relationship between class and education and the early reception and perception of Bourdieu's work in the English speaking world was based mainly on this research on schools and colleges (Robbins, 2004).

As might be inferred from my description of Bourdieu's sociology in the last chapter his theory of education is above all a theory of how class domination is secured through cultural struggle. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argue that formal education valorises certain cultural norms, standards and values and that the process by which these norms and standards are established is profoundly classed. They go further that this fairly well established proposition and argue that education is based on what they call 'symbolic violence' which comes about through the imposition of what they term a 'cultural arbitrary' (1990, p. 15). In education this 'cultural arbitrary' usually reflects the cultural practices and needs of dominant classes especially those with the high levels of cultural capital (although this is historically variable and not held to be universally true). This of course reflects Bourdieu's belief that culture is *always* a field of struggle in which various groups will seek to reshape or maintain the social practices that are most advantageous to them. It is also important to note that the imposition

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53 Although it should be said the extent to which some of his findings are grounded in a given context rather than well wrought theoretical interventions is moot see especially (1984) where it is not always clear how the arguments have been developed through the empirical material.

of the 'cultural arbitrary' is not simply about the organisation of the content of the curriculum or even the means of educational evaluation (although Bourdieu and Passeron do argue these things are integral to educational reproduction). It runs deeper than this and they suggest that ease of upward movement through the educational system depends on one's habitus and the composition and volume of capitals at one's disposal. So while the habitus of the dominant is well adapted to formal education the primary socialisation of working class people at home and community is far more likely to be odds with the habitus of formal educational institutions. For Bourdieu the working class habitus is defined by immediacy and a preference for the concrete which is similar to Bernstein's (1960, 1971a; see also Young, 1971)[54] argument about class, knowledge and 'codes'- in that it emphasises how preschool socialisation shapes us in ways that means we readily fit into, or are at odds with, the culture of institutions the day we step in the door of schools and colleges.

So Bourdieu wants to find a way of analysing the significance of the difference, or perhaps more accurately the distance, between a working class habitus and the habitus of most educational institutions and in doing so firmly places working class experience within education as part of a broader process of social reproduction. In this regard it is important to note that Bourdieu and Passeron (1990, p. 210) think that inequality relies less and less on the inheritance of property or the power of rank and symbolic capital and

> the obtaining of social privileges depends more and more closely on the possession of academic credentials, the School does not only have the function of ensuring discreet succession to a bourgeois estate which can no longer be transmitted directly and openly. This privileged instrument of the bourgeois sociodicy which confers on the privileged the supreme privilege of not seeing themselves as privileged manages the more easily to convince the disinherited that they owe their scholastic and social destiny to their lack of gifts or merits, because in matters of culture absolute dispossession excludes awareness of being dispossessed.[55]

A good deal of research suggests that Bourdieu and Passeron are right about the importance of credentials in modern society (Goldthorpe, 1996; Lynch, 1989; Wright, 1985; and more recently see Bennett et al, 2009). The other part of the argument here is just as important: working class ways of being and knowing are largely devalued in formal education *and* that

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54 There has been considerable disagreement over the extent to which Bouridieu's work overlaps with that of Bernstein - see Harker & May (1993), Bourdieu (1991) and Bernstein (1996).

55 Thanks to Michael Burawoy for highlighting the importance of this passage.

as a consequence it is harder to succeed. But curricula and pedagogy, especially in terms of models of evaluation, are seen as neutral and going through these institutions confirms for working class students the lack of value given to their cultural knowledge in society as an 'objective' fact. Thus the power of the 'cultural arbitrary' derives from the capacity to conceal its own arbitrariness and this means that working class students experience education primarily as a powerful and *compelling* form of symbolic violence. This is a typical theoretical move on Bourdieu's part in which he maps a circular movement of power in which the subordinate classes are sorted and inculcated with the values of the dominant classes.

Bourdieu maintains that cultural power needs to be treated simply as more than an economic epiphenomenon and conceptualises how everyday educational interactions, embedded in educational practices and knowledge forms, can be linked to social structures. Unlike Bowles and Gintis space is made for the specificity of educational institutions-as a field and a set of practices- within a general account of the social logic of domination. Just as importantly this theory of how class is mediated and maintained in cultural space is based on wide-ranging empirical research and traces the relationship between home, family, labour market and class position. As a result, I would argue, that Bourdieu offers an account of social reproduction of education which far exceeds the theoretical reach of the correspondence theories of Bowles and Gintis.

That said Bourdieu describes a type of power loop-a perfection of imposition-which displays a residual determinism and underplays the role of agency in everyday life and is not entirely convincing (Giroux, 1983; Sayer, 2005).[56] Also, Bourdieu's (1985, 2000) healthy scepticism towards overly romanticised notions of class struggle, is linked rather too firmly to a conviction that sociological knowledge qua scientific knowledge is potentially emancipatory (Burawoy, 2008). A strong disciplinary adherence to sociology led Bourdieu, at least for most

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56 See Bourdieu (1990) in which Levi-Strauss' structuralism is treated far more leniently that Sartre's voluntarism. All the same I think that the designation of Bourdieu solely as a 'reproduction theorist', by some thinkers (eg Giroux, 1983) involves a simplification of what he is saying. Bourdieu has often been misrepresented as simply presenting, and therefore justifying, a deficit model of the working class or being 'just' a structuralist. While Giroux (1983) depended on a partial knowledge of Bourdieu's position this cannot be said of accounts after the mid to late eighties. It is also forgotten that these books were polemics within heated debates about educational reform in France (Harker & May, 1994) rather than reified statements about education in all places and all times.

of his career[57], to imagine everyday knowledge and the knowledge that emerged from the organised working class movement as a form of unscientific 'doxa' (Bourdieu, 2000). To return to a theme adumbrated at the end of Chapter Two this means his bid for sociological clarity is above all wagered on pointing out the limits of working class self-understanding. While a rejection of idealised notions of politicised class consciousness may be a necessary aspect of understanding the complexity of class in modern society one should be wary, as Ranciere has warned, of on that basis endorsing a set of intellectual strategies which enthrone the sociologist as 'king' (Ranciere, 2004). While Ranciere ignores Bourdieu's arguments about the need for reflexivity in research (see Chapter Two) and exaggerates the extent to which the truth of Bourdieu's work relies on highlighting the 'ignorance' of the dominated from my perspective there is little doubt that Bourdieu does 'bend the stick' too far towards structuralist reproduction and gives sociology far too much credit for clarity and far too little value to the critical power of everyday knowledge.

Nonetheless, Bourdieu manages to undermine simplistic notions of meritocracy in education and offers a devastating critique of ahistorical and 'pure' notions of value, taste or reason- and retains, to a large extent, the power to suggest just how important symbolic violence and prior socialisation are to understanding educational systems. If Bowles and Gintis make a useful, but limited, case that education cannot be seen in isolation from the dynamics of capitalism Bourdieu says that we need to analyse institutional forms and practices as classed cultural practices and this strikes me as equally invaluable in beginning to understand class and HE.

Paulo Freire's pedagogy of freedom

A very different approach to class experience and inequality is taken by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire who based his educational philosophy on his adult literacy work (first in Brazil in the 1950s and 1960s, and later across the developing world in the 1970s and 1980s). The best known statement of his ideas is offered in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) but is further elaborated in later works (1998, 2004) and in dialogue with collaborators (Horton, Freire, Bell, Gaventas & Peters, 1990; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Freire & Shor, 1987). Freire's work is based on an eclectic range of sources including liberation theology, anti-colonial political theory, Marxist philosophy, psychoanalysis and existentialism. These

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57 The power of neoliberalism was such that in the 1990s Bourdieu began to rethink how he saw the university and social movements see (Bourdieu, 2003a).

various ideas and influences are brought together within a conceptual framework, and a dialectical mode of philosophical investigation, that is very strongly influenced but, nonetheless, distinct from Marxism.

I say distinct because Freire shows little concern for most of the hallowed categories and shibboleths of Marxist political economy-such as value theory -and wholly uninterested in offering an elaborate description of class relations. The important thing, according to Freire, is that society is riven by a fundamental division between the oppressed and the oppressor and it is this power line that determines what is important in education (1972). While this notion of oppression as a power line is directly linked to class inequality it also allows for the existence of multiple forms of domination (Freire, 1998; 2004; Freire & Shor, 1987)[58]. Freire (1972) believes it is the *lived experience* of oppression and of powerlessness which should be the focus of critical education efforts and it is only by reflecting and acting on such experience that the dominated can overcome oppression.

This is linked to a perspective in which human beings are envisaged as "unfinished", and will necessarily remain so, and are driven by the "ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human" to contest and transcend inequality(1972, p. 28). For Freire politics is more than a struggle over resources or economic interests; it is inextricably bound to a human drive for individual and collective emancipation. The struggle of the oppressed is not simply a quest for economic and political transformation but also for cultural emancipation and political autonomy (1972, 1998) and this ontological desire for freedom manifests itself in every sphere of human life and in all forms of human codes, practices and institutions and even in terms of our linguistic and mental schemata.[59] So although Freire (1972) describes the oppressed' consciousness as divided and even as 'colonised' by dominant power he argues that within working class, and the oppressed more generally, there is an awareness of their own circumstances and they hold valuable biographical and social knowledge which can used

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58 In Freire's early work the oppressed are viewed primarily as peasants and workers and he deploys a dichotomous model of class which is indebted to Marx's analysis but also reflects the nature of political struggles in Latin America in his lifetime.

59 Although day to day reality may be shaped the cultural and political hegemony of the oppressor all culture including "language makes explicit the ways in which people have been resisting in other words language gives you a glimpse of how people survive" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 137). Freire posits that the very building blocks of human culture – language and thought- are shaped and marked by the tide of dominant power and the undertow of resistance.

as the basis for mental decolonisation and breaking the 'culture of silence' that characterises oppression (Freire, 1970, 1972).

Freire (1972) is deeply critical of traditional approaches to pedagogy-what he calls 'banking education'-because they reinforce powerlessness in dominated groups and he perceives a direct relationship between the traditional hierarchical relationship between teacher and students and broader structures of oppression. Education in the banking model is conceived as a transfer of 'knowledge' where deposits of information deemed useful by dominant, are passed from the 'knowledgeable' teacher to the 'ignorant' student. In contrast he proposes a pedagogy based on egalitarian cooperation in which a subject is co-investigated through a dialogue of equals between the student and the teacher. "Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention" (1972, p. 46); this forms the basis for a type of 'problem posing' education in which we take what we know of the world through our lived experience and reframe it by delving further into socio-historical reality to question and then reinterpret it. Cognitive, intellectual and social development can be charted in this movement to "gain distance from a knowable object" (1970, p. 15). This praxis, the conscious reinterpretation and transformation of culture, opens up the possibility that history itself can be transformed. In other words humans can become agents of emancipatory change through reflexive action and encouraging this should be the aim of any educational effort.

There are several things that are worth underlining in this review of Freire's ideas in the context of the broader debate over class reproduction and resistance. His work is a useful corrective to overly economistic or structuralist perspectives which argue that oppression is completely pervasive and/or minimise the importance of the desire for freedom, autonomy and the search for meaning. Freire also believes educators, researchers, teachers, administrators- can, and should, seek to play a role in effecting small and wide scale change even though he clearly argues that education alone cannot transform society (Freire & Shor, 1987). Compared to the reproduction theorists Freire has a much stronger sense of everyday agency and desire and his approach is less marred by the arrogance of sociology and vanguard politics. As such I think Freire's theory of pedagogy helps to "ward off the effects of an analysis which necessarily grasps [everyday] practices *only* on the margin of a technical apparatus at the point where these alter or defeat its instruments (Certeau, 1984, p. 41 my emphasis). For the purpose of the present study it is also worth noting that Freire's (1998)

definition of class division can be readily integrated within the framework outlined at the end of the last chapter which made a case for conceptualising class-on one level-as a historically contingent experience of power and disempowerment

But Freire's voluntaristic notion of politics and pedagogy and his insistent celebration of hope and agency mean that although he acknowledges the fact of mental colonisation he underestimates just how difficult it can be to overcome the internalisation of dominant modes of thinking outside of times of great social ferment. Moreover, although Freire's expansive humanism and emancipatory zeal offers a useful distillation of radical grassroots approach to education it does not offer a conceptual framework capable of giving a full and differentiated account of institutions and the power of 'legitimate' knowledge in relatively stable, capitalist societies. As a result I think Freire's highly politically committed vision of what education *can* achieve often seems very remote from contemporary students experience and onscures some of what education *does.* I believe Freire's dichotomous vision of education might even lead us to ignore some of what is valued by students and the significant things that happen even within quite traditional and non-egalitarian educational systems.

Taken together Freire, Bourdieu, Bowles and Gintis offer tremendous, and I think vital, insights into education which suggests as we go through educational institutions we are positioning ourselves, and being positioned in relation to certain form of 'legitimate' knowledge. All of these thinkers also underline the fact "that educational knowledge is a major regulator of the structure of experience" (Bernstein, 1971b, p. 47) and we can be affirmed or rejected and devalued in powerful ways as we go through educational institutions and this is a classed process. Overall, I want to suggest that a critical approach to education needs, as Freire argues, to be concerned with student experience and modes of cognition and agency but to approach this in a way that maintains a stronger focus on critical political economy and the logic of capital alongside Bourdieu's disenchanted exploration of the sociogenesis of institutions and practices. I think by bringing together everyday experience and a critique of political economy and institutions I have the basis for a more realistic and robust framework for understanding class inequality than human capital theorists, orthodox Marxists, political arithmeticians or Weberians using rational actor theory.

Rethinking class and education through the research data

However, reading these writers within a contemporary Irish context and in light of conversations I had with students the lacunae within all these theories-however they are synthesised- is all too apparent. Early on in the research I discovered that these analyses of education-as a sorting space, as a place of silent imposition and a site of political struggle- were not going to help me understand everything the students were saying to me. The politics of class, or at least the conscious politics of class, remained a very minor theme throughout the interviews. Rather the participants chose to discuss agency and reflexivity and their educational experience was described as a more emotive, subtle, less directed and more personally meaningful experience than any of these thinkers allow for. Repeatedly students discussed HE as a very significant space of personal identity formation and their evaluations largely rested on this way of thinking about the purpose of education[60].

Similar findings led Peter Alheit (1995b, 1996; 2005a, 2005b; Alheit & Dausien, 2000, 2002; see also Beck, 1992), to conclude that the way we narrate and negotiate our life stories, and the temporalities and transitions which characterise modern life, in relation to education have been transformed.[61] We seem to be in a time in which we do not solely learn to labour but labour to learn. The interviews suggest that class remains important but that critical education needs new conceptual resources to describe the complexity of identity formation, and the varied desires and needs that inform how people use, discard and reshape their ideas of class *through* education.

The participants in the research also chose to foreground the emotional, evaluative and moral aspects of their experience of class and education. Reay (2005) has pointed out that there is a relatively limited amount of research which explores "the psychic landscape of class" and it was just this sort of material which I needed to make sense of the student narratives. One can, of course, point to E. P. Thompson's (1980, 1993) or Raymond Williams work (1961, 1963, 1989b, 2001) who insisted, in various ways, just how ordinary *yet* potentially transformative

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[60] I should mention that this was certainly not part of the initial design of the research and demanded that I rethink what I thought I knew about class and education.
61 Alheit's theory, based on life history research and theories of reflexive identity, proposes a far more subtle relationship between individual learning, personal biographies and collective social experience than a lot of educational sociology concerned with social reproduction. Aspects of this will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Seven. Alheit argues "the self-willed, 'autopoietic'accomplishment on the part of active subjects, in which they reflexively 'organise' their experience in such a way that they also generate personal coherence, identity, a meaning to their life history and a communicable, socially viable lifeworld perspective for guiding their actions"(Alheit & Dausien, 2002, p.17).

learning and education can be for working class communities and individuals. Moreover, both thinkers grasp the way being in the world, and analysing modes of being, necessarily involves thinking and feeling and addressing the power of class requires that we pay attention to collective sensibilities rooted in shared experience which are profoundly ethical. As Williams has eloquently argued social theory needs to be attuned to the "elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought" (1977, p. 132). This work undoubtedly helped me to interpret the data because it does not try to simplify or reduce human experience and offers insights into the politics of cultural processes. Yet I have to say, despite the acuity and depth of Williams and Thompson's insights, as I worked through the interviews their broader assumptions about politics and class identity seemed both a generation, and a world, away from present day working class experience.

Reay and Skeggs: the normative and affective dimensions of educational experience
In the end it was critical feminist scholarship that helped to deepen my understanding of the data and fully grasp the normative, affective and psychic dimensions of contemporary class experience. I cannot claim that this was part of the original research plan and my engagement with these ideas is grounded, and limited, rather than extensive and long-standing. In retrospect, it is now obvious why this work proved to be so generative; feminists have long been concerned to explore why certain social experiences are rendered invisible and have explored why those things that are deemed unimportant, personal and private are so often socially significant (Rowbotham, 1973). Because of feminism we now have a more profound understanding of affective basis of rationality (Nussbaum, 2001) and have begun to perceive just how important care is for social life and is a key issue for egalitarians (Gilligan, 1982; Lynch, Baker, Lyons & Cantillon, 2009; Noddings, 2003). This scholarship has also changed the way we approach epistemology, methodology and mark out disciplinary boundaries in social science. As I noted in the last chapter the relationship between class and gender inequalities has been of tremendous importance to certain versions of feminist theory (Anthias, 1998; Federici, 2004; Hartsock, 1983; Lynch, Baker, Lyons & Cantillon, 2009). It is this latter body of work which has been by far the richest resource in thinking about the 'psychic landscape of social class' and I am especially indebted to the work Diane Reay and Beverley Skeggs (Reay 1996a, 1996b, 1998a, 1998b, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2004, 2005;

Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009; Reay, Ball & David, 2002; Reay, David & Ball, 2005; Reay & Williams, 1999; Skeggs, 1997, 2004; Adkins & Skeggs, 2004)[62].

Reay's early work (1998a), an ethnographic study examining thirty three London mothers' role in their children's schooling, is an important retheorisation of Bourdieu's notion of habitus. Reay argued on the basis of her research-despite the general trend in the social sciences in this period- for the continuing "centrality of social class, as gendered and racialised, in any explanation of the persistence of educational inequality (1998a, p 1). Reay concluded that "class is a complicated mixture of the material, the discursive, psychological predispositions and sociological dispositions" (1998a, p. 259). My research suggests that this is correct and the empirical analysis will outline how these various aspects of class emerged from the data. Reay, in collaboration with other researchers (Reay, David & Ball, 2005), went on to explore how a theory of classed habitus can illuminate the processes of everyday meaning making and students' choices and trajectories in further and higher education institutions. Overall, I think this work-with its insistence on the layered and multidimensional nature of everyday experience- has been particularly successful in offering theoretically rich and empirically fleshed out descriptions of class processes[63].

This includes having a nuanced analysis of the education system. She notes that "despite the advent of schooling for the masses over 100 years ago, education from majority of the working classes remain something we got through rather than go on to" (2001, p. 335) but she also acknowledges that education has its own specific features with dynamics and tensions which are poorly described in correspondence theories. Furthermore, she argues, due to the expansion of the education system, that "growing numbers of the working classes are caught up in education [..] as an escape, as a project from maximising and fulfilling the self or complicated mixture of the two" (2001, p. 336). Again the research suggests this is a very accurate assessment and why it is so important to be attentive to the complexity of contemporary working class experience. As a Bourdieusian she has consistently returned to the issue of how institutional cultures impacts on the way students view themselves within education (2002, 2009: Reay, David & Ball, 2005). Reay (2001) contends that the cultural

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62 Reay and Skeggs borrow a good deal from Kuhn (1995),Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody (2001), Steedman (1986), Plummer (2000) and Mahony & Zmroczek (1997). My analysis also draws on Kuhn and Steedman.
63 Reay appears to underestimate the number of previous attempt to think through the psychic landscape of class.e.g. the Durkheimean Halbwachs (1958), early critical theory (Bloch, 1985; Reich, 1972) and the historical sociology of Moore (1978).

dissonance between working class habitus, which reflects the sedimented history of classed and gendered power, and the institutional culture of higher education which is dominated by the middle class means that HE is often a powerful and sometimes a threatening experience for working class students. Yet she has also described the joy that working class students experience as they reposition themselves in relation to 'legitimate' knowledge and culture (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009).

This may seem very familiar territory for the reader at this stage but there is an important difference between Reay and Bourdieu. I think methodologically, as an ethnographer, and theoretically, as a feminist, Reay, is far more sensitive than Bourdieu to the way the working class experience of education can involve "a delicate balance between realizing [one's] potential and maintaining a sense of an authentic self" (2001, p. 337; see also 2002a, 2002b). This is reflected in the way Reay uses her data to develop a proper social and *psychological* account of class and in her far less deterministic theorisation of habitus than the one given by Bourdieu. Consequently, I think Reay's work is particularly well adapted to exploring education, as this thesis does, as a specific social space in which the relationship between collective social experience and personal biography is *negotiated* by students in diverse and complex ways.

Skeggs (1997, 2004) has taken a similar approach to examining class and is also interested in how everyday meaning making processes rely on unequal access to cultural and economic resources. In a longitudinal ethnographic study in the north-west of England with eighty three white working-class women Skeggs (1997) documents these women's biographical experiences in an FE college, and how this relates to their sense of community and sense of self. Skeggs maintains that our sense of class is far more often more deeply embedded, and frequently more troubling, than traditional notions of class identity indicate. She posits that "categories of class operate not only as an organising principle which enable access to and limitations on social movement and interaction but are also reproduced at the intimate level as a structure of feeling" (1997, p. 6).

According to Skeggs (1997, 2004) categorical models of class fail to capture how people are constantly working *against and within* the way they are social classified. Skeggs also pays attention to how representations of class and gender in the wider culture affects the way these women understand themselves. This links Bourdieu's theory to a version of cultural studies

by examining how discourses and media images, which are predominantly demeaning and hostile, impacts on these women's sense of what it means to be working class. Skeggs (1997) also describes how these women resist and play with the way they are valued in society and concludes that these women "operate with a dialogic form of recognition: they recognise the recognition of others. (1997, pp. 3-4). Importantly, Skeggs also documents that the experience of being culturally undervalued in work and society, and relentless negative representations in the media, affects how these working class women think about the value of education which is viewed as offering access to scarce cultural resources of dignity and respectability.

So Skeggs, like Raymond Williams and Andrew Sayer (2005, 2011), is interested in how class informs normative evaluations, affective dispositions and conceptions of moral worth as well as the distribution of wealth and cultural capital. Skeggs develops these points (2004) in a more explicitly Foucauldian direction in a very ambitious but somewhat uneven book about value and evaluation in class theory. Skeggs links the discursive formation of self to the process of commodity exchange. She asks (2004, p. 2)

> How do certain bodies become inscribed and then marked with certain characteristics? Second, what systems of exchange enable such characteristics to be read as good, bad, unworthy and worthy? And how is this value attributed, accrued, institutionalised and lost in the processes of exchange? And how is this both moral and economic? Third, how is value produced through different perspectives (different ways of knowing, hearing and seeing that represent particular interests)? Fourth, we need to know how the systems of inscription, exchange, valuing, institutionalisation and perspective provide conditions of possibility from being read by others in the relationships that are formed between groups; what are the effects?

In addressing these question Skeggs reformulates Bourdieu's analysis of cultural and economic power through a feminist critique of the 'male gaze' linked to a Foucauldian distrust of normative discourses and a very idiosyncratic reading of Marx's theory of value to asks how gender and class are made and remade in culture. I think that his provocative and suggestive synthesis does not fully hold together but the questions she attempts to answer strike me as tremendously pertinent for educationalists and for class theory and the thesis will try to answer these questions.

Overall, Skeggs and Reay's scholarship is important because they have developed a critical sociology of class using ethnography and in-depth interviewing which does not shy away

from acknowledging the complexity of people's lived experience of inequality and illuminates how often class experience is deeply imbricated with the issues social and moral value. It is worth noting that Reay and Skeggs arrived at this position through a critical rereading of Bourdieu through the lens of feminist theory (see also Adkins & Skeggs, 2004; McNay, 2008). This rereading of the concept of habitus in the case of Reay, and capitals in the case of Skeggs overcomes some of the problems with Bourdieu especially in the way he offers social scientific knowledge primarily as the fruit of an objectification of the strategies of social actors[64]. Their approach to research and theory is ultimately quite different to Bourdieu's and there is a modest solidarity that underpins their work which amongst other things makes them far more sensitive to the psychosocial dimensions of social practice. The fact that both thinkers are concerned with how people negotiate class within formal educational institutions makes this work doubly valuable for the present research. They also offer very suggestive accounts of how class and gender overlap-a key question in a period in which the traditional gendered images of class, as male and industrial, have little salience (Savage, 2000). I think these methodological and theoretical innovations offer the basis for a grounded, dialogical and critical account of class experience today that rejects both postmodern amnesia and a certain type of left-wing nostalgia for the halcyon days of the industrial working class.

All the same there are number of problems with how Skeggs and Reay frame their analysis of class. Their arguments, especially Skeggs, are often aimed- in true Bourdieusian fashion- at highlighting the 'bad faith' of middle-class academics in their approach to the working class. However true this might be the political and social scientific limits of this particular strategy are, I think, more than apparent. More importantly while they both explicitly acknowledge how the political conjuncture, viz Thatcher's neoliberal remaking of Britain, has contributed to the denigration of working people there is little connection made in their work to the longer history of working class self-management, agency and resistance. For instance Skeggs (1997, 2004) argues that society has been constituted by modernist, individualistic discourses in which working class people are defined in terms of what they lack. She states that "class is a discursive, historically specific construction, a product of middle–class political consolidation, which includes elements of fantasy and projection" (1997, p. 5). This seems a

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[64] Bourdieu also believes that the researcher should also subject themselves to reflexive objectification. I do not disagree with this argument or that research *requires* strategies for creating epistemic breaks with one's own self-understandings and in framing and contextualising other people's accounts of their experience. My contention is that the way this is carried out varies in subtle but important ways.

very limited and partial theorisation and I would argue that class is neither simply discursive nor simply the 'object' of middle class consolidation. Obviously neither Skeggs or Reay are unaware of the history of organised working class politics but I think their major concern is to document the reality of class inequality, and to say something about what this means for working class people, in an era which seeks to deny the existence of class altogether. Taking a relatively narrow historical focus is understandable choice but while this has the advantage of avoiding ideologically motivated simplifications and fantasies about the working class it nonetheless downplays some of the vibrancy, strength and achievements of working class culture.

Towards a grounded, normative and historical approach to research on class and education

In Chapter One and Three I made the case that any attempt to make sense of class is inherently political. But I also noted that the ideologically overdetermined nature of class analysis in politics and the academy means that it is particularly important to avoid forcing data into pre-given ideological categories and that we should remain wary of attributing a particular form of consciousness to any given class position. My approach is embedded in these propositions and I firmly believe that sceptical, grounded, committed and critical research on class is necessary. This of course entails a good deal complexity and working through generative tensions. I am now in a position to be even more explicit about what this means in relation to the specific research context. My primary and secondary research suggests that what is required is a dynamic theory of class which sees class formation as a historically shaped collective process which informs, but does not fully determine, personal experience in structured social space. Moreover, this demands an awareness of how class relations are mediated, reinforced and reshaped through education. I think this necessarily requires an account of meaning making and evaluative practices which are connected to the possibility of *various* forms of collective *and* individual agency. On this basis, like Freire, Skeggs and Reay I want to suggest that an analysis of class must begin with lived experience rather than notions of working class people 'should be'. In this sense the main aim of the research is to think through what people say about their lives in a clear, rigorous and grounded way.

So how precisely does this relate to both the theory of learning and education in relation to the history of the working class outlined in the first part of this chapter? Well, I would

contend that framing these interviews nonetheless *requires* a broad historical and critical account of education. The proposal here is that history, and this particular moment, is immanent with small and large scale possibilities, which are often occluded, and this 'anticipatory' sensibility is a precondition for emancipatory forms of critical thinking and praxis (Benjamin, 1992; Bloch, 1985; Freire, 1972; Giroux, 2001). So although I think Skeggs and Reay understand class and education in a profound way I think that their work can be usefully supplemented by a more historical and emancipatory lens. In a remarkably individualistic and neoliberal era in which the social imagination is dominated by notions of the disreputable poor and working class is meant to be slowly dying away in forgotten rust belts and post-industrial towns it is not enough to document the moment. In a time in which Jameson has remarked (2003) it is easier to imagine the end of world than an alternative to capitalism -however distant it now seems- the history of working class self-management, creativity and activity has to be part of how we make sense of what is possible. This does not mean that this history is repeatable, it is not -at least not in the same terms in which it has occurred in the past (Harvey, 2010a) - or that this working class movements were inclusive-we know they were not- but I would maintain that a small, but key, part of critical research is finding a way of thinking through how the traces of history, of experiment and alternatives, cast a different light on the here and now. This contextualises the contemporary denigration of the working class and the breathless immediatism, individualism and amnesia of market society in a different way. Our particular moment needs to be inscribed within longer arcs of historical experience. This is one interpretation of the task of class analysis and I would argue commensurable with other lines of investigation in critical theory (Aronowitz, 2003; Bloch, 1985; Freire, 1972, 1998).

In the bringing Bowles and Ginits, Freire, Bourdieu, Skeggs and Reay into critical dialogue with each other here-with what the interviewees had to say firmly in mind- I want to make a case for a form of scholarship that keeps lived experience central yet acknowledges the importance of structural forces combined with an awareness of historical possibility without trying to redescribe present experience solely in terms borrowed from the past.

Conclusion

The development of the modern education system cannot be separated from the history of capitalism and class inequality and learning is, ultimately, organised as part of a more general effort to direct human labour power. This of course relies on the broad definition elaborated

earlier that learning is a fundamental human capacity exercised and shaped through the variety of types of informal and non-formal learning that take place in work, civil society, the community and the family. Historically, the modern educational system has been driven by elite interests and now occupies a hegemonic role in the way we legitimise, validate and interpret learning in general but this can never be a total and complete form of hegemony due to its necessary and dynamic relationship with other forms of social learning. Also, the education system has been a very important site of political struggle, and has responded to pressure and initiatives both from above and below, and this means that education has both mediated and impacted on broader social conflicts about social needs, desires and identities. The contested nature of education means that it can serve as a space in which new claims can be articulated and emergent practices can take shape. I think this also means the exact relationship between class inequality and education can never be expressed in terms of a simple universal proposition. Historically it has been a space of imposition and social reproduction but also a system in which demands for equality and democracy have been made and won and where the desire for singularity-for time, space and identity work-has never been wholly absent. I believe this layered history cannot be ignored in a study of biography, education and social power.

All the more so in recent years because, as Raymond Williams once remarked, to extend formal education is to qualitatively change the meaning of education. In a period of massive expansion at all levels it is vital for egalitarians to understand what this change has meant for working class students and well as identifying the barriers to further equality. The chapter has outlined some of the theoretical, historical and policy issues for this research and has sought to develop concepts which can speak to personal experience and identify what is new in working class educational experience as well as accounting for persistent structural inequality. The remainder of the thesis will explore this topic in detail but before I can turn to the empirical data these issues and ideas need to be properly contextualised and address what is specific about class and education Ireland.

Chapter 5

The hidden country: education, politics and the Irish working class

> I sat by myself in the shed
> And watched the draught
> Blowing the papers
> Around the wheel of the bicycles.
> Will God judge
> our most secret thoughts and actions?
> Will God judge
> our most secret thoughts and actions?
> And every idle word that man shall speak
> He shall render an account of it
> on the Day of Judgement
> The taste
> Of ink off
> The nib shrank your
> Mouth.
> (Thomas Kinsella, *Model school Inchicore*)

Hitherto, it was hard to find any journal or magazine deigning to take the least notice of the working class of society, unless for stigmatising them with the cognomens of mob, lower order, swinish multitude, or the rabble.
(George Kerr, a nineteenth century Belfast trade unionist)

There is a class ceiling in Irish society. It is rarely visible and rarely ever problematised but it is there and it is real.
(John Bissett, community activist and educational ethnographer)

Introduction

This chapter is about class and education in Ireland. At a very early stage in this research project it became very obvious that there are enormous gaps in how we discuss and theorise class in Ireland. Remarkably, I could find no interdisciplinary overview of class analysis in so I as part of the research project I completed a thorough examination of how the working class has been described in Irish social science, history and politics. This confirmed just how scant the literature is on working class culture and educational experience and that many aspects of working class life remain invisible in social science and the public sphere (on this issue see Bridgeman, 2011; O'Neill, 1992; Pierse, 2010).

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section will summarise the findings from the interdisciplinary review and will briefly summarise what the review suggested about class formation and education in Ireland from the late eighteenth century through to the foundation

and consolidation of the Irish state between the 1920s and 1950s. This will develop the arguments about class and classification struggles made in Chapter Three within an Irish context and I think it will help explain why there is so little in-depth work exploring Irish working class culture. The second section will offer a more finely meshed description of class, society and education in the two most recent historical phases of Irish society; namely the liberalisation of the Irish economy between the 1960s and 1980s; and the neoliberal turn, in boom and bust, which stretches from the 1990s till today. This latter section will be far more detailed as I want to provide an adequate socio-historical background for the interviewees' accounts. The chapter will conclude with an analysis of the changing nature of Irish education. The main focus will be on HE and I will outline how the present study fits within broader debates about access, equality and lifelong learning policy in Irish HE.

Section I

The absent centre? An interdisciplinary review of research on class in Ireland

The literature examined in the previous two chapters has been extensive but is far from exhaustive. Any researcher interested in class and education has to negotiate their way through a vast amount of disparate material and develop a framework which is capable of marshalling this literature in a coherent manner. The preceding chapters have outlined my own approach; I contend that a theory of class requires an awareness of history and an analysis of social power which can explain the role of political and symbolic struggles in class formation. It is only within these broad parameters that one can begin to analyse the forces that shape class relations and how cultures are made and remade through the experience of shared conditions and through a sense of what is historically possible and impossible within a given period. In order to do this we need to be able to draw on political, social scientific and everyday descriptions of working class life.

Pursuing this type of inquiry in Ireland is not at all straightforward. When one moves one's focus from the international literature on class to the Irish literature on this topic it soon becomes clear just how little germane material is available. This is in large part because, for a variety of reasons, "Irish society is often thought of a classless society" (Share, Tovey & Corcoran, 2007, p. 170). Of course the study of class has defined sociology as a discipline internationally and many Irish sociologists have tackled class at some level but sociology, and related fields of inquiry such as anthropology have relatively shallow roots in Irish academia

(Lee, 1989) and detailed conceptual and empirical work on class has been surprisingly rare in Irish social science. While it is no longer true, as one prominent Irish sociologist argued in the 1980s, that "no systematic, coherent effort has been undertaken to date to define [class] in a rigorous fashion" (Peillon, 1982, p. 35) the sort of research that this thesis might hope to build upon is very sparse indeed.

It is not a completely barren field though and since the eighties two major theoretical approaches to class have developed within Irish sociology- Neo-Weberian stratification theory and radical, usually Marxist or Marxist influenced, social theory[65]. By far the largest body of work on class has been produced by Neo-Weberians mainly under the auspices of, or in collaboration with, the state funded think tank the *Economic and Social Research Institute* (ESRI). Their analysis of class in Ireland employs large scale quantitative datasets on income, occupation and employment relations (Breen, 2004; Breen, Hannan, Rottman & Whelan 1990; Breen & Whelan, 1996; Callan, 1989, 1996; Callan & Barrett, 2000; Fahey, Russell & Whelan, 2007; Hout, 1989; Nolan & Callan, 1994; Whelan, Breen & Whelan, 1991; Whelan, Nolan & Maitre, 2005). These studies employ class schema based on a hierarchy of occupations, sorted according to putative skill, divided into between seven and eleven discrete socio-economic groups and classes[66] (Employers and Managers, Higher professionals, Lower professionals, Non-manual workers, Skilled manual workers, Semi-skilled manual workers, Unskilled manual workers, Farmers and Own account workers). Within this classification system the working class is typically understood as the four 'lowest' socio-economic groups –that is to say manual workers and routine non-manual workers. I think it is fair to say this model which is used by the ESRI, and the Central Statistics Office

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65 Most of the empirical data on socio-economic groups is gathered by the CSO. Statistics were first collected by the Statistics Branch of the Department of Industry and Commerce following the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922. The Statistics Branch amalgamated a number of statistics gathering organisations that had existed in Ireland since 1841. There was little demand for statistics in the new Irish state but this changed after the 1960s when the CSO was established (Lee, 1989). The CSO has used classification systems very similar to those employed in the UK-see Medico-Social Research Board (1985). In 1996 it adopted a version of the UK standard occupational classification which uses a variety of class groups and subclasses and offers schemas which have 7, 9, 11 and 25 classes for occupations (Breathnach, 2007: Clancy & Wall, 2000). Sociologists of all stripes and orientations use this data but the work done by the CSO sits most neatly with neo-Weberian stratification theories.

66 This has gone through a number of amendments between the mid-eighties and today - i.e. the way Employer/Managers are categorised and how farmers get assigned within this scale and the massive growth in 'Own account workers'. Also the enormous heterogeneity of the non-manual group in terms of pay, conditions, autonomy, power and status makes the claim that it forms a 'class' in any meaningful sense questionable.

(CSO), is now the most widely diffused and most influential approach to understanding class in contemporary social science and Irish society[67].

The academics and policy sociologists responsible for this work on stratification can point to a number of achievements; they have meticulously documented changes in the nature of work and in patterns of social mobility and systematically explored the implications of these changes for the education system; they have intensively studied income distribution and made a considerable impact on state policy. These large-scale quantitative, and often longitudinal, studies have, for self-evident reasons, have also been used in major comparative, international studies in which Ireland is sometimes used as an example of 'late industrialisation' (Breen, 2004; Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992; Whelan & Goldthorpe, 1992). The fact that these theorists are part of a much larger, and very prominent, community of neo-Weberian social science researchers who all use a similar theoretical framework has undoubtedly added weight to this body of work.[68] As I have already delineated where I think the general weaknesses are with stratification theory in Chapter Three-through an evaluation of the work of John Goldthorpe- there is no need to reiterate the points here but I will discuss specific findings of the ESRI in greater detail below[69].

A number of theorists within Irish sociology have propounded an alternative, radical, and it must be said far less influential, approach to class. This group includes Marxists (Allen, 1997, 2000, 2011; Breathnach, 2002, 2007, 2010; Cox, 2011; Eipper, 1986, 1989; McNamee & Lovett, 1987; Munck, 1985; Purdie & Morgan, 1980; Silverman, 2001; Slater & McDonough, 1994; Wickham, 1980), egalitarian theorists (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2009; Lynch, Baker & Lyons, 2009; Lynch, 1987; O'Neill, 1992) and economic and historical sociologists who employ a range of theoretical resources including Marxism (Coulter & Coleman, 2003; Kirby, 1997, 2002, 2010; McCabe, 2011; O'Hearn, 1998, 2001). As might be expected this work offers more pointed critique of the distribution of wealth and the use of political power and makes far more explicit emancipatory arguments than stratification

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67 The key works here are Hout's (1989) ground breaking study of the social mobility of men and the very widely cited and very influential books by Whelan & Goldthorpe (1992) and Breen & Whelan (1996) and Breen, Hannan, Rottman & Whelan (1990) .

68 A substantive number of professional and scholarly connections exist between these social scientists and Nuffield college where Goldthorpe is based and they have done joint work including on the famous CASMIN project (Comparative Analysis of Social Mobility in Industrial Society)

69 See Allen (2000) for a very critical account of the ESRI and stratification theory.

theorists. Over the thesis I will draw on both strands of Irish class analysis-the Weberian and the radical- but for obvious reasons, it is the latter body of literature which sits more neatly within the research paradigm I am working within and which is more immediately germane to the research.

Despite these shared affinities I think there are large gaps in the body of work on social class produced by radical sociologists. Some of these gaps are empirical (and this is one of the reasons why the work of the ESRI remains useful). However I think many of the lacunae are also the consequence of a shared approach to class analysis which is orientated to broad stroke socio-political descriptions of Irish society as a whole. It is telling that only two of these books are monographs on the Irish working class. One, a brilliant piece of research, is concerned solely with one specific locality, Thomastown, between 1850 and 1950 (Silverman, 2001) and the other is a short but very insightful study of single working class community in Dublin (O'Neill, 1992). It is also rare to come across class analysis that fully explores the intersectionality of class, gender and ethnicity (Cohen, 2001; Coulter, 1994; Lynch, Baker, Lyons & Cantillon, 2009). Rarest of all is work which pays sustained attention to the everyday experience of class and reconsiders the conceptual basis of class in the light of their findings (Eipper, 1986; Gray, 2010; Jenkins, 1982, 1983; Lynch, Baker, Lyons & Cantillon, 2009; Saris & Bartley, 2002; Silverman, 2001[70]). While broad socio-political analyses are undoubtedly necessary I think this should not be the only mode of radical inquiry into the nature and effect of class divisions but unfortunately, how class is understood, experienced, culturally mediated and resisted by working class people currently gets very short shrift in Irish social science.

In pursuit of material which might offer insight into these issues or add another layer to the historico-political dimension of the research a review of material outside the established disciplinary boundaries of social science and education was also undertaken (please note the material on education will be reviewed separately at the end of this chapter). A number of research databases of journals and collections were consulted including a university catalogue which contains all published copyright items in the British Isles [71] and this was followed by

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70 See also Throop (1996) and Humphreys (1966) which do explore quotidian class experience but in a way that is of very limited relevance to the present research.

71 This is the Stella catalogue in TCD which using multiple search terms yielded less than a hundred items (including theses from TCD and excluding double entries and miscatalogued publications). NUI catalogues in

searches of all other Irish university library collections, and a review of all the relevant material in the National Library. Further research of specialised archives, journals and newspapers only served to confirm the dearth of salient material. What can be concluded from this review? Well, if the working class is discussed at all in it is mainly in relation to a fairly narrow band of themes. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century the working class is most likely to be mentioned in official documents, mainly from county councils and the state, about housing, education and social and moral reform. During the twentieth century most of the available material is associated with socialism, trade unions, housing, voting patterns and in more recent decades social problems, most especially crime and drugs, and certain types of literature, especially novels and memoirs, and popular entertainment. Interestingly there is a disproportionate material related to the north of Ireland which I think reflects both the intensive industrialisation of the region in the nineteenth century and the political mobilisation of Protestant and Catholic working class communities since the 1960s.

Material from two of the most influential academic disciplines in the arts and humanities in Ireland, at least in terms of public debate outside the university, history and literary studies, was also examined including a number of 'canonical texts' (Brown, 1985; Cleary, 2006 ; Cleary & Connolly, 2005; Deane, Carpenter & Williams, 1991, 1997; Eagleton, 1995; Fallon, 1998; Ferriter, 2005; Foster, 1988; Gibbons, 1996; Kearney, 1985; Kee, 1981; Kiberd, 1996; Lee, 1989; Lyons, 1971; Whelan K.,1996). Reviewing this material underscored just how small a place the working class has in mainstream cultural history. That said in some recent publications the absence of the working class is beginning to be addressed (Cleary, 2006; Cleary & Connolly, 2005; Ferriter, 2005) and both Joe Cleary and Diarmuid Ferriter have written books that give a fresh perspective on Irish state formation in relation to social inequality class and gender.

Cork, Maynooth, Galway and UCD and DCU in Dublin and Queens in Belfast were also searched and from which I obtained a handful of new references (mainly Masters and Doctoral theses). The National Library holds under two hundred publications that were anyway potentially relevant to the present study. A number of academic journal catalogues were also searched. All the issues of key relevant social science journals such as the *Irish Journal of Sociology, Educational Studies* were checked individually. The *Irish Labour History Society* publication *Saothar* proved an invaluable resources and every single issue since 1973 was consulted. The catalogues of the *People's History Museum* in Manchester and the *Working class history* archives in the UK were also combed through. A keyword search of the Irish newspaper archives (this includes 250 publications including the Irish Independent), the Irish Times archives, and a catalogue of ESAI theses were also consulted. It is indicative of the state of class analysis in Ireland that all the material unearthed through searches was very manageable (a couple of hundred items rather than thousands). Comparative searches of international material or even searches using terms like gender in relation to Ireland yielded larger number of publications.

Some sense of how marginal labour history has been within mainstream Irish historiography can be gleaned from the fact that Lee's (1989) ground breaking and, in many respects superb book, on Ireland between 1912-1985 has less than a page on the 1913 Lockout -the most violent and dramatic episode in Irish working class politics in the twentieth century. This is also reflected in the relatively slow development of the field of labour history and the historian Emmett O'Connor (2011) has wryly pointed the first academic book on Irish labour history appeared in 1920 and the second was published in 1977! Nonetheless, the field of labour history and analyses of working class politics, from both inside and outside the university, has grown in the past thirty years and now encompasses a relatively broad range of work (Allen, 1997; Boyd, 1972; Boyle, 1988; Connolly, 1967; Ellis, 1985; Gilmore, 1966; Greaves, 1961; Hanley & Millar, 2009; Keogh, 1982; Kostick, 1996; O'Connor, 1988, 2011; O'Drisceoil & Lane, 2005; Lane, 1997; Lynch & Campling, 1998; Lysaght, 2003; O'Casey, 1919; Yeates, 2000; Workers Party, 1978 etc.). This includes a great deal of very rich material but the social invisibility of class and its marginal status in historiography means that these historians are still overwhelmingly concerned with discovering and dignifying the history of organised working class collective action in Ireland. This means, like most Marxist sociologists, very little attention is given by labour historians to everyday life, to culture and those dimensions of class experience which are not readily categorised as political. In other words labour history has not yet developed into a 'people's history' and this has certainly affected the way education is approached in the field and the few books that do explore this topic are absorbed with the history of 'cadre' education (Boyd, 1999; Croke & Devine, 2007). This tendency in Irish labour history as a whole is clearly reflected in *Saothar,* the journal of labour history. The publication has been in existence for just under forty years but very, very few articles have been published on popular culture (e.g. Lane, 1999) and only a handful of these touch on education in any way and this is usually in relation to teachers' trade unions (see Duffy, 1990 for one of the few articles with a wider focus).

So if Irish sociology, anthropology, mainstream history, literary studies and labour history have largely failed to engage in research which gives a thick description of working class life or education what other sources can we draw upon? There is a small body of work by journalists –such as Nell McCafferty (1987), Rosita Sweetman (1972), Gene Kerrigan (1998) and Fintan O'Toole-that does offer some real insight into working class culture (see also O'Dea, 1994). There is also an immensely rich seam of work produced by community

activists and oral historians (Fagan, 2006; Fagan & Savage, 1995; Johnston, 1985; Kearns, 1994, 1998; O'Neill, 1992)[72]. I think probably the freest and most complex exploration of working class life is in literature- for example in the fiction, memoirs, biographies, poems and drama of James Stephens, Robert Tressel, Sean O'Casey, Brendan Behan, Paula Meehan, Peadar O'Donnell, Frank McCourt, Roddy Doyle, Dermot Healy, Mannix Flynn, Pat McCabe, Lee Dunne, Dermot Bolger, Pat Tierney, Tom Murphy, and Colm Keegan etc. Not coincidentally one of the most thorough and compelling academic accounts of working class culture is a study of a small portion of this literature (Pierse, 2010). Of course one can also cite examples of films and documentaries dealing with working class life but this is less common- no doubt because successfully operating in these fields demands more resources and requires negotiation with cultural gatekeepers in a way that literature does not. It is also worth noting that some commentators have argued that Irish TV has often misrepresented and caricatured the Irish working class (Pierse, 2010). This reservation aside I think literature and popular culture currently has often managed to explore fine grained accounts of everyday experience linked to broader patterns of socio-economic change more effectively than social science[73].

To summarise, if one examines the various ways class is represented in Irish society-through politics, social science, newspapers, history and popular culture-the most striking thing is the relative dearth of material which offers some insight into working class culture and everyday experience. The fact that the working class has been largely invisible in dominant representations of Irish society and that when it has been visible it has often been associated with lack, poverty and social problems tells us a great deal about Irish society. This neglect can be easily discerned in the incomplete and uneven treatment of class in academia. I have identified three substantive academic lines of inquiry into class– labour history, radical social theory and work on stratification and social mobility. All three bodies of work undermine a

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[72] *The Urban Folklore Project* in Dublin's north inner city run by Terry Fagan a fascinating example of the power of community based research to illuminate everyday experience (Fagan, 2006; Fagan & Savage, 1995). The work of Mairin Johnston (1985) is quite similar and equally valuable. This research, by its nature, is to bound to particular communities and generalising from it is difficult and I think may risk overemphasising how unified, homogenous and perhaps even how solidaristic working class Ireland has been as a whole.

[73] Other forms of popular culture such as sport and music are obviously fundamental to developing a richer understanding of class. I have left sport and music aside here for the purposes of brevity and the difficulty of properly integrating this sort of material within a concise review of textual sources. It should be noted that Fintan O'Toole has in occasional articles in the Irish Times and academic journals such as *Cineaste* outlined out how these aspects of cultural life might be usefully used to understand class and Irish life. This approach has also been explored by Tony Farmar (1995) in his study of middle class Ireland

'deficit' notion of class but have mainly, but not exclusively, confined themselves to broad descriptions of social change and state formation. This work is invaluable but given my interest in a developing a grounded account of working class identity and educational experience the lack of material on culture is frustrating and indicative of how narrow our understanding of class inequality at the present time.

Explaining invisibility: Class formation, education and the state

> Gentility flourished easily in Ireland: very little wealth nourished it. In the towns tuppence ha'penny looked down on tuppence, and throughout the country the grades in social difference were as numerous as the layers of an onion (O'Malley, 1979, p. 24)

> And we had in Ireland no class in society except for the remnants of Anglo-Irish gentry, and their imitators [..] This restoration of a classless society is one of the rarely recognised contributions to national well-being. (Todd Andrews quoted in Boyle et al, 2008, p. 22)

So why has working class culture not been the subject of more academic research? If we cast an eye over the history of Ireland over the past two hundred years I think the reasons for this become quite clear. This is certainly not the place to explore this topic in the depth it deserves but a very brief summary will help to frame the findings of the present study and I think offer an interesting example of how the specific dynamics of class formation influence how class gets constructed and understood in the public sphere. As I think this is necessary background material rather than a main issue for the research I will outline a brief propositional summary rather than a lengthy and fully elaborated theoretical argument.

I think Irish class formation in the modern period was largely shaped by the country's position within the world capitalist system -as semi-peripheral colony within the British empire (O'Hearn, 2001). A semi-peripheral colony is one that follows a 'dependent' and exploitative form of economic development and displays hybrid cultural, political and economic forms that reflect its proximity to the metropolitan centre of power -so in Ireland's case the legal and cultural institutions were often very similar to Britain and a significant portion of the population considered themselves British (Cleary, 2006; O'Hearn, 2001; for related arguments see Amin, 1976; Said, 1994; Wallerstein, 1974, 1979)[74]. As a consequence Irish socio-economic development was very uneven and although it was integrated within the

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74 For a very well argued alternative theorisation of this period see Slater & McDonough (1994).

Atlantic economy, the powerhouse of the nineteenth century capital accumulation, it nonetheless remained chronically underdeveloped and even went through a phase of partial deindustrialisation in the nineteenth century (O'Connor, 2011). Ireland's colonial status determined its three major economic functions in the nineteenth century- supplying rents, producing agricultural goods and a source of migrant labour in the Atlantic economy. In this formative period the vast majority of the Irish working class were cottiers, labourers, servants and migrant workers until the famine in 1845 and the majority were poor and often underemployed (O'Connor, 2011; Slater & McDonough, 1994).

The very fragmented nature of labour politics in Ireland meant that the working class remained politically very weak and throughout the nineteenth century religion, gender, skill level and nationalism were sources of intraclass division and competition (Lane, 1997; Maguire, 1994; O'Connor, 2011). The success of political movements linked to the faith and nation meant that class politics, while often fierce, remained relatively dispersed and subordinate to other social projects. So despite the fact that Ireland in the nineteenth century was in many ways a laboratory of innovative, democratic politics-for example O'Connellite monster meetings, mass campaigns, boycotts, civil disobedience etc., independent working class organisations remained very small and collective notions of working class power remained completely marginal in Irish politics (Foster, 1988; Lane, 1997; O'Broin, 2009).

Ireland's position as semi-peripheral colony also affected the formation of the education system. There are clear links between the development of the educational system in Ireland and Britain and both systems emerged from a similar process of interventions from the state and the work of various philanthropic and religious groups (Coolohan, 1981; Logan, 1990). Goldstrom (1972), in his study of texts used in schools for working class students in Ireland and England in the nineteenth century he notes that the pre-eminent concerns in both countries were identical-the moral reform and social control of the poor. Education, it was thought, would provide a bulwark against the profligate behaviour, improvidence and indiscipline of the popular classes (Dunn, 1799) and the foundation of the formal education system in 1831 was deeply concerned with managing the "general intelligence and good conduct of the poorer classes" (Logan, 1990, p. 132). The main difference from the broader European and US context discussed in the last chapter, and this again is related to Ireland's status as a semi-peripheral colony and the specificities of Irish class formation, was just how

central the question of religion and faith was in debates over the new educational system and how little effect the organised working class had on this process in Ireland. The struggle was not so much over 'really useful knowledge' but concerned who would be in a hegemonic position to steer the education system. Despite the British state's attempts to resist denominational education in Ireland the Catholic church fought a long and ultimately successful battle over education between the 1830s and 1880s (Coolahan, 1981). The effect of the church's intervention was that education at primary level was comparatively, given other indices of development, relatively widespread and accessible by the end of nineteenth century (Foster, 1988; Lee, 1989). However, it also meant that education was completely enmeshed with religion and by the turn of the twentieth century most children of all classes and faiths went to denominational schools and the small numbers who went onto upper secondary or tertiary education also attended institutions run by the religious (Coolohan, 1981; Logan, 1990).

Power, class and education in Ireland after independence

The decimation of a large segment of the rural working class- especially cottiers and farm labourers-through famine and emigration and the consequences of the successful land war fought against landlordism in the 1880s- which led to the mass transfer of property into private hands between the 1890s and the 1920s- radically altered the class composition of Irish society (Foster, 1988). In the same period nationalism and unionism became ever more powerful forces in Irish politics. Yet despite the creation of a massive class of smallholders and the growing cultural and political hegemony of nationalist ideas of various hues there was nonetheless an efflorescence of organised working class political activity in the early years of the twentieth century (Connolly, 1988; ; Ellis, 1985; Kostick, 1996; O'Connor, 2011; O'Casey, 1919; Yeates, 2000). However, following independence in 1922 the organised working class, after a period of growth and militancy, became, once again, invisible (Kostick, 1996; McCabe, 2011). Instead, a coalition of wealthy farmers, the middle classes and the church, through appeals to religion and nation, secured mass support for their stewardship of the new independent state (Ferriter, 2005; McCabe, 2011). But the appalling poverty that helped to fuel this working class activity in the first place remained a stubborn fact of life in the new Ireland and the capital of the Free state was notorious as a city of slums (Daly, 1984; Fagan, 2006; Fagan & Savage, 1995; Kearns, 1994; McManus, 2003) and right across the country the poor were neither blessed or respected under the new dispensation. The first head of state W. T. Cosgrave even opined that it would better if the poorest in Ireland "all took it

into their heads to emigrate" (Ferriter, 2005, p. 186). The new hegemony was consolidated by Fianna Fail who in the 1930s established a firm electoral base amongst the working class in rural and urban Ireland who "saw it as their main hope of advancement" (Allen, 1997, p. 2) and this undermined the parties, unions, organisations which sought to facilitate independent working class activity.

Sections of the working class were deemed as having "weaker moral fibre" (Ferriter, 2004, p. 333) by the powerful and were considered in dire need of the moralising and reforming activity of the Catholic church and I think the state-church nexus is fundamental to understanding Irish society and Irish working class experience in the years following independence. The vast majority of Irish people in the Free State were practicing Catholics and over the course of the nineteenth century the church had built a formidable infrastructure for diffusing a notably pietistic version of Catholicism (Ferriter, 2009; Foster, 1988). As a consequence it was institutionally and culturally in an extremely powerful position after independence to inform dominant notions of what it meant to be Irish (Brown, 1981; Ferriter, 2004; Inglis, 1987). The church promoted and sustained a wide range of social and cultural institutions which shaped working class experience in the Saorstat and the pervasive influence of the Church in the south of Ireland was secured both through providing services and supports and influencing the social imagination through the maintenance of institutions and the creation of a class of intellectuals capable diffusing its ideas (Cox, 2011; McManus, 2003). In particular, one can point to the role of lay orders, confraternities and Catholic social clubs in drawing immense number of people into the orbit of the church and shaping the dynamics and concerns of Irish civil society (Cox, 2011; Silverman, 2001)[75].

The state-church nexus was also responsible for managing coercive institutions through which a steady stream of the Irish working class flowed. In fact, recent reports on child abuse (*Commission for Inquiry into Child Abuse* (CICA), 2009) and first-hand accounts of survivors suggest that the poorer sections of the working class were very often targeted and incarcerated in these reformatories, industrial schools and other carceral institutions (Flynn, 2003; CICA, 2009). Some indication of the classed nature of these institutions can be gathered from the fact that eighty two per cent of the survivors who gave evidence to the commission on child abuse came from the manual working class and only two per cent were

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[75] I would like to thank Laurence Cox for the discussion and debates we have had both on the article cited above and on Irish society which have helped me to think through these issues.

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from a managerial or professional background (CICA, 2009, p. 21). Terry Fagan, an oral historian, has underlined[76] just how important these institutions were in shaping the relationship of some working class communities to the new state and the writer Mannix Flynn (interviewed on TV see Ferriter, 2012) has argued that 'dirty poor' were treated as both a moral and social problem which led to "the confinement and segregation of a class of people who were seen as God's mistake". One of the harshest lessons in silence and force imparted by these institutions was that the poor working class was socially inferior, powerless and voiceless in Irish society.

If class power was enacted and reinforced through lay organisations and penal institutions of course formal educational institutions were just as crucial to how the church and the state shaped and directed society. In the first years of independence education was restructured and professionalised and new exam system was inaugurated (although the physical condition of schools remained quite basic) (Akenson, 1975; Coolohan, 1981). Unsurprisingly, given what has already been said, schools were tasked with ensuring moral development and revitalising the Irish language (Akenson, 1975; Ferriter, 2005; Raftery & Hout, 1993). The exact role of formal education in working class life is not entirely clear and although there was expansion in the numbers of students going on to secondary education between the 1920s and 1960s for most working class children formal education continued to finish at an early age. Ferriter (2005, p. 597) notes that as late as 1961 less than ten per cent of youth aged between 15 and 19 who came from the families of semi-skilled and unskilled workers remained on in education (this is despite the fact that the vocational schools established in 1930s which did create some new educational opportunities for working class, primarily male, youth (see O'Buachalla, 1987).

My main point here is that through a mixture of popular support and state backing the ideas of Catholic Church completely permeated formal and informal education and saturated civil society. This meant that the Catholic Church's notion of social responsibility, of charitable ministry to the poor, and vociferous opposition to socialism, announced in the famous papal encyclical of 1891 *Rerum Novarum*, became part of the common sense of independent Ireland (McManus, 2003). Crucially this helped to define how both society as a whole and the working class themselves understood class relations and learnt to 'know their place'. This

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[76] Personal communication in 2010.

surfaced as one of the crucial themes in Marilyn Silverman's (2001) book about working class experience in which she argues that class distinctions became closely identified with notions of charity, status and respectability. She argues that her research in Thomastown indicates that in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century underemployment had enormously strengthened the power of employers and had forced the working class into maintaining a culture of deference in many everyday interactions with landlords, employers and professionals. This culture of deference was consolidated after independence by a state in which the organised working class had suffered a serious defeat and the middle class has secured a directive role in the new order. The cumulative effect of this was that social and occupational divisions were popularly understood, by *all* sections of society, as a status hierarchy and these notions permeated daily practice in conscious and barely conscious ways. Silverman asserts, based on archival research and interviews, that the working class not only had less power and status but also had to fight much harder to for respect and respectability than other social classes.

Silverman (2001) also documents, and this is touched on in other research (Gibbons, 1996), that efforts to organise working class spaces, such as labour clubs and social nights met sharp opposition in Ireland in this period. This meant that a debilitated labour movement-which was already divided and poorly led -remained toothless (Finn, 2011; O'Connor, 2011). The specific form of state-church hegemony that took shape after independence and a weak labour movement also explains why the tradition of popular independent working class education was so minor in Ireland at this time (Boyd, 1999; Croke & Devine, 2007). I want to argue, building on the general analysis of class formation and classification struggles advanced in the past two chapters, that this is precisely why much of working class life has remained hidden or demeaned in dominant accounts of Irish society.

It is also striking just how durable this hegemony led by nationalist politicians, the middle class, strong farmers and the church proved to be and there is evidence that it persisted in one form or another until at least the 1970s (Eipper, 1986, 1989; Inglis, 1987, 2003; Sweetman, 1972). This link between socio-economic relations and this constellation of ideas about respectability, power and the poor, as defined by nationalist Catholic middle class, is I think immensely important for understanding the roots of contemporary working class experience. Of course things have changed greatly since the foundation and consolidation of the state but the interview data gathered for this research suggest that traces of these ideas

about respectability and social position continues to exert a very powerful influence in Irish society and this has ramifications for how we understand class and education. I also think that the general emphasis on narrowly defined material interests rather than cultural formation in Irish studies of class means that the importance of this vital issue has been largely neglected in the extant literature on working class life (for an example of research that does address this issue see Bridgeman, (2011).

A note of caution needs to sounded here though. I think Cleary (2006, p. 293)[77] is right to point out

> it has become almost axiomatic that Ireland before the 1960s.[...] was essentially a dourly purgatorial society –a place defined not just by its political and economic failure, but an utterly joyless puritanism as well. The trouble with these accounts is not that they are wrong –the poverty, hardship, the crass authoritarianism of the Church and state, the moral puritanism are all patently obvious-but that they elide those more unruly elements in Irish society that were recalcitrant to the dominant culture of the time

The problem is that Irish social history and the social sciences have to date offered very little material through which we can build an alternative version of events. We have fragments of this story from labour history and oral records but the moving beyond this will take far more research. The evidence we do have (Fagan & Savage, 1995, 2006; Ferriter, 2005; Gibbons, 1996; O'Connor, 2011; Pierse, 2011; Silverman, 2001) suggests that the form of class hegemony that took root after independence was incredibly powerful and very difficult to openly resist. Making class visible, let alone asserting class as a central part of an organised political project, in this sort of society is no small matter. This is why I began the section with the quotes from Ernie O'Malley and Todd Andrews on class. In his memoirs O'Malley articulates some of the hopes and ideological insights that surfaced during the struggle for independence and he demonstrates an awareness of class divisions linked to the idea that the new state was expected to change these inequalities. On the other hand Todd Andrews who was an energetic and, in many ways, prototypical figure of this new state, tells us a great deal about what began to pass for common sense amongst the post-independence elite in his writings. I think it is wholly typical, and telling, that he should argue class was really only a residue British rule. Andrews was not alone and this sentiment was repeated by Charles Haughey who also thought class politics was an 'alien gospel'. Class from their perspective is

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77 For a book which takes issue with the basic premises of this argument see Fallon (1998).

basically unIrish, to discuss class is unnecessarily divisive and this is part of a more general form of post-colonial cultural politics contributed to the rather curious idea that Ireland is somehow a 'classless society'. It is not uncommon in post-colonial states to believe that the slate has been 'wiped clean' and the inequalities of the past can be overcome post haste. But after the passing of the dawn holding onto to such ideas, as is the case with both Andrews and Haughey, I would argue, means overlooking the poverty, disrespect, subordination, poorly rewarded work, forced migration, underemployment and unemployment that, as far as we know, has largely shaped Irish working class experience both before and after the foundation of the state (Fagan, 2006; Silverman, 2001).[78]

Class in Ireland needs to analysed on several levels. Long term socio-economic trends most notably dependent development, the effects of the famine and the creation of a class of peasant proprietors in the late nineteenth century means that Ireland's class structure and composition has its own peculiar characteristics. It is also apparent from this review just how pivotal I think political struggles are in defining a society sees itself and construes social division. How we imagine ourselves and our society has been struggled over and refigured throughout the nineteenth century- through Republican and peasant radicalism, O'Connell's very modern form of democratic mobilisation of communities of faith, Fenian and Young Ireland nationalism, the Land War and the series of social and national struggles that played out in the two decades before independence are all fundamental to Irish class formation. To return to the argument made in Chapter Two an examination of Irish history underscores how formation struggles rarely function simply according the algebra of economic interest. As Wright (1989, p. 29 my emphasis) has outlined

> It is *problematic* whether workers will be formed into a class or into some other collectivity based on religion, ethnicity, region, language and, nationality, trade. The class structure may define the terrain of material interests upon which attempts of class formation occur, but it does not uniquely determine the outcomes of these attempts.

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78 To follow up on a remarks made earlier on popular culture it should be noted that the real state of affairs has been explored again and again in fiction; from O'Casey to Liam O'Flaherty's *The Assassin* and Patrick Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger* through to John McGahern's *Amongst Women* up to Roddy Doyle's *A star called Henry*. In these books the frustration of hope and the moral and material limits of life in Ireland, and sense of disappointment in the state after independence is visceral. I am also sympathetic to Ferritter's (2005) argument that more recent 'misery literature'-which drew the ire of many commentators –such as Frank McCourt's *Angela Ashes*-is powerful not because it is yet another predictable tale of self-improvement and adventure but because it struck a chord because it was a reminder of what has so often remained hidden in Ireland.

Reviewing this material it is hard to escape the rather simple, yet far reaching, conclusion, that the issue of class inequality has been invisible for much of Irish history because independent, organised working class movements, using a discourse of class pride and of emancipation, have played a comparatively small role in Irish history. This, I would contend, is the main reason that to this day "many working class customs tend to escape middle class attention and working class people have themselves failed to document the networks, language and customs central to their lives" (O'Neill, 1992, p. 27). In conclusion taking the long view on class in Ireland demonstrates just how useless teleological ideas of history are for understanding class formation and also, I would like to suggest, offers a particularly compelling example of the central role political and cultural classification struggles play in the construction of class.

Section II

The socio-historical background for the interviewees' life stories:

Class and 'late' industrialisation in Ireland from the 1960s to the 1980s

I think it is vital to trace the continuities and breaks in collective experience in order to properly frame the questions that animate this thesis but Ireland in the 1890s, or for that matter in the 1940s, is nonetheless quite distant from the Ireland of today. The remainder of the chapter will discuss Ireland from the 1960s on and will go into greater detail because this is the Ireland where the interviewees grew up and is the period in which the current education system took shape. The first part of this section of the chapter will explore education and class from the 1960s to the 1980s and the second part will look at Irish society, class and education since the 1990s.

There is a well-rehearsed and very familiar narrative in Irish society which is used to explain the development of the Irish economy from the late 1950s onwards as a "belated dash for growth" (Garvin, 2004, p. 198). Critics have rightly claimed this idea-that Ireland had somehow finally 'caught up' with modernity-is an unduly simplistic and highly ideological proposition (Cleary, 2006; Deane, 1997). What cannot be disputed though is that Ireland went through a rapid process of economic modernisation and as a result class composition and class politics changed and, to a large extent, the sources and networks of elite social power were transformed.

Numerous explanations for Ireland's 'late industrialisation', have been put forward. Commentators have highlighted various factors including the leadership of Sean Lemass and his advisers such as T. K. Whittaker, the development of state agencies such as the Industrial Development Agency, the growing influence of powerful bodies such as the Organisation of European Economic Cooperation, the role of the US state, and the emergence of new circuits of global trade and commerce (Breathnach, 2010; Kirby, 2002; McCabe, 2011). Nearly all accounts highlight the fact that as a consequence of liberalisation Ireland has become far more reliant on international capital and multinationals for investment and export led growth (Kirby, 2002, 2010; McCabe, 2011; O'Hearn, 2001). This occurred in three different waves of expansion between the 1950s and 1990s which were punctuated by sharp contractions and recessions. In the sixties and seventies there was a period of intensive industrialisation followed by a winnowing away of Irish industries which were uncompetitive (Breathnach, 2010). There was then a further burst of growth and investment in the late seventies followed by a deep recession in the eighties followed by the Celtic tiger in the mid-nineties (which will be discussed separately below) (Coulter & Coleman, 2003; Kirby, 2002; O'Hearn, 1998).

So what exactly changed in Irish class composition between the 1950s and 1980s? The most sustained attempt to map changes in class and occupation over this period has come from the stratification theorists of the ESRI[79]. As I noted earlier these social scientists have concentrated on elucidating patterns of social mobility and use a class schema based on occupations sorted into classes based on the level of skill required for a particular job (Breen, 2004; Breen & Whelan, 1996; Breen, Hannan, Rottman & Whelan 1990; Hout, 1989; Whelan & Maitre, 2008). Using this schema they have charted the transition of Ireland from a mainly rural, agricultural economy to a predominantly industrial and urban society in the past sixty years (Breen, Hannan, Rottman & Whelan 1990; Erikson & Whelan, 1992). As part of this process of modernisation there has been a steady diminution in the number of unskilled manual working class jobs and an increase in the number of professional-managerial, skilled manual and routine non-manual occupations (Breen, Hannan, Rottman & Whelan 1990; Hout, 1989; Whelan, Breen & Whelan, 1991). Since the 1980s there has been a large rise in the number of women in paid work (Layte & Whelan, 1999).

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79 As an aside, and this relates to the broad arguments made about classification struggles and sociology in Chapter Three, the establishment of the ESRI in 1960 and the the development of large scale quantitative social science is itself one small, but important, aspect of this process of modernisation.

According to these sociologists this occupational transformation is characteristic of patterns of industrialisation which has been observed elsewhere in Europe (Breen, 2004). However, unlike more blithe proponents of modernisation, they acknowledge this type of transformation does not necessarily lead to the lessening of class inequality. An early study of Irish social mobility by Hout (1989) dealing with this exact question came to similar conclusions as Goldthorpe (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992; Goldthorpe, 1996), the nub of which is that despite higher levels of social fluidity class inequality remains one of the major characteristics of industrialised societies. According to Hout (1989) economic liberalisation did lead to greater intergenerational mobility (i.e. children not entering their fathers' social class) but "there has been in particular remarkable stability at the extremes" (i.e. amongst the lower working class and the professional and managerial classes) (Hout,, 1989, p. 146). These findings were confirmed in a later study by Layte and Whelan who found there had been "very modest changes over time and are not consistently in the direction of greater equality" and "the broad pattern of class advantage has been maintained" (1999, p. 17). According to these studies the Irish class structure has consistently privileged people born into families of employers, managers and professionals as well as some farmers. On the other hand there are significant class barriers to social mobility for working class people and they argue that as a result the working class is more likely to encounter poverty, unemployment and, as will discuss in greater detail below, suffer from educational disadvantage. The stratification theorists have repeatedly returned to these themes in various ways and foci and concluded that despite enormous changes in the labour market and increased social fluidity in society there is an identifiable and durable class structure which systematically benefits the middle class[80].

On this level the work of Hout, Whelan and Breen is illuminating but this literature is less helpful in comprehending how this process of liberalisation led to a new spatial organisation of capital or in exploring the role of politics has had in recent Irish class formation. For example Breathnach (2010, p. 1188) notes the growth of manufacturing in Ireland, in the 1970s and early 1980s

> which accelerated following EU entry [was] being guided mainly to non-urban areas, especially in the west of Ireland, while established (and mainly indigenous) industry,

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80 The policy recommendations made by these theorists–which primarily centre on progressive taxation and alleviating poverty-are anchored in these ideas.

which was concentrated in the larger urban centres and had been established with a high level of tariff protection, contracted significantly with exposure to external competition.

I think Breathnach's research indicates how the flows of capital have the power to reshape both space and everyday experience and as we shall see this is directly relevant to the empirical research (see also Harvey, 2010a). These changes helped to transform Ireland and created a pattern of partial deindustrialisation[81] in some areas as well new spaces of accumulation and production-such as business parks in towns and cities and factories in rural areas. The new industries also required extensive new infrastructure to function properly and this in turn created jobs in commerce, construction, professional work, public service, banking and insurance (McCabe, 2011). In the same period new types of alliances were forged between the state, local politicians and global business and these networks of communication, influence and decision making have been crucial in Irish politics since the 1960s and as a consequence local power structures, national politicians and state institutions have become far more sensitive to the needs of foreign investors. Eipper (1989; see also 1986) has documented this process in his fascinating study of the impact the arrival of a multinational had in Bantry in the 1980s and this has also been highlighted in a number of analyses of Irish society since then (Allen, 2007; Kirby, 2002; McCabe, 2011; O'Hearn, 2001). This process required different policies, ideas and ideologies amongst the Irish political class and over time two of the key factions within the dominant group-wealthy farmers and the Catholic Church wielded less and less influence within the state. Instead, multinationals, financiers and developers became the key players in shaping economic, and to a certain extent social, policy (O'Hearn, 1998; McCabe, 2011). It has been convincingly argued that this type of modernisation follows a pattern of economic development which is wholly characteristic of newly developing economies in that the Irish state has chosen to create an unusually favourable tax and regulatory environments for business in order to attract international capital into the country (Kirby, 2002; O'Hearn, 1998). These critics also argue that this meant, and still means, that although this can lead to high levels of growth in GDP it does not necessarily lead to job creation, investment in research and development or even higher wages (Kirby, 2002; O'Hearn, 1998).

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81 There are numerous examples of this one of the most vivid examples is the transformation of Dublin's docks. Containerisation and the decline in the importance of livestock exports through Dublin port created mass unemployment. In the 1990s it became a site of property speculation and a key node in the burgeoning financial sector see O'Toole (2009) and McCabe (2011) for further details.

These policies radically changed the nature of work in Ireland and the number of PAYE workers grew from 180,000 in 1960 to 605,000 in 1970 (Allen, 1997, p. 124). This growth in waged work meant that by 1980 twenty five per cent of the workforce was involved in manufacturing (often for multinational companies) (McCabe, 2011) and Ireland's economy and class composition in many respects became more 'typical' of a Western European country. What impact did this have on Irish politics? There is evidence that this helped to create new forms of political culture and a number of social movements which were built around some notion of working class identity between the 1960s and 1980s. The growth in housing struggles, working class community activism, sporadic trade union militancy, the tax marches, anti-drug campaigns, the Gregory deal for the north inner city and the electoral success of the Workers Party in the 1980s can, I think, all be accurately described as evidence of the emergence of a new form of self-conscious working class politics (Allen, 1990, 1997; Hanley & Millar, 2009; Lyder, 2005; Sweetman, 1972; Workers Party, 1978). However, it is important not to exaggerate the effect this recomposition had on Irish politics and as Mair (1992, p. 386) notes, despite the existence of relatively strong unions and high numbers of people describing themselves as 'working class' in surveys between 1950 and 1980 left wing parties only garnered between 10.9 per cent and 12.8 per cent of the vote (in a period in which the mean was 40 per cent across Western Europe)[82].

Allen (1997) ascribes the weakness of the left to Fianna Fail's influence on the Irish working class. This is a central factor in understanding class in Irish politics but I think there is at least one other major reason why this might be the case based in part on the empirical data gathered for the research. Large sections of the Irish working class, especially amongst the manual working class in deindustrialised areas, endured very harsh social conditions between the 1960s and 1990s and mass unemployment, forced migration and poverty were defining experiences in many working class communities (O'Neill, 1992; Sweetman, 1972). However, the occupational upgrading and fluidity described by the stratification theorists also meant that some sections of the working class enjoyed new cultural and economic opportunities or found themselves in white collar work which was clearly distinguishable, and widely perceived as better, than the sort of traditional working class-often manual- jobs that their parents had done. Over the course of the research the interviewees would often discuss their

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82 Mair says that in a European values survey about class identities 41.9 percent of the people surveyed in Ireland designated themselves as working class. This level of self-description as working class was the second highest in all the countries surveyed (the UK came first).

lives in relation to these longer family stories of two or three generations and this sense of some material improvement and the possibility or the reality of upward social trajectories, despite economic difficulties, is sociologically meaningful and very salient to a class analysis.

The restructuring of Irish education

The interviews also suggest education now occupies a central role in mediating social expectations and hopes and that increased access to education is integral to understanding the changing nature and meaning of class in Irish society. It is well known that the state led project of economic liberalisation in the 1960s resulted in large scale educational reforms. This process was stewarded by the two energetic ministers- Patrick Hillery and Donogh O'Malley -and public spending on education doubled as a proportion of GDP over the 1960s (Raftery & Hout, 1993). The state initiated a large school building programme and subsidies and capital grants were also made available (Ferriter, 2005). Most importantly of all secondary education became free in 1967 and a means tested grant for university was introduced in 1968 (Raftery & Hout, 1993).

International institutions also began to play role in shaping and driving educational change in Ireland at this time. For example the seminal 1966 *Investment in Education Report* was drawn up by the Department of Education in co-operation with the OECD and the introduction of free secondary education was a direct response to the comparative data published in a UNESCO report (Ferriter, 2005). International bodies such as the OECD, and later the EU, have had a decisive influence on Irish educational policy ever since and helped to establish the issues which remain the guiding concerns of policymakers today- the integration of educational policy within broader visions of social change based on economic modernisation linked to an aspiration to greater social equality.

The reforms led to a steep rise in participation rates in secondary education- which stood at eight per cent at the foundation of the state and climbed to sixty per cent in 1975 and rose to seventy five per cent in 1986 (Raftery & Hout, 1993). Similarly, access to third level education was restricted to a tiny elite (in 1925 the participation rate was only 1.5 per cent) and attending university remained a very rarefied social experience for the first four decades following Irish independence (Raftery & Hout, 1993). However, as part of these educational reforms a commission for Higher Education was established in 1960 with the intention of

developing a plan for a more diversified and modern tertiary educational system. A governing authority for HE was established on an ad hoc basis in 1968 and given statutory authority in 1971 which became the Higher Education Authority (HEA) (O'Buachalla, 1987). There was also a re-evaluation of the role of technical and scientific knowledge in society and the establishment of the legal and physical infrastructure for the current binary system of education can be traced back to the establishment of Regional Technical colleges in the 1960s and 1970s (White, 2001).

Although the full effect of these reforms took a number of years to become clear the changing nature of educational provision adds another socio-cultural layer to the picture I have been sketching out and I think helped to create the sense that some new opportunities were becoming available to some working class people. Perhaps just as importantly, but this is far less widely discussed, there seems to have been a shift in educational expectations which is not solely due to the changing nature of state funded education between the 1970s and 1980s. At this time there was mushrooming of independent grassroots community groups, more often than not led by women, and more often than not in working class communities who organised a wide range of non-accredited educational programmes based on skill sharing, personal development and empowerment (Inglis, 1993). These initiatives established a good deal of the infrastructure for contemporary adult education and the some of the ideas and practices which have since been adopted by university outreach programmes. Little research exists on this topic but it is worth remembering that the changing nature of educational aspirations cannot be solely ascribed to systemic pressures and top down initiatives.

Conclusion

I think a socio-political analysis of changes that occurred between the 1960s and the 1990s is absolutely crucial to grasping the nature contemporary Irish working class experience inside and outside educational institutions. A move away from a predominantly rural economy, the growth in the number of professional, skilled manual and white collar jobs, the gradual feminisation of work, the increasing influence of multinational capital and the new spatial organisation of industry led to profound renegotiation of the meaning of work in Ireland. This in turn changed the nature of rural and urban culture and the way we think of gender and class. Ireland became a more fluid society and the importance of these shifts can be clearly discerned in a number of memoirs (Kerrigan, 1998; Sheridan, 2012) and in a collection of interviews about class (O'Dea, 1994). From the little literature available, it appears that Irish

working class culture before economic liberalisation was defined by shared expectations, solidarism and, for the most part, limited opportunities for social mobility (Fagan & Savage,, 1995, 2006; Johnston, 1985; Kearns, 1994, 1998; O'Neill, 1992; Silverman, 2001). Furthermore, up to the 1950s working class jobs largely involved manual work in Ireland and a small number of large employers often dominated the labour market in many Irish towns and cities (Sheridan, 2012; Silverman, 2001) and this changed as international capital came to Irish shores. At the same time Ireland also became a producer and consumer in an expanding global mass culture of TV, radio, music, films, images, sport and books in which Anglophone culture was particularly important. Consequently, the range of cultural resources available to make sense of everyday life was also greatly enlarged and also became far more intensely commodified (Gibbons, 1996). I believe these shifts-economic, spatial, cultural and political-weakened traditional patterns of deference and dependency and made it far less easy to subordinate the Irish working class within the established hegemonic ideas which drew deeply on Catholicism and nationalism and was shaped by ideas of the piety of sacrifice.

The composition of the Irish working class became much more similar to other industrialised European countries and, to a noticeable extent, working class politics and culture became more visible in this period. The Irish working class in towns and cities across the country was now linked to the circuits of multinational capital and were working in new types of jobs and often lived in recently built estates (Bolger, 1988; McCabe, 2011). This liberalisation brought busts and booms, greater levels of consumer income as well as deindustrialisation, unemployment and forced migration, and new opportunities in work and education and novel forms of politics and culture. I strongly suspect that as a result of these changes working class experience became far more diversified in Ireland. It should be noted though that this is speculative and the gaps in our knowledge on this subject, at least in social science, are enormous; we know very little about everyday culture, and have little sense of how class boundaries were managed and transgressed on a daily basis or how individuals saw their own efforts to move away from their background or sought to maintain their ties and bonds within established working class communities. In a small, relatively fluid and rapidly changing country these are very important sociological questions but the layered and contradictory experience of class and social power has been largely ignored by sociology and cultural historians.

We thus arrive at the 1990s with cluster of meanings around the idea of class which carry the traces of a long history and more recent transitions. There is the experience of poverty, subordination and disrespect deeply embedded in Irish society and a flux characterised by new opportunities and new threats brought about by the liberalisation of the economy and culture. In this manner the Irish working class arrived at the edge of the twentieth first century through a very different path of formation than the European or British working class whose experience is usually deemed 'typical'. Amongst other things the organised working class never dominated politics in the same way and subsequently, I think the idea of a shared working class identity played a much smaller role in defining popular culture and politics than for example in say Britain or France (Lamont, 2000; Savage, 2000). The organised Irish working class had neither the myth of ascendancy or the myth of absolute and irrevocable decline which occurred in Italy, France, Germany or even the US working class in the 1980s and the 1990s but I do think there is evidence that in Ireland between the 1970s and 1980s this class began represent itself more effectively and this affected mainstream politics.

Neoliberal Ireland: a classy nation in boom and crisis

The extraordinary and unprecedented economic boom between the mid-1990s and 2008 created a new Ireland- the country of 'The Celtic Tiger'. The phrase 'Celtic Tiger was repeated with tedious regularity during the long decade of Irish growth and it now sounds very dated and worn but it became a clichéd phrase precisely because is so neatly captured the sense of dynamism that pervaded Ireland from the mid-1990s until, with some qualifications, 2007. Economic growth was so rapid that it even convinced sections of the Irish elite, and a large portion of the Irish population, that we had discovered a way to surf the waves of globalisation so ably that we could now teach the world how to successfully manage post-industrial development (O'Toole, 2009). Developing countries around the world were invited to emulate the Celtic Tiger and one respected economist and *New York Times* commentator even argued that highly developed economies such as Germany should now, as he rather embarrassingly put it, 'Follow the Leapin Leprauchan' (Friedman, 2005). So for a time Ireland became truly modern, or even postmodern, untrammelled by the limits of its colonial past and haphazard path of economic modernisation followed since independence as it launched itself into a future of endless possibility. Given earlier history it is wholly unsurprising that in these circumstances class inequality was largely viewed as a marginal social phenomena of little concern to a busy, consumer society in which we were culturally reinventing the meaning of being Irish (Kirby, Gibbons, & Cronin, 2002). This section of the

chapter will explore how the boom and the spectacular meltdown that followed the boom, during which the field research was undertaken, led to further changes in the occupational structure, altered material and cultural expectations, including of education, and ultimately helped to change, once again, the way we view and talk about class.

The boom generated a good deal of ridiculous hyperbole but the speed and extent of the transformation of Irish society was truly phenomenal and there is a large swathe of popular and academic literature from a range of disciplines that explores the 'Celtic Tiger' (Allen, 2000; 2007; Cleary, 2006; Coulter & Coleman, 2003; Fahey, Russell & Whelan, 2007; Jacobson, Kirby & Ó Broin, 2006; Kirby, 2010; Lynch, 2006; McCabe, 2011; McWilliams, 2005; Nolan, O'Connell & Whelan, 2000; O'Hearn, 1998, 2001; O'Toole, 2003, 2009; Mac Sharry & White, 2000; O'Riain, 2000; 2004; O'Riain & O'Connell, 2000; Smith, 2005; Sweeney, 1998). The headline figures were certainly remarkable; there was a sixty five per cent increase in GDP between 1994 and 2000 (O'Reardon, 2001), an average annual GDP growth rate of between seven and twelve per cent during the height of the boom (Kirby, 2002), and massive increases in real income and consumer spending (NESC, 2003; Smith, 2005). Unemployment went from seventeen per cent in 1985 to just under three per cent in 2006 and Ireland experienced population growth and an expansion of over half a million people in the active workforce. It also led to the further feminisation of the labour market (according to the CSO in 1993 there were 435,000 women in paid work in 2004 there were 787,000 women). Ireland also became ethnically and culturally a far less homogeneous place and in the 2006 census ten per cent of the population were originally from countries outside of Ireland.

So although the aleatory rhetoric about the Celtic Tiger was never completely credible it was at least understandable. Yet for some commentators the boom appeared to be little short of a secular miracle (Sweeney, 1998) and until recently much of the work dealing with this period (Fitz Gerald, 2000; Mac Sharry & White, 2000) was remarkably uncritical employing a very limited sets of indices for judging social development. These writers completely failed to interrogate how the vast wealth accumulated during this period of economic growth was used, who was directing social change and what this might mean for Irish society in the future. A deep and ongoing recession, which began as a banking crisis in 2008 and developed into a grave socio-economic crisis has meant there paeans to progress are now thin on the

ground and these events have prompted a good deal of useful critical reflection (Cooper, 2009, 2011; Finn, 2011; Kirby, 2010; McCabe, 2011; O'Riain, 2009; O'Toole, 2009).

I think that the boom and meltdown are inexplicable without reference to the state taxation and regulatory policies used to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) from multinational capital (O'Toole, 2009). The growth in the signature industries of the Celtic Tiger-computers, pharmaceuticals, light engineering, and financial services- was part of the long-standing pattern of state intervention to attract and support foreign capital (Allen, 2007; O'Hearn, 1998; O'Riain & O'Connell, 2000; McCabe, 2011) but a number of conjunctural factors in the 1990s, namely a greater buoyancy in the US economy and the further integration of the European Union as a single market, meant that Ireland was particularly well placed to take advantage of multinational investment at this time. This is only the first part of the tale of the Tiger and the key drivers of the economy in the latter part of the boom, approximately from 2001, until the financial crisis of 2008 were credit driven consumption, construction, and above all property and financial speculation. While there has been a tendency to concentrate on the role of frenzied consumption of 'unruly spirits' in the Celtic Tiger (Williams, 2005) more recent research has highlighted the loosening and growth of financial markets across the world[83] and the strengthening of the links between financiers, speculators and developers in Irish politics as the causal factors in the 'overheating' of the Irish economy (Cooper, 2009, 2011; McCabe, 2011; O' Riain, 2009; O'Toole, 2009)[84]. This pattern of multinational led growth, financial speculation and meltdown can be clearly linked to the development of an Irish version of neoliberalism. I have explored the proposition that Irish state was reconfigured as part of a global neoliberal revolution and that in many respects free market ideas are now the determining and dominant ideas in Irish society in considerable detail elsewhere (Finnegan, 2007; 2008). Rather than repeat this here for the purposes of the present study I will very briefly outline what I think happened, and why, and then devote most of my attention to how this can be linked to the question of class analysis.

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83 This of course reflects the massive growth in financial speculation mentioned in Chapter Three see (Graeber, 2010; Harvey, 2005, 2010a; Mason, 2011) .

84 It should be said that I disagree with these writers in one important respect. Broadly speaking O'Toole (2009) and O'Riain (2009) describe a 'healthy'period of growth followed by an unhealthy burst of speculation.The figures presented by O'Riain are striking: a 466 per cent increase in lending by financial institutions from 1998 to 2007 (O'Riain, 2009). This is linked to a big increase in property speculation (in 1998 4.7 per cent of total lending and in 20.9 per cent in 2007) with an increase in personal mortgages (29 to 33 percent) in the same period and very little lending used for research and development but this story of a good boom and a bad boom is not credible when one takes into account the marked continuities in policy, decision making and social structures between the late 1980s and 2008.

Neoliberalism was, and is, primarily a project aimed at the restoration of elite power, which began as a response to the disintegration of Keynesianism and became a global phenomenon linked to the political, cultural, economic and spatial reorganisation of capital (Finnegan, 2007; Harvey, 2005; 2010a). It was above all a bid to define a new 'common sense' which largely succeeded in promoting the idea that the 'business' of public life is to provide the economic and regulatory conditions that favour capital and maximise profitability. This was, in part, achieved through the creation of a discourse[85]which was spread far and wide by public intellectuals, think tanks and universities (Harvey, 2005) and copper-fastened through trade agreements and policies drawn up by the transnational bodies such as the WTO , the G8 and the IMF. The main features of this neoliberal discourse are now very familiar indeed-the absolute necessity to maintain, at all costs, competitiveness and flexibility within the global market and the related assertion that the market operates according to its own immutable and natural laws which must be obeyed.

In response to the 1980s economic crisis the Irish state began to adopt some of the nostrums of neoliberal thinking and economists, consultants and a number of prominent politicians drew up a programme of market deregulation, financialisation, marketisation and to a lesser extent privatisation (Allen, 2007; Murphy, 2004; O'Toole, 2009; Sweeney, 2004). The Irish state began to promote the language and model of the market in the public sphere in unprecedented ways and attempted to commodify public services and goods -in health, education and water and waste disposal- which had been traditionally been seen as distinct from the market (Allen, 2007; O'Donovan & Casey, 1995). These policy initiatives were one element in a broader public discourse promoting competition and individualism (Allen, 2007; Lynch, 2006; O'Riain, 2004). These cultural shifts have also affected Higher education (Allen, 2007) and Lynch (2006, p. 1) argues that universities "have been transformed increasingly into powerful consumer-oriented corporate networks, whose public interest values have been seriously challenged". Lynch and Allen discern a new form of managerialism in HE which plans, measures and evaluates teaching, learning and research according to the logic of the market. Just as importantly this period further consolidated networks between business and politics-what some commentators have termed 'crony

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85 Clearly the critical realist distinction between transitive and intransitive dimensions of knowledge means that loose use of the word discourse needs to be avoided. Here it is understood " in the strong sense of that versatile term; a historically formed set of topics and procedures that both drives and regulates the utterance of the individuals who inhabit it, and assigns them definite positions in the field of meaning it delimits" (Mulhern, 2000, p. xiv).

capitalism'- in which decision making on important social issues became even further removed from any meaningful form of democratic oversight including, fatally, the financialisation of the Irish economy (Allen, 2007; Cooper, 2009, 2011; O'Toole, 2009).

It should be noted that this certainly not how these changes were represented by policymakers and politicians at the time. For historical reasons Irish, and for that matter many European neoliberals, have chosen to employ a corporatist, consensual rhetoric that links the market to notions of meritocracy, modernisation *and* social equality. As the British critic and historian Perry Anderson has observed, in certain cases "the winning formula to seal the victory of the market is not to attack, but to preserve, the placebo of a compassionate public authority, extolling the compatibility of competition and solidarity." (2000, p. 11). This approach dovetailed nicely with sensibility and practices of mainstream Irish politics which is dominated by a type of pragmatic populism. Besides which the fact that this 'neoliberal turn' occurred during a long boom meant that successive governments were also able to increase public spending in many areas while implementing neoliberal reforms (O'Toole, 2009). So following Kirby (2002, 2010) I want to acknowledge the specific historical trajectory and political characteristics of Irish society but contend that the state is firmly wedded to a neoliberal model of development. It operates as, what Kirby has called, pace Cerny, a 'market state' where the priorities and needs of business come first and the overall orientation towards the market puts powerful limits on what is deemed possible to achieve. Importantly, the development of a neoliberal state does not exclude the possibility that a state might increase expenditure on social initiatives or claim to be acting on behalf of the poor and in the interests of equality (Kirby, 2002). I think this notion of the market state helps to clarify the disjunction between policy rhetoric and the actual workings of power in Ireland which was a recurrent feature of Irish politics in this era. For example Murphy (2004) has noted in a study of government anti-poverty policies and social partnership agreements in this period that there was a clear commitment to eradicating poverty but within such documents the 'strong discourse' of the competitive economy was deployed alongside the weak and vaguely defined discourse of social inclusion; of course the discourse of economic imperatives and laws prevailed. Arguably, this helps to explain why even though there were substantial increases in government expenditure on welfare during the boom the state completely failed to address structural inequalities (Turner & Haynes, 2006).

So what effect did the configuration of a 'market state' and the growth of neoliberal discourse have on class and classification? In Chapter Three it was suggested that class is usefully conceptualised as the product of the structuring of social space through differentials in ownership, authority and legitimate cultural capital and obviously the development of an Irish market state had an effect on these things- often in a readily quantifiable way. For instance, a number of studies indicate that income and wealth inequality increased during the boom (Allen, 2000, 2007: Kirby, 2002, 2010; O'Hearn, 1998). These authors argue that there was a diminution in the social wage, as measured through wages, pensions and social welfare, and a concomitant increase in the level of private profit. Allen calculates the adjusted wage share for employees dropped from seventy one per cent of GDP in the 1980s to fifty four per cent between 2001 and 2007 (2010, p. 26). While this is partially due to the increase in the number of self-employed workers in the economy, to changes in the type of manufacturing taking place in Ireland, and is affected by how output and profit is calculated for tax purposes by multinationals, it also demonstrates that the tax system increasingly favoured the wealthy (Allen, 2007; Callan & Nolan, 2000; CORI, 2007).

What is more this data almost certainly underestimates the full extent of social polarisation due to the under-reporting of income by the very wealthy and the difficulty of assessing the exact concentration of wealth held in other forms such as assets, capital and shares (O'Reardon, 2001). There has been very little systematic research undertaken on the rich in Ireland but some idea of the extent of this inequality can be gleaned from research commissioned by the Bank of Ireland in 2007 (O'Sullivan, 2007). This publication estimated that in 2006 that the top one per cent of the Irish population held twenty per cent of the wealth, the top two per cent held thirty per cent and the top five per cent held forty per cent. However, if we exclude the value of housing wealth and focus primarily on financial wealth, the concentration of wealth increases and one per cent of the population holds around thirty four per cent of the wealth.

Further evidence of polarisation in Irish society is to be found in the annual reports of the United Nations Development Programme who pointed out despite a massive increase in per capita GDP and a consistent movement upwards through the development rankings in the time of the Tiger Ireland remained one of the most unequal of similarly developed countries and had the second lowest ranking in the Human Poverty Index which measures comparative poverty (UNDP, 2007). UN development reports between 2000 and 2007 also documented a

lower level of social spending on health and education than other similarly developed countries (see also Hughes, 2007). For obvious reasons state protection and universal social goods are more important to the working class than the wealthy (especially for the most vulnerable sections of the working class) (Savage, 2000). This contention is lent even further credibility by a recent European Union statistical survey that measured the level of social protection offered by the various European states and found that Ireland scored poorly in comparison to most of the long-standing members of the European Union (Eurostat, 2011).

Breathnach's (2002, 2007) research on the changing nature of the occupational structure in the 1990s augments the evidence that there has been a polarisation in Irish society (and amends some of the findings of the stratification theorists described earlier). Like the ESRI Breathnach argues that there has been considerable occupational upgrading and growth in the number of employers, managers and technical workers in the Irish labour market since the 1980s. But one of the most noteworthy aspects of Breathnach's research is that he recoded the occupational data gathered by the CSO. By doing this Breathnach identifies a pattern that had hitherto attracted little comment; he discerns two poles of growth in the labour market, there are more people in professional and technical work but there has been an increase in routine unskilled work. There has also been a steady contraction in moderately well paid 'blue collar' industrial and administrative work.[86] On this basis Breathnach concluded that the CSO has underestimated the growth of routine and poorly paid work in retail and personal services in the past decade. So in 2002, when the economy was very strong, and bearing in mind that this was still before the height of the construction boom, Breathnach states that just under thirty per cent of the workforce were doing unskilled work (2007, p. 35). As education is one of the main paths used by individuals to move away from routine work into technical and professional occupations these changes are important for educational scholars. It is hardly an accident that the present research and previous work I have done clearly indicates that the hope that one can make a transition between the routine to skilled work through acquiring formal credentials is a significant factor in how working class students now view education (Fleming, Loxley, Kenny & Finnegan, 2010).

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86 Fahey, Russell & Whelan (2007) suggest that wage inequality in this period lessened because 'traditional' working class jobs such as construction, to which there are few educational barriers to entry, fetched high wages due a general labour shortage (see also Layte & Whelan, 2000) . But sectoral and/or a short-term decreases in wage inequality do not invalidate the polarisation thesis.

It is also noteworthy that throughout the boom all the main trade unions were involved in 'social partnership' with the state and business and embraced a consensual model of industrial relations (Sweeney, 1998). In this regard I suspect it is telling that over the past twenty years although there has been a small rise in union membership union density, that is the share of the workforce as whole that is unionised, has dropped from sixty one per cent in 1985 to thirty two per cent in 2007 (Allen, 2010, p. 28). Of course many of the multinationals who arrived in Ireland in the Tiger years discouraged or even refused to recognise unions (Allen, 2010). As a result during partnership unions became increasingly associated with white collar and civil service work and union density amongst manual workers including in construction, and non-manual routine service work such as restaurants and bars fell dramatically. Furthermore, there was a high concentration of migrants in routine work (Breathnach, 2007) and young and migrant workers are now less likely to belong to unions (Allen, 2010). What these trends seem to indicate is that trade unions became increasingly disconnected from the least secure sections of the working class and more firmly aligned with workers in better paid 'white collar' and sometimes professional work (for example teachers).

In the mid-nineties community groups were also brought into partnership structures-an area which had been in the 1970s and 1980s a forum, and arguably even a laboratory for new forms of working class politics (Cox & Mullan, 2001). The unions and the community sector to jointly threw their weight behind interventions such as the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) in which the putative aim was to mobilise "all sections of Irish society in building a fair society" (NAPS, 1998, p. i). As we have seen this did not happen on a number of levels and some participants in the social partnership process have pointed out that the models and indices of development used within the partnership process, with the focus on 'issue' of poverty in a free market rather the distribution of social wealth, limited the possibility of genuinely egalitarian outcomes (CWC 2003a; 2003b; Zappone, 1998; see also Geoghean & Powell, 2004 for useful background on this).

I would argue that the partnership process as a whole contributed to a rather lopsided and incomplete notion of what was occurring in Irish society in terms of inequality. Issues of class inequality were subordinated, or folded into, a discourse about poverty and poverty relief at this time. I think Allen is correct when he argues "poverty is a state that affects sections of the working class rather than constituting the basis of class itself" (2000, p. 44) but throughout this period unions, community groups and social scientists, more often than not, focussed on

the most marginal and vulnerable parts of the working class (Callan, 1996; Callan & Barrett, 2006; Nolan & Callan, 1996; Pringle, 1999). I would contend this served to update and extend a common sense notion, grounded in a Catholic idea of charity, that social policy should be orientated toward the amelioration of poverty rather than to substantive equality. So while poverty was a very visible issue in the Tiger years very little social science or public comment gave any indication either that inequality was increasing or that a sizeable percentage of jobs created in the Tiger economy were routine, often non-unionised, and often unrewarding jobs.

So instead of class and equality we discussed poverty. I think this is theoretically and politically questionable at any time but in the midst of a boom in which wages in many sectors were high and in which cheap credit was readily available to the majority of people this is even more problematic. If poverty dominated one pole of the sociological imagination the economist David McWilliam's adventure in popular social science (2005) provides us with a different lens to understand society at this time. McWilliams set out to identify the principle of differentiation amongst the Celtic cubs -'the Pope's children'-in terms of consumption and taste-and his book and the TV programme did reflect new realities in work, leisure and consumption. Its lack of merit as social science is not really important; what is significant is that encouraged the idea that Ireland consisted of 'contented majority' equally sharing in the benefits of modernisation with the poor imagined as some sort of residual problem (Allen, 2000). The same pattern can be seen in crime reporting- another Tiger growth industry. When working class areas were featured in the media in the late 1990s and 2000s it was increasingly in relation to gang culture and drugs. In contrast, in the 1980s magazines such as *Magill* and journalists such as Gene Kerrigan and Nell McCafferty had used crime reporting to look at society as a whole. However, a flurry of books, films and documentaries and an endless slew of articles about crime in the 1990s changed the terms under which this work was done and severe, and deeply rooted, social problems were sensationalised by journalists such as the execrable Paul Williams (2003) through tales of a dangerous underworld. I mention this because I think Williams and McWilliams contributed to a more general tendency in the politics of representation in which the poorest section of working class Ireland began to be depicted as an 'underclass'.

My argument here is that in neoliberal Ireland the terms under which the Irish working class had become visible in the 1980s were contested and transformed through notions of the contented majority, consumer choice, poverty, crime and the politics of partnership. A diminishing sense of class inequality as important issue fitted neatly into a larger story that Ireland had finally shed the tardy and inefficient cultural and economic habits that were holding back social progress (Garvin, 2004) In this conjuncture class could easily be imagined simply as a marginal social phenomena, a residue of times past, rather than a central social division which is related to broader questions about power, distribution and human flourishing. I think Irish neoliberalism consolidated the policy shift made in the 1960s to develop Ireland as an open and liberal economy and also led to changes in economic policy and public discourse which has weakened the idea of collective agency, encouraged selfish individualism and shrunk the public sphere (Kirby, Gibbons, & Cronin, 2002). This led us to ignore the low levels of social spending, increasing inequality and occupational polarisation and concentrate intermittently on poverty and associated social problems. So in the midst of the boom class, once again, largely disappeared in the public sphere but this time the invisibility of class was far more clearly moored in the ideas and ideologies of international change. The Celtic Tiger was built on the hope of limitless velocity and fluidity of late capitalism and modernisation meant we could all be wealthy. I believe that Irish neoliberalism copper-fastened inequality and guaranteed that important sources of social power remain outside popular democratic control and ultimately led the state into serious recession and crisis. Over the period of the research private bank debt has been transformed into public debt and has resulted in swingeing austerity cuts (Killian, Garvey, & Shaw, 2011). The cuts have intensified the logic of the boom and the CSO (2011) has reported increased income inequality and community projects aim at combating disadvantage have been gutted (Harvey, 2012). Unemployment is now at thirteen per cent and mass emigration has returned to Irish life but due to partnership and the pattern of class recomposition the organised working class has probably never been weaker.

The expansion of education in Ireland

Yet access to educational credentials, a key form of legitimate cultural capital, has become easier in recent history and, on the surface, suggests that polarisation is not having a direct effect on the educational system. However, I will argue later that educational 'careers' and institutional cultures remain classed in important ways and that these polarisation processes are indeed shaping HE albeit indirectly. Before I can explore this I want to outline the main

trends observable in educational provision. There has been a large increase in the demand for secondary and tertiary education since the 1980s and today over ninety per cent of fifteen to nineteen year olds participate in education and thirty five per cent of the adult population have completed secondary education or some form of non-tertiary post-secondary education (OECD, 2012).

The rate of expansion in tertiary education is even more striking. The introduction of free universal secondary education, the development of a grant system and the establishment of technical colleges in the 1960s laid the basis for the 'mass' tertiary system as we now know it. Initially though, the pace of change in HE was much slower than in secondary education and although participation rates did increase in the 1960s this tailed off for a period in the early 1970s (Raftery & Hout, 1993[87]). In 1969 there was a participation rate of eleven per cent (Raftery & Hout, 1993) and this rose to twenty per cent of school leavers in 1980 and then to forty six per cent in 1998 and up fifty five per cent in 2004 (McCoy, Byrne, O'Connell, Kelly, & Doherty, 2010). Most of this growth occurred between the mid-1980s and the late 1990s and although this had slowed down in the past three years, largely as a consequence of the economic crisis, there has been another spurt (a 13.2 per cent increase in 2010 according to the HEA (2011). The participation rate is now above both the EU and OECD average and thirty six per cent of the adult population have now completed some form of tertiary education (OECD, 2011). Colleges in the Republic of Ireland are currently catering for 188,000 undergraduate and graduate students (HEA, 2011) out of a population of 4.5 million. This follows the pattern mapped out in Chapter Four of the international expansion and diversification; perhaps the only significant difference is that his has happened in quite a short time frame, in comparison to many Western European countries. The modernisation of the Irish education system has been rapid and in many respects very successful (Hughes, 2007) but educational attainment within the Irish population remains both uneven and very unequal[88].

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87 See O'Buachalla for a slightly different interpretation of the general trend at this time and who emphases the increase in numbers- 16,300 students in 1963 and 33,000 in 1975 (1987, p. 246)

88 Ireland is still below the average of similarly developed countries is of the number of people who have completed a full secondary education (OECD, 2011). Research undertaken in the mid-nineties in co-operation with the OECD found fifty five per cent of adults between the ages of 16 and 64 had very low levels of literacy (Morgan, Hickey, & Kellaghan, 1997). International research has also underlined that the level of adult participation in lifelong learning, which includes informal and non-formal activity, has historically been lower in Ireland than in other comparable countries. A recent European publication includes an overview of lifelong learning across the EU (Eurostat, 2011, p. 67) indicates that there has been some improvement in the

Inequality in education: Quantitative data and egalitarian research

One of the most consistent and important findings of Irish social science is that despite this rapid expansion Irish education continues to be characterised by very high levels of class inequality in participation and attainment at both secondary and tertiary level. This has been documented in numerous studies undertaken from variety of theoretical perspectives (Akenson, 1975; Breen & Whelan, 1992; Clancy, 1982, 1988, 1995, 2001; Clancy & Wall, 2000; Drudy & Lynch, 1993; Hout, 2004; Raftery & Hout, 1985, 1993; Layte & Whelan, 1999; Lynch, 1987, 1989, 1999; Lynch & O'Riordan, 1998; McCoy & Byrne, 2011b; O'Connell, 2005; Smyth & McCoy, 2009; Whelan, 1994; Whelan & Hannan, 1999; Whelan & Whelan, 1985).

The stratification theorists assert that the wealthiest and most privileged still dominate the highest reaches of the education system and consistently secure advantageous social outcomes through education (Hout, 2004; Raftery & Hout, 1985, 1993; Layte & Whelan, 1999; Whelan & Hannan, 1999; Whelan & Whelan, 1985; Smyth & McCoy, 2009). The availability of resources and opportunities allow wealthier students to attend better schools, they perform better at reading, maths and in exams and they are more successful at identifying the most socially and financially beneficial pathways through the educational system (Whelan & Hannan, 1999: Smyth & McCoy, 2009)[89]. This group of social scientists believe that education now has a role in maintaining inequality (Layte & Whelan, 1999; Whelan & Whelan, 1985; Whelan & Hannan, 1999) and in fact research in Ireland has been important in the development of the 'maximally maintained inequality thesis' internationally (Hout, 1993; Raftery & Hout, 1985, 1993) These findings have led Whelan and Hannan to acerbically note that "the middle classes of the Republic of Ireland have succeeded admirably in [maintaining inequality] while continuing to espouse the rhetoric of equality of opportunity and denying the reality of class" (1999, p. 304). They argue that the cumulative effect of economic and educational privilege is enormous and affects health, employment and life conditions, (Smyth & McCoy, 2009).

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participation levels of adults in formal and non-formal learning in Ireland (from 6.1 per cent of the adult population in 2005 to 6.3 per cent in 2009). However, this is still low by European standards (9.3 per cent for EU 27).

89 They argue this is the case even when allowing for differences in that powerful but rather nebulous idea of 'ability'.

A small number of authors, many of whom are based or associated with in the *School for Social Justice,* UCD have gone further and explored this issue through mixed methods and qualitative research (Bissett, 2000; Lynch, 1999; O'Neill, 1992). The work of Kathleen Lynch (1985, 1987, 1989, 1999, 1994, 2002) has been foundational to these efforts and she has developed the argument made by Whelan and Hannan that education has a role in the maintenance of class advantage in a theoretically substantive way and in a politically egalitarian direction. Lynch's early work (1985, 1987) used quantitative and qualitative research and discovered deep rooted class and gender biases in pedagogy, curricula and the subject choice available in different schools. Lynch also came to the conclusion that the organisation of learning in schools often served to naturalise the idea of fixed intelligence through streaming- and this has compounded class inequality (Lynch 1987). Later Lynch (1999) undertook even more ambitious research in schools, communities and colleges and traced the experience of inequality across the educational system and again found deeply embedded patterns of disadvantage.

What is significant for this thesis is the argument made by Lynch and other egalitarians that educational equality is not just a function of differential access to material resources. According to these theorists we need to also grasp how the practices and values of institutions shape educational relationships (Lynch, 1999) and we need to be cognisant of the impact of cultural factors; this includes how working class culture is represented and described within an educational institutions, how differences in background between staff and students affect educational interactions and how the availability of cultural capital set the terms of the relationship of whole communities to the educational system (Bissett, 2000; Lynch, 1999; O'Neill, 1992; for interesting research outside of this group see also Mac Ruairc, 2006). This body of work makes the argument that inequality is very deeply entrenched in society and education at all levels and that overcoming this will take an enormous and sustained effort. My research corroborates these findings-with some important amendments.

Policy, promises and progress: Access and widening participation in Irish HE
Educational inequalities in schools lay the foundation for educational inequality in HE (Lynch, 1999; Whelan & Hannan, 1999). In a longitudinal study Layte and Whelan (1999) examined data sets from 1973, 1987 and 1994 and concluded that while greater numbers of people from all social backgrounds are now attending tertiary education the expansion has

disproportionally favoured the wealthy. Patrick Clancy's quantitative studies over two decades have also meticulously documented the persistence of class inequality in Irish HE (Clancy, 1982, 1988, 1995, 2001; Clancy & Wall, 2000; see as well O'Connell, 2005). By far the highest rates of participation in HE are people from higher professional, managerial and farming families and entrants from a higher professional background have now reached saturation levels (Clancy & Wall, 2000; O'Connell, 2005)[90]. A study of admissions to university by postal district by Clancy (2001) found that there was a seven per cent admission rate in Ballyfermot, a working class suburb in Dublin, and a seventy seven per cent admission rate in Foxrock, an upper middle class suburb which is only a twenty minute car journey away from Ballyfermot. Some sense of what this means on the ground can be gathered from Cathleen O'Neill's (1992) study of a working class community in Dublin in the 1990s where of the hundred and fifty six youth who had left school in the area only two of them had gone on to study at third level.

Access policies over the past fifteen years have sought to redress this imbalance. The formation of the current equality and access agenda can be traced back to the commitment given to the principle of equality in the 1966 *Investment in Education Report* which was reaffirmed in the 1971 *Higher Education Authority Act* (O' Reilly, 2008)[91]. Incontrovertible evidence of durable and stark inequalities, and the perception that education was now fundamental to social integration and economic growth, meant that policy makers began to strongly foreground access and equality in the Department of Education's White Paper *Charting our Educational Future* (1995) and the *Report of the Steering Group on the Future of Higher Education* (1995). This was buttressed by equality legislation and the *Regional Technical College Act* of 1992 and the 1997 *University Act* which included statutory obligations to improve access and equality. Promoting access has become increasingly central

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90 O'Connell (2005, p. 18) offers the following definition a "participation ratio is the ratio of the share of a group with a particular attribute (in this case the share of new entrants to higher education from different social backgrounds) to the share of that group in the total population (in this case a comparison group of the population with different social backgrounds). A participation ratio in excess of one indicates that a group has a higher share of an attribute than would be expected on the basis of that group's share of the population. A ratio of less than one indicates that a group has a lower share of an attribute than would be expected on the basis of that group's share of the population". Although more up to date figures are available and will be cited below O'Connell's report is the last very detailed survey of this kind. In 2003 he found Farmers had a participation ratio of .89 , Higher professionals 1.36,Managers .65, Lower professionas-.65, Non-manual- .27, Skilled manual workers .50 , Semi and Unskilled manual workers .40.

91 Of course widening participation and access initiatives were started by individual institutions in the 1980s well before the 'access agenda' was articulated as a systemic objective in educational policy see (Finnegan & Byrne, 2012) for some of this 'prehistory'.

in mainstream educational policy over the past two decades (DES, 1995a, 1995b, 2011; HEA, 2008a; NOEAHE, 2004, 2006, 2010; Osborne & Leith, 2000; Skilbeck & O'Connell, 2000). An action group on access was convened by the minister of education in 2000 and it produced a report the following year (DES, 2001) and in 2003 *The National Office of Equity of Access to Higher Education* was set up by the HEA to oversee and implement access initiatives in a more systematic manner.

In the report drawn up the Action Group on Access (DES, 2001) a number of 'under-represented' social groups were identified - working class students, students with disabilities and mature students and it was argued that targeted support for these groups would help overcome historical inequalities in participation and outcomes. Following on from this Irish HEIs raised the profile of their access offices, forged links with schools in disadvantaged areas, developed new routes of entry and progression and set up partnerships with FE colleges (NOEAHE, 2010). Free fees and more generous grants also became available in the 1990s. The target groups listed above remain, somewhat redefined, the main focus of access policies today and data is now collected on the participation levels of these groups and assessed against pre-set targets (HEA, 2008a; NOEAHE, 2010)[92]. Over the past two years more detailed equal access data has been gathered by HEIs and there are currently plans to use this data to link state funding of individual HEIs to the achievement of access targets. There can be little doubt that widening participation and access now occupies a central place in policy, practice and research and I think this has had some very positive effects. There has been a tremendous amount of creativity and effort within particular access programmes. More generally there has been a steady increase in the number of working class students who come from skilled manual backgrounds (DES, 2001; O'Connell, 2005) and the impact of the

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[92] The two biggest changes in this period are there are now greater levels of gender equality in HEIs and the has been a big increase in the number of mature students attending tertiary education. The percentage of new entrants who are mature (i.e. over 23) has gone from 4.5 per cent of full-time new entrants in 1998 to 13.6 per cent in 2010 (HEA, 2008a: NOEAHE, 2010). However, it should be noted that this is still below the HEA's own 2010 target of 17 per cent. The overall percentage of students with disabilities in the undergraduate student body has gone from .65 per cent in 1993 to 3.2 per cent in 2006 (HEA, 2008a) and this group accounted for six per cent of all new entrants in 2010 (NOEAHE, 2010). There has also been considerable improvement in the provision of assistive technology over the past decade and a new charter on inclusive education has been drawn up for students with disabilities. Overall there has been less emphasis within access policy and offices on ethnic minorities and migrants but broader policies on education and social inclusion have also highlighted the importance of providing access to these groups as well (DES, 2000) and the Department for Education and Science recently published a paper which linked access in HE to the issue of intercultural education. Irish Travellers have also been listed as a 'target' group in a recent review of access in HE and Travellers and remain very badly underrepresented in HE (NOEAHE, 2010).

'access agenda' in some working class areas has been dramatic -for instance in some areas of Dublin participation rates doubled between 1998 and 2004 (O'Connell, 2005).

However, overall there have been more uneven results in bringing people from non-manual, semi- and unskilled socio-economic backgrounds into college and a recent review of access suggests that the percentage of students from some of these groups has dropped or remained static in recent years (NOEAHE, 2010). Of particular concern has been the decline in the participation rates of entrants from non-manual backgrounds (HEA, 2008a; NOEAHE, 2010). The non-manual group is a large and heterogeneous 'class' but significantly now includes many of the more routine poorly paid service jobs in the Irish economy (precisely the types of jobs that Breathnach's (2007) research suggests are important in understanding the process of occupational polarisation in Ireland). The significance of the changing nature of work and the importance of providing access for people from routine non-manual occupational families has been highlighted in two recent research projects (Loxley, Fleming, Kenny & Finnegan, 2010: McCoy, Byrne, O'Connell, Kelly, & Doherty, 2010). Overall, participation rates for working class students remain stubbornly below the HEA targets and this group only accounts for twenty three per cent of new entrants (NOEAHE, 2010). The number of students coming directly from schools through HEAR, an access route aimed specifically at school students in disadvantaged areas, is proportionally very small –this group accounted for only 1,009 students out of a total of 34,500 new entrants in 2010 (NOEAHE, 2010) [93]. Furthermore, a number of studies over the past decade (Clancy & Wall, 2000; Loxley, Fleming, Kenny & Finnegan, 2010; McCoy & Byrne, 2011a) have demonstrated a high level of diversification and differentiation between institutions and between disciplines. As noted in the last chapter this means that egalitarians need to keep in mind the participation rates of various social groups but also explore the changing morphology of social inequality (this will be explored in the thesis primarily through a comparison of the experience of students in various HEIs - see especially Chapter Seven).

I think there can be little question that considerable effort has been made to develop a more coherent and integrated HE system which is both more flexible and more inclusive. But not all of the growth can be ascribed to access policies and we have to bear in mind the independent effect of the credentialisation of the labour market, and that many individuals

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93 In the previous year the number of HEAR students was a third less than in 2010 (NOEAHE, 2010).

and families accumulated private resources during the boom which they were then willing to use to access education (Fleming, Loxley, Kenny & Finnegan, 2010). Besides it needs to be stressed very strongly that there are relatively small numbers of young working class people on access programmes, there has been decline in the participation of some sections of the working class and there is mounting evidence of class based diversification of HE. As a consequence class inequality remains the key issue in judging the success of a decade and half of access policies and, from an egalitarian perspective, one of the most crucial issues in contemporary Irish HE.

Qualitative research on working class students' experience in Irish HE

Apart from recent work from the centre for research in the Department of Adult education in NUIM (Field, Finnegan, Fleming, Holliday, Morgan-Klein & West, 2010; Finnegan, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2011a, 2011b; Finnegan, Fleming, Johnston, Merrill, & West, 2009; Fleming & Finnegan, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2011a; Fleming, Loxley, Kenny & Finnegan, 2010) there is a paucity of material which examines the HE from the perspective of students themselves and explores how they view and value higher education (Fleming & Murphy, 1998; Inglis & Murphy, 1999; Keane, 2009; Martin & O'Neill, 1996; see also O'Brien & O'Faithigh, 2007; Slowey & Schuetze, 2000), let alone studies specifically looking a working class experience in HEIs (Lynam, 1996; Lynch & O'Riordan, 1996, 1998; Lynch, 1999; Martin & O'Neill, 1996; McMahon, 1997; Smyth & McCoy, 2011b). This means the 'access story' remains very obviously incomplete. What motivates students, the barriers they encounter, the supports they use and how they view and value education -these obvious yet vital topics remain largely unexplored. To date social scientific research on equality in HE has been overwhelmingly dominated by the use of systemic targets and policy objectives to frame the access agenda and student experience remains shrouded behind all this talk of precise quantitative outcomes and hazy policy aspirations.

The most extensive piece of work on working class students experience in Irish HE was undertaken by Kathleen Lynch, Suzanne Lynam and Clare O'Riordan in the mid-nineties. They conducted forty interviews with working class students in five different HEIs as part of larger project with a hundred and twenty two participants examining the education system from a working class perspective. The main thrust of the findings has already been sketched out and they discovered that there were significant financial, cultural and educational barriers to working class participation in HE. Of these barriers finance emerged as the pre-eminent

concern but the culture of HEIs, which is emphatically middle class, was also cited as one of the main barriers to successful participation. This laid the basis for other work on HEIs which widened the base of the original research and further tested the findings (Carpenter, Healy & Lynch, 1999). But the data was collected over sixteen years ago and given the widespread changes in HEIs discussed above, more qualitative research needs to be conducted-and this if of course the main rationale for the present research.

Outside of the NUIM material cited above there is very little other work examining working class experience. One recent project using mixed methods, working between a culturalist and rational actor approach to research, conducted by Emer Smyth and Selma McCoy (2011b) deserves to be mentioned. This study examined the educational experience of twenty nine school leavers, thirteen of whom were working class (all from a routine non-manual background). Smyth and McCoy highlights, as this study does, both continuities in inequality and changes in class composition and educational expectations and suggests that family resources, cultural capital and lack of information are the most significant barriers to equal access to HE.

Student experience, pedagogy and policy in the era of lifelong learning

As I have already outlined the aim of the research is not simply to document student experience but to use this material to think through and interrogate the categories currently used in pedagogy, policy and social science. I would argue that much of the value of exploring student perspectives is that it allows us to rethink what is happening in HEIs in terms of pedagogy and policy from a new perspective. While HE has radically changed there is very little evidence that this has entailed the sort profound rethinking of the culture and practices of higher education -in terms of new forms of pedagogy, curricula and courses-which might be commensurate with the needs, values and experiences of 'non-traditional' students that some scholars have advocated (Fleming & Murphy, 1998; Thompson, 2000[94]). I believe that access is primarily envisaged as widening access to a 'more or less' traditional university for individuals from the working class rather than the working class and other non-traditional students reshaping the nature of third level education. This idea and some of the

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94 See also Conway (2002) for a good article on this issue which looks at compulsory schooling and which shares some of my concerns about the nature of pedagogy in Irish education.

implications of what students had to say about pedagogy will be explored in Chapters Seven and Eight.

As we shall see the hope and belief that education might be in the process of becoming more egalitarian or at least more meritocratic surfaced repeatedly in the interviews. In fact, it was a really central issue for the people who spoke to me and a great deal turns on how we are encouraged, students, staff and researchers, to frame these issues. As a consequence of my research I think the HEA and state policy on access and participation has largely set the terms for how we imagine and understand equality in third level education. In Ireland "categorical approaches are viewed as the only approach with which to conceptualise the relationship between disadvantage, social class and access to higher education" (Bernard, 2008, p. 32). I have already adduced the reasons why I think this is problematic from an egalitarian perspective to rely largely on a top down perspective and to ignore the social experience of students in educational design. However, even if one does not share this point of view it is clear from the statistics that there are severe structural limits to widening participation which the categorical model cannot explain or, it seems, overcome. Furthermore, I think the data strongly indicate that this categorical approach has an important role in currently defining the politics of education and shaping the social imagination; specifically I think it is being used to develop a version of lifelong learning which is supposedly egalitarian and progressive but is in reality largely subordinate to neoliberal social policy (Finnegan, 2008; Grummel, 2007).

I do not think it is a coincidence that the formalisation of the access agenda and the development of the lifelong learning policies occurred in exactly the same period. A version of lifelong learning has been in circulation in Irish education for almost four decades but it has enjoyed far greater currency as a term in Irish educational policy since the European Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996. The 1997 *University Act* established lifelong learning as one of the key objectives of the sector and the Higher Education Authority (HEA, 2008a) has indicated that the idea is a fundamental to their vision of education[95]. Lifelong learning has

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[95] It has also been central to debates about adult, community and further education and features in the Department of Education and Science's Green and White Papers on Adult Education . Lifelong learning has also become a key policy term for the main organisations of adult education in the Republic of Ireland such as Aontas and their main publication *The Adult Learner* which has for over a decade examined some of the theoretical and practical implications of the lifelong learning agenda for adult education. Pobal the management company tasked with allocating funding for community development projects on behalf of the state and whose activity has a direct bearing on Irish adult education has also adopted the idea of lifelong learning. For further detail see (Finnegan, 2008; Fleming, 2004; Grummell, 2007; Murphy, 2001)

also featured regularly in *general* social policy as well as educational position papers over the past decade including in key policy statements including the *National Development Plan 2000-2006* and the *National Development Plan 2007-2013* and the *Strategy of Innovation and Science 2006-2013*. This socio-educational ideal is also drawn on by the Future Skills Group who is responsible for anticipating labour market demands. In fact it is noteworthy just how wide a range of economic and cultural changes it is meant to address and the lifelong learning agenda has often resulted in cross departmental and cross sectoral co-operation in the government and the education system. For instance when the *Task Force on Lifelong Learning* was established in 2000 by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment it was done so conjunction with the Department of Education and Science. The importance of the concept of lifelong learning to policy and to state planning is suggested by the fact that data on participation in lifelong learning is now regularly gathered by the CSO.

The idea of lifelong learning has emerged and re-emerged in educational thinking in a variety of forms since the 1970s (Borg & Mayo, 2005) and is defined and understood in diverse ways. It has been regularly argued that it is a potentially progressive idea because the theory acknowledges of the value of learning outside of formal institutions (Connolly, Fleming, McCormack & Ryan, 2007) and it thus offers us an opportunity to think about how pedagogy, provision and learning can be designed and conducted in a more democratic manner (Fleming, 2002, 2004; Fleming, Collins, & Coolahan, 1999). However, the dominant version of lifelong learning policies in Ireland employ a 'human capital' theory of education which is similar to the model advocated by the OECD (2008) and the EU (CEC, 2000, 2001) the main aim of which is to 'upskill' the general population. For example, in the national development plans cited in the last paragraph it is repeatedly argued that lifelong learning is necessary for a competitive economy and this will create greater levels of opportunity, equality and social inclusion. Typically these policies are also wedded to varying models of post-industrial development in which information technologies are accorded enormous significance and it is posited we are building the 'knowledge society' or most recently the 'smart economy'[96.] Tertiary education is seen as a vital to the creation a lifelong learning society (DES, 2011, HEA, 2008a; NOEAHE, 2010) and HE properly managed, will, it is believed, enable future

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96 For a recent example of this type of thinking see especially the 2008 document from the Department of the Taoiseach *Building a smart economy:A framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal*.

economic prosperity, innovation and social equality. Moreover, lifelong learning is seen as a *necessary* response to the ceaseless and uncontrollable forces of globalization and producing more flexible and educated workforce is believed to be the sine qua non of a thriving modern economy. I think there can be little question that this matrix of priorities shaped by the market state and a neo-liberal EU (Borg & Mayo, 2005; Finnegan, 2007, 2008; Magaelhaes & Storr, 2003; Tett, 2002) in which "education [is viewed] as a key strategy towards the achievement of economic policies" (Alexiadou, 2005, p. 102) has colonised the idea of lifelong learning. This overweening emphasis on the economic function and purpose of education marks an enormous change in the way we describe HE as a social good and is part, I would argue, of a new educational common sense (Aronowitz, 2000; Ball, 2007; Collini, 2012; Giroux & Giroux, 2004; Lynch, 2006; Nussbaum, 2010).

This discursive shift is immensely significant in and of itself but my particular interest here is to identify how access and widening participation policies fit within this vision of education. According to the state and HEA policies these initiatives are meant to guarantee that this emerging knowledge society is fair and just; thus access policies are offered as evidence of compassion and proof that efforts are been made to foster social inclusion in a post-industrial, market society. In this way access helps to justify educational and social policies, linked through the ideas of lifelong learning and the smart economy, as being generally progressive. As we shall this has filtered in to how students make sense of their own educational stories. However, despite the range and reach of this rhetoric there is very little indication in the HEA or state policies cited above of how exactly these ambitious goals might be achieved or any sense that these objectives may be incommensurable. Regardless of the recent fetish for measurement and accountability in education (Ball, 2007; Lynch, 2006) the way access and lifelong learning will contribute to the knowledge economy is left very ill-defined and undertheorised. Furthermore, as I have noted in Chapter Four, I do not think these claims about human capital and equality- fused together within a socio-educational ideal of lifelong learning-stand up to critical scrutiny in light of what we know about patterns of industrialisation and the educational participation rates and outcomes for different socio-economic groups in Ireland and beyond.

My contention is that we are enmeshed in a series of public pedagogies which support the now, almost pervasive, idea that one of the main purposes of education is for people to adapt

to the demands of a market economy and that education is mainly about providing the skills and competencies needed for the global market (Morrow & Torres, 2000). Obviously, we cannot separate these arguments from what is occurring in Irish society as a whole. I have discussed above growing social polarisation in work, wealth, income and power, the weakening of democracy and collective notions of empowerment and the development of a discourses and practices which support the idea of a market state. I think within a society and culture in which common sense is largely defined in relation to narrowly defined economic needs even quite liberal notions of education are liable to be instrumentalised by market 'pragmatism'. To return to an earlier point; within this model of lifelong learning there is a marked tendency for the strong market discourse to prevails over weaker claims made for social justice in access and widening participation (Allen, 2007; Finnegan, 2007, 2008; Lynch, 2006). When these policies are then justified and discussed solely in quantitative terms access and lifelong learning runs an even greater danger of becoming meaningless portmanteau terms which offer no credible explanation for the cause or the persistence of class inequality. In fact it may well occlude these things. Just as importantly, I think the debate over the changing nature of the university as it is currently constructed offers few reference points for why 'non-traditional' students value education in the first place or what is at stake, either biographically or socially, for working class students.

Conclusion

Over the past three chapters I have explored the relevant contexts and concepts for the empirical research. A theory of class and learning has been outlined and an account of the role of class inequality in education has been sketched out. The present chapter has traced the formation of the Irish working class and suggested that for historical reasons the organised working class has been very weak and the sentiments, hopes, concerns of a very sizeable section of Irish society has remained largely invisible in official Ireland. A key idea that I have developed here-which draws on the analysis of class formation and classification struggles developed in Chapter Three-is that class relations are constantly refigured through time but that ideas and representations about class often persist: the sediments of history remain and I believe that the threat and stain of poverty, the desire for respectability, the experience of cultural invisibility, and the practice of solidarity in the face of adversity are woven into the meaning of class in Ireland. These collective social memories are remade and internalised, in each generation in different ways and are important in getting to grips with the lived experience of social and cultural inequality and the making of biographies.

I have also outlined how aspects of working class culture and experience have been largely neglected in Irish social science. Marxists, world system analysts, post-colonial theorists and labour historians have been concerned almost exclusively with mobilisation, political organisations and broad stroke socio-political theories. The most influential approach to class in sociology has been developed by statisticians and neo-Weberian stratification theorists and although they have compiled sober and careful accounts of social structures which have informed social policy, and have empirical merit, they have also consistently downplayed the political and cultural aspects of class and, to paraphrase Lorca, the human element is often lost in the mire of laws and figures.

Reviewing the material from a critical perspective I would contend that although much of it is useful and enlightening, class analysis in Ireland has been too narrowly focussed on the issues of social mobility and political mobilisation. What is lacking, with some honourable exceptions, is research and literature, which describes the lived experience of the Irish working class in society and in education. As a result the 'subject' of these various discourses remains curiously absent; in fact one can read a good deal of material about class in Ireland without ever being troubled by being forced to listen to a working class voice or left with any real tangible sense of what it means to be working class in this country.

This is especially the case in HE where for the first time in Irish history significant numbers of Irish working class people are attending third level education. This phenomenon is under-researched, at least when it comes to studies which use intensive and qualitative methods, and because of this I think working class participation and non-participation in Irish HE is only vaguely understood; it is a black box through which we measure inputs and outputs and on that basis make various claims about equality and lifelong learning. This is obviously unsatisfactory; while we have compelling evidence that class inequality remains one of the most salient features of Irish education we know very little about how working class students view and value education (especially HE). We know very little about why people choose to enrol in a given course or what makes people leave education; we remain largely ignorant of what it means to do a degree and whether access is, for individuals or communities, genuinely effective. We can only speculate on what is actually learnt in college or how third level education affects students sense of themselves or the world. The obvious, and I would argue only effective, way of exploring these, and other related questions, is to ask working class students about their experience of HE and the role it plays in their lives

Part II

Empirical findings and interpretation

> It is foolish and empirically unwarranted to treat individuals in rigid class terms. Class is a collective mode not a person [..]. There are no masses just ways of seeing people as masses (Raymond Williams)

I have argued that from an egalitarian perspective understanding the cause and effects of inequality is of vital importance and there is a large body of evidence that class inequality remains one of the most important axes of social division even though the nature of class experience and class politics has changed enormously in the past forty years (Harvey, 2005; Savage, 2000; Sayer, 2005). I have also proposed that everyday accounts of social life are an invaluable source of knowledge (Harré & Gillett, 1994; Harré, & Secord, 1972; Plummer, 2000; Sayer, 2000) and I think provide the soundest basis for inquiry in the highly fractious and contested field of class analysis. It is also indisputable that there is a dearth of material in Irish social science which explores working class experience and culture in any depth. The genesis and design of this research are founded on these arguments which that I have been fully fleshed out in the past three chapters. The rest of the thesis will consist of the findings and interpretation of my empirical research.

Chapter Six will examine how the interviewees talk about their lives and how they negotiate, describe and refuse notions of class in the telling of their life stories. This chapter will also begin to outline elements of the research participants' perception of third level education but the substantive account of how the interviewees view and value HE will be given in Chapter Seven. So the main focus of Chapter Six is on class and class identity and the key concern of Chapter Seven is learning and student experience. Necessarily, there is an overlap between the two chapters in the sense that the Chapter Six describes what brought people to the front gate of the university and the following chapter is mainly about their experience within the walls of these institutions. The chapters are organised under these inclusive rubrics but because they are lengthy, and deal with a range of issues, each chapter is subdivided into several sections; the first part of each chapter will offer an overview of the main findings, the middle section of each chapter will be taken up with extended accounts of the interviewees' experience and the final part of both Chapter Six and Seven will explore the theoretical implications of the empirical findings.

The purpose of the research, I want to reiterate, is not simply about bringing social experience 'to' sociology but also about reconsidering class theory through everyday experience. The empirical research is based on individual biographical accounts and I have already made the case that I think this is one of the best ways of exploring the contextual and evaluative nature of social experience. I believe these biographical accounts-in their nuance, detail and individuality-have an integrity that needs to be respected in the presentation of the findings. Consequently, whenever possible, individual stories are used to illustrate key themes and arguments. This form of presentation is also directly linked to the argument, adumbrated earlier, pace (Honneth, 2007), that we can, by attending carefully to the contours of individual experience, discover a whole world of concern and struggle which discloses something about collective human needs and the organisation of social power. In this particular context, I believe this type of biographical approach to data collection and analysis offers the most secure basis for a normatively charged critical theory of society and education grounded in everyday experience.

Chapter 6

Class life and the making of the self through place, work and notions of worth

> Political economy can therefore advance the proposition that the proletarian, the same as any horse, must get as much as will enable him to work. It does not consider him when he (sic) is not working, as a human being; but leaves such consideration to criminal law, to doctors, to religion, to the statistical tables, to politics and to the poor-house overseer.
> (Karl Marx)

> On his first parade the Sergeant Major couldn't make out the shape of Arthur's head because there was too much hair on it, and Arthur jocularly agreed to get it cut, intending to forget about it [...] 'You're a soldier now, not a Teddy-boy,' the sergeant-major said, but Arthur knew he was wrong in either case. He was nothing at all when people tried to tell him what he was. Not even his own name was enough, though it might be on his pay-book. What am I? he wondered. A six-foot pit-prop that wants a pint of ale. That's what I am. And if any knowing bastard says that's what I am, I'm a dynamite-dealer, Sten-gun seller, hundred-ton tank trader, a capstan-lathe operator waiting to blow the army to Kingdom Cum I'm me and nobody else; and what people think I am or say I am, that's what I'm not, because they don't know a bloody thing about me.
> (Alan Sillitoe, Saturday night, Sunday morning)

> She was very grand in herself. She had lovely clothes, she'd buy lovely stuff […] I used to look in the wardrobe…I could never get it, I was only working. I was never allowed to eat with them. I was in the kitchen they were in the dining room. We understood at the time that is the way things are, we felt we were beneath them, we always felt a beneathness.
> (Nora Fahey, a woman who worked as a servant in 1950s Ireland)

Introduction

This chapter aims to offer a broad overview of the interviewees' lives and will focus in particular on how the interviewees discuss class and how this might help us to understand how they see education. I will begin with an summary of how the interviewees described class within their biographical accounts and this will be followed by an exploration of the key empirical themes in relation to class and identity; namely- place, family, social space, work and worth. Section two of this chapter will bring several of the themes together to make a more general argument about the importance of the moral and affective dimensions of class experience- especially respect and disrespect- and how this is linked to various conceptions of human flourishing. All of the material has been selected to suggest how biographies outside of the walls of educational institutions shape learning lives inside education and several of the issues introduced here will be returned to and developed in the next chapter.

Too often we are invited to think of class in a flattened way using the schemas of the class taxonomists, what some critical pedagogues once called the 'box people' (Allman, McLaren & Rikowski, 2000) but I think large scale aggregate categories based on employment on their own tell us very little about how people live their lives. The data suggest that class continues to have an enormous impact on people's lives but contrary to clichéd and old-fashioned notions of class the interviewees did not form a homogeneous group in the sense of having a singular class identity. There are certainly identifiable commonalities amongst the cohort in terms of shared conditions, collective reference points and similar trajectories through social space but even so it would be a mistake to claim these class processes fully determine the interviewees' lives. I do not want to belabour the point but I want to be as explicit as possible at this point that my interest here is in what we learn about society by exploring individual's experience rather than developing typologies or taxonomies. I think the life and learning stories of the research participants illuminate the "immanent structure to the social world" (Bourdieu, 1986a, p. 46) but this cannot be reduced to simple formulae.

Stating this so baldly is not just a humanist response on my part to the overbearing explanatory claims of structuralist analysis; it is also about being alert to how social experience is differentiated according to *various* axes of power. I think grasping the social logic at work in our lives means taking account of all the differences that make a difference, rather than folding everything into singular notion of class and class identity. On the most basic level the men and women I spoke to came from different generations and different places; they came from Africa, Eastern Europe the UK and America and lived in big cities and small towns in Ireland and they just as importantly came from different sections of the working class. Gender, race, age, disability, ethnicity and intraclass divisions offset, mediate, disarticulate, refigure and intensify the experience of class inequality in a variety of ways and the forthcoming accounts illustrate how inequalities intersect within biographies.

Section I
Life stories and patterns of class (dis)identification [97]
This section will give a broad overview of how people discussed class and identity- through types of self-designation, financial concerns and experience in families, communities and workplaces. For the purposes of clarity the two other major themes that emerged and related

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97 This terminology is borrowed from Skeggs (1997).

to class and class identity -the struggle for respect and recognition and classed expectations and experiences of education will be discussed separately.

Given what has been said in the previous chapter about Ireland, where the organised working class has historically been quite weak and regular claims have been made about the 'classless' nature of Irish society-it might be imagined that people would not use explicit class designations at all in the interviews. In fact, a third of the people I spoke with spontaneously chose to describe themselves in class terms-mainly as working class but also as poor, disadvantaged and 'not posh'. But these forms of self-designation, at least on their own, tell us very little and these terms are notoriously fluid as recent research in South Africa, France, the USA and the UK has highlighted[98]. It is, I think, more telling that strong forms of positive class identification surfaced very rarely over the four years of research and while there was a rudimentary and diffuse notion of 'them and us' in many of the accounts it was not articulated in a conflictual way. In fact, when this was discussed explicitly it was often articulated in the terms of an aspirational desire to move from 'us' to 'them'. Moreover, several participants said they thought there has been weakening of class divisions in Irish society but it is worth noting that this idea was most clearly expressed by two mature interviewees both of whom were over fifty. Although most of the interviewees did not voice this point of view a small majority narrated their stories in a way that suggested, at least in individual terms, class was seen as part of their *past* and that their arrival at university would, at the very least, ensure more meritocratic treatment in the future. When the transcripts were coded for attitudes to social mobility I discovered a majority of people felt they had either maintained or improved their social position over their life course and/or it had improved in comparison to their parents. Nearly all the interviewees thought obtaining a degree would ensure future mobility. This was a recurrent topic in the research and I think the connections made by the interviewees between upward mobility and education and what mobility actually is taken to *mean*, deserves very careful consideration (this will be discussed below and in Chapter Seven).

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98 A recent survey of inhabitants of the township of Soweto, in which two thirds of the people are not working or are underemployed, and approximately ten per cent of people are in what would be deemed middle class jobs by most sociologists sixty six per cent of respondents identified themselves as middle class (Phadi & Ceruti, 2011). This is a striking illustration how patterns of self-identification can differ from sociological descriptions. See also Lamont (2000) who has explored how national and poltical culture affects these patterns of identification. This can easily be linked to Shildrick and MacDonald's (2004, 2006) finding that in England class position is nearly always discussed in reference to ones immediate social world (so to have work in a poor working class community where unemployment is commonplace will lead people to see themselves as doing well etc.).

On the other hand, a more detailed analysis of the transcripts revealed a large majority of the working class interviewees attested to the classed nature of Irish society (in the sense that unequal access to socio-economic resources and opportunities had been an important part of their life stories). On the most basic level two thirds of the working class cohort discussed having to get by on very limited financial resources at some point and this was a particularly pressing concern for young students from families who had to rely on benefits such as Community Employment payments, single parent's allowance, unemployment and disability benefits or older students who found themselves stuck in low paid jobs like cleaning. A lack of money can be crippling and for example two young female students I interviewed, both from households relying on benefits, financial problems made their first year in college almost impossible for them.

However, given how pivotal this issues has been in Irish working class life in the past (Fagan, 2006; Johnson, 1985; Lynam, 1996; O'Dea, 1994; O'Neill, 1992; Silverman, 2001) financial considerations were not foregrounded as much as might be imagined. Lynch and O'Riordan identified finance as the single most important issue for working class students and community activists in the mid-1990s. In all likelihood this difference reflects the composition of the research cohort (over half of whom were mature students). So although a majority of the mature students were on tight budgets they indicated that were generally more comfortable than they had been when they were young and in several cases had accumulated resources through redundancy, family income, savings and loans. It also reflects the timing of the research which began at the tail end of the boom and at the cusp of the crisis and a large number of the participants- both mature and young-said they had benefited from the 'Tiger'. However, concerns about money began to arise far more frequently in the latter half of the research once savings were gone and the recession began to bite more sharply into people's income. The data also strongly suggest that household rather than individual resources are often crucial not only in monetary terms but also to people's sense of financial security (which lends credence to approaches which have argued for models based on shared household income and resources in large-scale studies of class (see especially Standing, 2009)[99]. Overall the research suggests that single parents, single mature students and most especially young students without household support were by far the most economically

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[99] Obviously this type of research should make proper allowance for gender differences in paid and unpaid work and complexity and even multiplicity in class identities within a household (issues which made household assessments in the past very dubious).

vulnerable in the cohort and the most likely to discuss finance as fundamental aspect of their student experience.

What emerges from a more sustained biographical analysis of the interviews is that self-designations and finances were less important in defining class experience and identity for this cohort than we might expect. While money, or the lack of it, did feature regularly in the students' life stories it was usually described as only *one* important element of a more general horizon of 'realistic' expectations defined by differential access to resources and opportunities of various kinds. To a striking extent the interviewees discuss these expectations as being formed through their *experience of social space* through which they have developed a sense of their 'place' in society. Shared maps of social space-constructed through everyday experience at home, at work and in the community-were absolutely central to how class and identity were understood and described by the interviewees.

We shall examine this idea in detail below but for now I simply want to note that the biographical accounts strongly indicate that social space is structured and is subject to clear dynamics and effort, sacrifice and ingenuity was required from many of the working class cohort to resist the gravitational pull of circumstances. In fact, this is one of the things that most sharply distinguishes the working class cohort from the middle class interviewees[100] whose accounts are marked by a comparative lack of friction and are less concerned with the *struggle* for mobility, resources and respect in the same way.

So one of my main contentions is that financial resources and, as we shall see, opportunities in the labour market are an integral part of the interviewees' stories but their experience is impossible to describe properly solely through the trim and tidy terms of occupation or income. One last thing remains to be said in this brief preliminary overview of forms of class identification; it became very clear that class is strongly associated with notions of social worth. As a result very few of the participants in the study had an uncomplicated relationship to social class in terms of personal identity; many of the participants would choose to bring class in and out of focus and even those interviewees who introduced themselves as 'working class' would then offer biographical accounts that included both class identifications and

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100 As noted in Chapter Two the secondary focus on the middle class and the small size of this sample makes my findings on middle class experience very tentative.

disidentifications (Skeggs, 1997). The point being that class, in the most familiar sociological or political terms, appears very rarely in the transcripts and the research suggests that people are often ambivalent about class and because of this unambiguous class identities are quite rare (see Drudy & Lynch's (1993) research on class identities amongst Irish school students which also found high levels of disidentification and for similar findings in the UK see Savage, Bagnall & Longhurst, 2001)[101]. The research strongly indicates that an analysis of socio-economic inequality requires some conception of how a specific job or a given income relates to other class resources such as cultural capital, the level of autonomy and authority one enjoys at work and the nature of everyday experiences of social space which is structured by divisions in power, ownership and status. Over the rest of this chapter I will flesh out the meaning and significance of these findings on class identity.

Community, place and family: The making and unmaking of class identities in social space

> And there is almost no space here; and you feel almost calm at the thought that it is impossible for anything very large to hold in this narrowness. But outside everything is immeasurable. And when the level rises outside, it also rises in you (Rilke quoted in Bachelard, 1994, p. 229)

To understand the patterns of class (dis)identification amongst the main cohort it is helpful to begin at a very concrete and immediate level of experience. The clearest and most commonly used form of class signifiers used by the interviewees were geographical and the names of areas, estates and streets were employed by just under two thirds of the interviewees as a ready and shared way of denoting class. This section will examine what the interviewees said about the places they come from and how ideas of belonging, or lack of belonging, relate to class identity. I will begin with a brief overview of the main themes and then explore these general findings through what three of the interviewees-James, Luke and Kieran-had to say about place, space and class.

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101 This is a fascinating in-depth qualitative study of class identity, based on 178 interviews, in the north east of England which discovered class identities are articulated in various ways, and depends, they claim, largely on differential access to cultural capital. Both middle and working class interviewees wanted to be seen as ordinary' and unambivalent class identities were unusual and were only commonly found amongst the wealthy and professional cohort.

That areas and types of housing indicate something about people's class background was treated as self-evident by the majority of research participants regardless of gender, age and ethnicity[102]. It was interesting just how readily this shorthand was used and indicates just how pervasive, at least on this level, notions of class are in social life. Classed spatial signifiers were often used in statements about origins and family, to mark transitions in the life course and to signify upward social mobility. In doing this interviewees would often shuttle between a relatively straightforward description of a given area and the far more phenomenological and rich accounts of community, belonging, affiliation, disaffection and solidarity. As we shall see these questions about belonging and community were also inextricably tied up about notions of 'one's proper place'. Repeatedly interviewees discussed the extent to which a place can be said to really part of one's self and explored if growing up, living and interacting in a particular area denotes something significant about one's character, one's capacities and even the justice of one's social fate. This question was posed and answered in very different ways by various individuals over the course of the research but it was this constant shifting between place, community identity which first led me to consider the spatial dimensions of class more carefully.

Only a small number of interviewees gave solidaristic accounts of place or felt unequivocally proud of their community. For example Ger, a twenty year old, did make the case that his community was more supportive and tight knit than middle class places he had visited but most students who discussed living in working class communities were far more ambivalent than Ger. Sinead, an intense and reflective woman in her late 20s is more representative and when she discussed her community said "*Look, where I grew up well, ok, it is pretty shit but at least people were honest. There is no hypocrisy there, no hidden bullshit, everything is [..] laid on the line*". This type of ambivalence surfaced a good deal as did more unequivocal and often quite negative judgements of working class areas. In fact, two thirds of the working class cohort who explicitly discussed the topic primarily associated working class communities with their family and neighbours lack of economic and educational opportunities and, to a lesser extent, the social problems that stem from inequality. They linked the experience of living in working class communities to a sense of social restriction and feeling penned in; as one mature student Eithne put it, she used to have a sense that "*all*

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102 However, most of the middle class cohort and some of the people in 'white collar' routine, administrative jobs or those married to spouses with relatively high incomes were far less likely to talk about community and class in the same way.

avenues are closed to you if you come from the wrong end of town". Notably, this sense of constraint was not a theme in the interviews with middle class students. Once I began to examine the interviews more intensively it transpired that linking physical places and notions of social space is one of the most common ways class identity gets discussed or alluded to in biographical accounts.

James: *"I knew nothing; I knew a block of flats ...No inside or outside of that"*

This begs the question how, and on what terms, do the limits and problems of particular area become part of one's 'psychic landscape'? James, who was builder before he came to college and is, now in his early thirties, offers invaluable insights into how a sense of place, linked to class inequality, can become internalised as part of one's personal identity. The interview with was very emotionally charged but not in a simple or straightforward way. James is a very watchful and self-possessed person and says that carefully weighing up situations and people has become one of his main character traits. Nonetheless, as time passed the interview was increasingly dominated by a type of intense self-searching honesty that necessarily has a powerful affective dimension. I believe it was charged and powerful because I think James offered an unvarnished account of his own 'internal conversation' about his place in the world [103] and his hopes, doubts, fears and difficulties.

A lot of the interview revolved around James sense of place and he is from a part of the inner city of Dublin which historically has been one of the poorest areas in Ireland. Deindustrialisation and mass unemployment in the 1980s exacerbated the difficulties faced by residents in this part of Dublin and in a number of estates and flat complexes from the 1980s till the mid-1990s a majority of adults had no work at all. Unemployment and persistent underinvestment help to produce a difficult and fraught environment for James, his family and his neighbours. Amongst other things-and this of course is directly relevant to part of James' story- less than one in ten school leavers went to college from his area when he was growing up (Clancy, 2001). Like a lot of his friends he ran into some trouble as a teenager and got involved in petty crime and drugs. In his twenties he left this behind, found work and established a new peer group. He decided in this period he wanted very much to understand why his world was the way it was because he felt

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103 The term is taken from Archer (2007).

> *I knew nothing, I knew a block of flats and that's all I knew, there was nothing outside of that. No inside or outside of that. I still walk in and see people and there is no inside or outside of that for them.*

James had *"no sense of achievement". "I was trapped in that block of flats. I needed to find out why I couldn't find my way out of the flats. I wondered why was it was so hard to get out of this?"* James made it clear during the research that this feeling of being trapped, this deep sense of social claustrophobia, was not just about the problems he had encountered when he was a teenager. James continued to feel like this even after he straightened his life out. His strong identification with the block of flats, and his area, which appears as a trope right through our discussions, is part of a more general story of feeling overwhelmed and of being pulled by powerful undertow of social forces. I think as a result James' conception of home and community, and who he was and might be, became tied to a profound sense of lack and a complete absence of opportunities.

This, to a large extent, remains the case and despite the fact that things have improved for him, and for many people in his area, since his teenage years this has left him with a seemingly ineradicable sense that his always teetering on the verge of chaos and the feeling that he is not in full control of his own life. James is very thoughtful, and usually very articulate, but he constantly talks about the difficulty of framing *exactly* he want to say, and in the discussions is constantly pulling at knots, trying to disentangle the fact of growing up in an area with extremely difficult social conditions from his sense of self. James is streetwise, calm and collected but it became clear that he carries within himself the idea that he is responsible for his own difficulties. In certain circumstances, especially in college, where he is working very hard, and is generally enjoying the newness of it, he tells me he nonetheless often feels fearful and ashamed. I think it is pertinent that shame as an emotion is evoked by a failure to live up to norms and expectations of others and "is commonly a response to real or imagined contempt" (Sayer, 2011, p. 167). This is not just about punishing academic demands but reflects the fact that part of James inner life is taking up with answering the accusation that he is somehow lesser and lacking something. James makes clear that despite his and his family's best efforts to overcome the challenges thrown up by inner city life he still find himself struggling with feeling worthless and he feels marked by his lack of achievement which he sees as a personal failing.

The philosopher Gaston Bachelard once wrote the place we are born into is more than a home "it is the embodiment of dreams" (1994, p. 15) but what if one's sense of place, which is embodied deeply within us, includes the scars of social inequality? James' narrative suggests that living in an area in which inequality is marked clearly in the physical environment, on the landings of flats, on terraces and on the streets, in the texture and feel of the lived environment, can eventually smuggle anxiety about one's worth right into the depths of oneself. As we shall see this is not the case for other interviewees but listening to James I have little doubt that he feels the weight, symbolic and material, of place is almost overwhelming at times. He also talks about longing, agency, resilience and education in an extraordinary way and we will have occasion to return to how he describes the desire for learning at the beginning of the next chapter. For the time being I simply want to note that both the shape of his biography and his decision to come to college is for him above all about getting out of the *"block of flats"*. To use his terms this is about maintaining and strengthening the boundary that he has established between the "*inside and the outside"*; that is between himself, his personal identity and his burgeoning sense that he shaping a new life, and everything that comes with the experience of living in an area in which severe inequalities have created enormous difficulties and challenges.

Luke: *"I'm probably saying I shouldn't be classed while I should be classed"*
This is only one way of making sense of these issues. Luke offers us a very different way of thinking about class and place than James and one which was just as common in the main cohort. Meeting Luke was a pleasure and I found him to be a very likeable and communicative person. On the day we sat down he was in his final weeks of his last year of his course and was getting ready to successfully finish his final exams for his degree. It was also the day before his twenty first birthday party. Luke's good humour was infectious and his genuine passion for the subjects he has been studying was very much to the fore in the discussion. This lent a specific tone to the interview which was pervaded by a strong sense of hopefulness about the future.

Luke came to college through a targeted access programme and he felt that he had really benefited from this and the support of the access office in college. He also modestly, but nonetheless quite emphatically, talked about how he had pushed *himself* to succeed in

college. Part of this determination stems from the fact that he is very close to family and they, he says, have really motivated him to work hard

> *They're very open and they're very realistic. They didn't sugar coat the fact that things can get tough and respected me in the way to go 'listen you do have to work hard to get what you want'*

Over the three years of the degree Luke flourished at college and by the end he was considering embarking upon a postgraduate degree and becoming a teacher. In thinking through his future he talks about his community, Ballymun, a large working class suburb of Dublin, and imagines what it might be like to work in the local school which he attended. He is not very enthusiastic about this prospect

> *I mean its plagued [...] like your day as a teacher would be plagued more with behaviour issues than it would with actually the material you're trying to teach which I know would bother me a lot. Like I mean, you know, I didn't study for that long or I didn't, you know, work at my subjects to stand and just be shouting for eight hours every day. [...]. Obviously I'd like to give back to a community that I came from do you what I mean but eh, just for my own sanity I think I don't think I'd be able to do it, so...(breaks off)*

Up to this point the interview was very fluid and open and he had spoken with great enthusiasm and very little prompting about his subjects, plans and motivations. But then I asked him whether the issues in his community were linked to social class. He initially agreed and then said

> *No, no, no, like I mean, yeah I reckon. I mean it can be very difficult to be politically correct sometimes you know what I mean? [..] Just I mean, you know, I'd never consider myself...I don't like it when people, you know, would class people. Obviously it's not a good thing to do and especially coming from Ballymun you know, I've probably heard it a lot you know what I mean? Initially [it was] the 'Ballymun thing' before [..] your academic work or your actual self you can be boxed into, you know...I'm from Ballymun, so you obviously have [breaks off]*

> *Q: Did that happen here [in the college]?*

> *A: A few times in first year but I think that was more, I think that was more because everybody was coming from their own backgrounds and stuff and like I said before the mixing with different people opens new doors I think for everyone. Do you what I mean? People were coming, where they hadn't, you know, they may have never even been to Mayo before and now their friends are from Mayo or from a country school or whatever and all those different social classes are started to mix or whatever and now definitely I'm the other end of it in the final year. I'd never think of a social class. I*

think probably county before I'd ever think of social class and it's never an issue do you what I mean. Like, let's say like I'd be on the grant. A few of my friends aren't and you know when it comes to things like that you know you could be going 'Jesus, you know, I'm going to collect my grant cheque' or whatever and they're saying you know 'well [..] my da gives me an allowance every whatever' do you what I mean? It doesn't...unless it is actually put on the table, it's not, it is never really an issue.

As the excerpt indicates Luke was uncomfortable in talking about class. Following this we moved back and forth trying to find a generative way of discussing this but the flow of the interview remained disrupted for the next few minutes[104]. The balance was only restored once Luke found a way to define class in a way that fits his own experience-in terms of financial constraints and being from an area that is designated as 'disadvantaged'[105].

Even though the flow returned over the course of the interview Luke nonetheless kept problematising access categories in various ways afterwards. He spent some time discussing a friend of his who fulfils most of the access programme criteria but because they are from a wealthier area than him she did not qualify as an access student. After chewing over the issue for several minutes Luke concludes *"I'm probably saying I shouldn't be classed while I should be classed".* For well-founded personal and social reasons Luke does not wish to be the object of a classifying gaze and says he *"should not be put into boxes"*, and appeals to the idea of meritocracy to explain why this should be the case; "*After college once you have the degree we will all be on a level playing field, that might be a bit idealistic, maybe because I have been after mixing with the diversity of university".* This description of finally arriving at a point in his life where class inequality is no longer really relevant to him personally recurred several times in the interview with Luke. An important element of this is the way he defines himself through the friendships he has built up in college with people from a wide variety of backgrounds (this is the 'we' and the 'diversity' he is talking about the excerpt quoted above).

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104 I am convinced that how this plays out often depends on how the interviewee reads the interviewer, and this includes the interviewer's class background. I think you can often see in the transcripts that a number of interviews assumed shared social experience as the basis for trusting me and in other cases there was a clear inference in what they said that I did not, or could not know, the world they were describing. There is further layer of complexity as the way we talk about these things changes over time and according to context. So a number of interviewees' form of class identification changed and became either more muted or more explicit over the course of the longitudinal study. In some cases this even shifted according to topic and there are interviews in which different segments of the transcript feature varying levels of class identification.

105 The fieldnotes taken after the interview just how much this part of our discussion loomed in my mind afterwards. I felt then that I had disturbed Luke's narrative and that I was so mired in my own concerns that I had pushed him in my question to use terms which were alien and alienating to him. I no longer think this is what occurred. It is not, I think, a case of using imprecise or inappropriate terms drawn from social science to discuss everyday experience as I first thought but rather that this exchange reflects something about the affective and normative nature of class experience.

As I mentioned already he was also very hopeful about his own future and right through the interview he chose to direct the interview towards his forthcoming plans.

It is worth pausing to analyse how exactly Luke describes class and place within this story of upward mobility and educational meritocracy. He is from an area where the rate of participation in HE which was respectively half and a third of the rate in the two middle class suburbs which are immediately adjacent to it (see Clancy, 2001). Luke clearly thinks his area has a bad reputation and later indicates that he thinks this is based on reality rather than just ill-informed generalisations. He says he encountered the "*Ballymun thing*" in the first year of college but he says very explicitly this he sees that a being separate from his "*actual self*" which he wants, understandably, to be defined by his merits and his achievements. From his story it is evident that he feels his success has given him choices which is measured by the distance he can put between himself and what might regarded as 'typical' for someone from his area. The move away from Ballymun through college is understood entirely in class terms but these are terms which he distrusts. The gives rise to complex patterns of class (dis)identification in the interview. Class is described by Luke as a real social phenomenon, primarily of place, and it is on this basis that he qualified as an access student but he simultaneously feels strongly that this is also a false categorisation of his "*actual self*". Luke is making sense of recent events by moving between two distinct types of social knowledge - the biographical and the mainstream social science categories of access and disadvantage. Luke overcomes the tensions and contradictions this negotiation entails by lending greater weight to biographical self-understanding and by describing higher education as a transitional identity space which is the entry point to a more meritocratic society.

Luke wants to protect his own sense of who he is now and who he wants to become. But as he notes himself there is a difficulty in the way he shapes his story as it relies on both the disavowal and acknowledgement of class -as part of his past but irrelevant to his future. Luke is saying several things that I think are important here. He is telling us that access categories have an instrumental value but say relatively little about personal life and are biographically almost worthless. Luke identifies with his disciplined, individual self and disidentifies with his class background as understood through personal experience in a geographic community which is overlaid, and in part defined, through the impact of access categories. This leads him to define success as the product of active individuals and problems as the consequence of

social passivity. As I have already noted in the last chapter I think that inadvertently access policies encourage this idea that class is something that can, and perhaps even should, be overcome through participation in higher education. Through the research I come to the decision that this is very problematic but Luke can hardly be blamed for embracing this idea.

I think the interview with Luke indicates something more than the limits of access categories though. It also suggests that class is often a disturbing topic and he says so very clearly. He reminds us that "the stories that people tell themselves in order to explain how they got to the place that they currently inhabit –are often in deep and ambiguous conflict with the official interpretive devices of a culture" (Steedman ,1986, p. 6). It is evident from the excerpt above that for Luke "class pollutes this idea of individuality since it challenges people's autonomy by seeing them as the product of the social background" (Savage, Bagnall & Longhurst, 2001, p. 882). Luke also reminds us that to categorise, as Bourdieu has argued, in its etymological root, includes the notion of accusation and I think in a class ridden society these terms always have affective and evaluative connotations. This is a theme that I will return to later but what that purifying class inequality of its evaluative, affective and ultimately moral connotations renders it into something else entirely. Overall, I think the paradoxes, tensions and knots within Luke's biographical account suggest something important about the limits of the categories produced by mainstream social science and illustrates both the importance, and the difficulty, of talking about class.

The commonalities and differences between Luke's and James' stories are meaningful. James whole story is shaped by the fact that he remains profoundly uncertain about the likelihood of success of efforts to disentangle himself from his past and the problems in his area. Luke also associates his area with problems but describes his movement away from it as secure and is far more assured that the 'inside and outside' of class and self are sharply demarcated. Yet I think in both stories we can see how class, is more than a category defined by variables in income or occupational roles; it is a "loaded moral signifier" (Savage, Bagnall & Longhurst, 2001, p, 889) which is very strongly linked to notions of place and social space.

A note on families, community and class
Up to this point I have separated the idea of place from family for the purposes of clarity. This is not a tenable division; when you ask people about their lives they nearly always discuss their family and the experiences within families are, of course, absolutely

fundamental to how we learn to be in the world. The data suggest that this is also crucial to the way we think about community and space and both Luke and James talked about the relationship between family and community in their interviews. Arguably, we can go one step further and make the claim that it is within the family where the stories of a classed self are truly forged- an idea which has been explored with great acuity by Annette Kuhn (1995) and Carolyn Steedman (1986). They point out that in family life, through day to day routine, interpersonal relationships, modes of interaction and fantasies, we learn to read the wider world and identify our 'place' in social space[106]. According to Steedman (1986) this is also where gender and class begin to intersect, overlap and mediate each other in very powerful ways. The interviewees' stories about family life reinforced for me just how important our early socialisation is for grasping the nuances and subtleties of social division in personal terms. Again and again family expectations, financial resources and cultural capital were discussed in relation biographical decisions and were presented as the bedrock of classed 'structures of feeling'. Family stories are also, inevitably, stories of care and carelessness and this will be very apparent in many of the excerpts from the interviews.

The research suggests that these stories of place, family and class form the basis of what I would call - in the absence of a better phrase- an 'everyday' sociological imagination. That is to say that our ideas of how society works, and are place in the broader scheme of things, are frequently rooted in an interpretation of inter-generational family stories. Thus, to make an obvious but important point, what class *means* for the children of parents who had their childhood wrecked in state institutions, such as industrial schools, or the children of parents who have seen slow and steady improvement over two generations is very different. I note this because these two examples come directly from the research and I have in mind two research participants who in neo-Weberian or in a quantitative survey would occupy the same class position but their family stories class pride and class damage play out very differently in their specific biographies. The point being is that family experiences can feed our sense of shame, anger or even quiescence and this eventually becomes part of how we act in the world. These narratives, as we shall see, also undoubtedly provide resources for resilience a theme which featured very strongly in the interviews. Given how often social mobility

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106 Steedman's 'psychobiography' includes an account of her father in relation to his own family and external authority which has few parallels in the literature on class and is a deeply convincing and insightful account of one aspect of the 'psychic lanscape of class'. More recent books such as *Dust* and *Labours Lost* are fascinating but do not recast the debate about class and identity in the same way.

appeared as a topic in the data it should also be mentioned, however obvious it is, that intergenerational family stories regularly informed individual's desire to overcome class barriers. Beside which our families have a powerful role in confirming or denying the validity of changes in self and circumstances and in bringing cohesion or forcing a rupture in life and learning stories.[107]. Again I think this points to the complex and multidimensional nature of the making of class identities as well as the limits of some of the most commonly used analytical tools we commonly employ in analysing class.

In relation to the main theme of this part of the chapter we can also say that if the fine web of memories, sentiments and narratives within families mould dispositions and our notions of self and this becomes bound up with how we come to think of place and community. I have already discussed the fact that a large number of interviewees spoke about the difficulties and social problems that occur in some working class communities. Many of the interviewees constructed their biographies with these facts, and outsiders' perception of these areas, in mind and repeatedly this was often mediated through accounts of the family. To develop these various strands of the analysis in relation to each other I will turn now to Kieran.

Kieran *"When I say I am from Neilstown, people can't believe it"*

Kieran was a 17 year old business student when we met a few weeks after he came to college. He was extremely polite and was delighted to be in college. He anticipates that he will have a lot more opportunities open to him after he obtains his degree and talks enthusiastically about the benefits this will bring. In telling this story Kieran talks repeatedly about his community an area that has been treated in the media as a synonym for urban degeneration and social problems.

> *I'm from Neilstown and [so] people always assume 'he's a scumbag'-that is people's impression of Neilstown. When I say I am from Neilstown, people can't believe it. I am proud of my ma and da because of the way they brought me up. There are little 8 year olds that smoke hash-that is how bad it is. It is not everybody. But there will be little kids running around at one in the morning-their ma's don't care.*

Kieran's way of describing family, community and class was quite common in the research. The idea that a good family needs to protect its members from the threats on the street was

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107 This is further complicated by the fact that many mature students with children presented their lifestories as a series of continuities and breaks between their birth family and their own family. The extent to which a student of any age felt 'authorised' by families to enter higher education is also important and the willingness of family members to accept the changes this brought in personal biographies was a regular theme in the interviews.

discussed by seven others in the main cohort of interviewees and was also talked about in some detail by one of the community activists who participated in the research. Before continuing I think it must be said that these issues were usually brought up by people who lived in communities, or lived close to places, where deprivation has been very acute and where there are, or were, very serious social problems. So although it would be a mistake to say Kieran's description of his area holds good for the cohort as a whole it does describe accurately something that is happening in some parts of working class Ireland. In such circumstances, when social problems beset, and sometimes really begin to define an area, people need a credible explanation for why some families manage well and why other families become completely submerged by these difficulties and parenting is the most ready explanation for these differences.[108] According to Kieran the difference between the aspiring and respectable and the profligate and disreputable in a working class area is best understood in these terms. Kieran was certainly not alone in foregrounding this distinction. However, taken as a whole the data suggest that this is not a completely persuasive explanation–a number of interviewees told awful stories about their family and their childhood and yet had avoided getting involved in the worst of the street life and vice versa. But the fact that this was discussed, often in fairly emphatic terms, by a large minority of interviewees does means that it deserves consideration and it certainly tells us something about how class and identity are currently being constructed through notions of place and family.

That said I think Kieran's remarks are not just about familial neglect 'out there' but are related to his own positive experience of care and his desire not to be stereotyped. He says at a different point that he been taken for "*scumbag*" because he is from Neilstown but then says he and his family do not conform to "*people's impression*" of the place. His parents are not careless and this he thinks this has made him who he is and is part of the reason why he is at college. I think this is a defensive rather than a simply descriptive account of families in a working class area. Like both James and Luke, quite naturally Kieran wants to create a boundary between him the enduring problems which he sees in his day to day life and the negative image of his area has. In Kieran's account his family offered him care and resources for agency which provide a moral and physical bulwark against the worst of social problems. But in valorising his family in this way Kieran has to pursue a strategy of intraclass

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108 For a very different response by youth to these type of circumstances in Ireland see Saris & Bartley (2002) and in the UK Robins & Cohen (1978). Both pieces describe a territoriality of resistance- a very familiar idea, which is often depicted in popular culture- which strongly at odds with the way Kieran and many others chose to discuss community.

distinction. I think this is the 'double bind' of having a denigrated working class identity-you have to prove yourself against the assumptions and prejudices of others and then judge yourself, and present yourself for judgement, as not conforming to a stereotype. I would argue this not about Kieran's individual predilection or sensibilities and over the course of the research this pattern of disidentification became very familiar to me.

Class, place and social space

Luke, Kieran and James stories of place are unequivocally stories about class and their concern with social problems, with the perception and the reality of working class communities, are important aspects of their respective life stories. These three accounts were chosen because the illustrate one of the main findings of the research; place is very readily associated with class and carries very clear shared connotations and meanings and this is very important in how people think about class in everyday life. Generally, working class communities were associated with restriction and difficulties. The differences in emphasis should not be passed over, and the stories have been selected on this basis. Luke, Kieran and James, in very different ways, all display tremendous ambivalence in their discussion of the attachment and binds of community. This ambivalence is I want to suggest a function of trying to make sense of classed places in biographical terms; be that through various modes of disidentification or, on the other hand, feeling incapable of disentangling self and place; be that by placing the future in the hands of an agentic, individual self, separate and unfettered by the ongoing problems in an area or by discussing the difference a supportive family can make.

Each of these men is also asserting that they do not want to be pigeon-holed and even from the short excerpts given above we can see how a sense of place is linked to ideas about becoming and being, the past and the future. As such it is a mistake to think of space simply in physical terms and we need to grasp how conceptual, physical and imaginary notions of space all contribute to 'the production of space' (Lefebvre, 1991a). Due to inequality areas can quickly become synonyms for material lack and are transformed into symbolic spaces and the connotations and associations that cluster around a given place can become in time a question of self. There is, I think, in all these accounts a *double mapping* in which the physical environments are overlaid by a map of social space defined by hierarchy and power relations. This is, as we have seen, the type of social space that Bourdieu has attempted to

conceptualise and within which "class is defined as much as its *being-perceived* as by its *being*" (Bourdieu, 1984 p. 483). This dual process is fundamental to the cognitive maps we construct of social space which is based both on objective chances and subjective experience. These experiences are in turn shaped by the flows of capital, forms of investment and types of state and institutional intervention in a locality and the modes of representation of a given place made available in the community itself and in the media. On the basis of the research I think these maps are very often a very powerful element in the construction of class identity. This is why biographical strategies that intensify the connection with a place or allow one to distance oneself from an area are so important in grasping how class (dis)identification works in Ireland.

Can we say something more precise about how collective, yet differentiated, class processes lay the basis for biographical strategies? From the data it appears access to cultural capital, age and likelihood of upward social mobility are important factors in defining the extent to which one can separate out a notion of self from the lived experience of a given place. It is noticeable that the five interviewees within the working class cohort that distanced themselves most forcefully from the area they grew up in from were young, were successful at college, and were all attending university rather than the IT. It would be obtuse not to discern a social logic in such differences and this indicates how situational and contextual factors create opportunities for remaking the self. Interestingly, two students who were young and enjoyed success at college but who did not frame their story as a moving away from community have families who actively encouraged them to feel proud of their community by their parents and also had access to considerable cultural capital. For them there was no contradiction between being working class and being successful (these stories will be explored in the next chapter).

A world in motion: Social space and individualisation - Beck meets political economy
We are accustomed to think of class experience within communities as the basis of stable processes of identity formation (Bourdieu, 1984; Hoggart, 1958). But most of the interviewees, and nearly all the younger students, discussed their lives in a manner that suggested that they expected to be occupationally and socially mobile and that upward social trajectories are now seen as the norm. This expectation, as the accounts of Kieran, Luke and James suggest, forces us to reflect on our sense of belonging and the nature of our communities and this was the case across most of the cohort and includes those interviewees

who offered solidaristic accounts of class and community. I think, this is connected to the socio-historical shifts discussed in Chapter Five through which Irish society has become more fluid and the nature and meaning of work has been radically altered. In contrast just over a generation ago cohesive and stable accounts of community and identity were quite common and there were very limited expectations of upward social mobility (O'Dea, 1994).

I have argued that class identity is frequently tied up with physical places and this forms part of our conceptions of social space. I want to now make the case that this expectation of mobility adds another crucial tier to the discussion of place, belonging and social space. A large majority of the interviewees subscribed to the idea that *as individuals* they needed to reflexively negotiate their way in the world to ensure successful movement through social space. Movement in these accounts is associated with more than occupational mobility; it is about proving oneself to be an agentic self who is capable of manoeuvring through social space, and of *making* a successful biography. This of course also depends on the structuring of social space, based on the distribution of resources and assets and the flows which reproduce, disturb and determine lines of power, been seen as natural or at least beyond our control. I think we can see this idea very clearly in Luke's biographical account. Repeatedly interviewees discussed the importance of personal agency in making a life and the costs of failing to be agentic (in fact this idea was most noticeable in the interviews with people who felt overwhelmed and thought social circumstances exceeded their 'resources of the self'). This in most cases was seen as confirmation, on a deep personal level, of failure-and often led to intense self-searching. Only two interviewees did not seem very concerned with upward movement-broadly understood- and both were middle aged men in middle class jobs

This emphasis on mobility and the concomitant anxiety about falling behind in the race to make a life, along with the stress on biographical strategies that are *personally* generative lends some credence to some of the claims about reflexive modernity made by theorists such as Zygmunt Bauman and Ulrich Beck. Poverty in the new millennium, Bauman (1998a, 1998b, 2000) has argued, is marked by physical and social immobility, and is thus how we negotiate space and place indicates something about our social position and the power one possesses. One of Beck's main arguments is that in the present era a flexible and reflexive biography is not just a choice it is an imperative (Beck, 1992). The research participants' emphasis on individual strategies aimed at circumventing the difficulties faced by many

working class communities and on upward social movement and on the remaking of identity vis-à-vis class and place suggest that these contentions have genuine explanatory value.

Trajectories through supposedly fluid social space were described in four main ways by the participants. The first trajectory is a 'failure' of movement and remaining the same person, in the same job, in the same social position living in the same area (I say failure because that is how it was usually described by the participants). The second trajectory is imagined as a clean break and move outside of one's community to new opportunities and to new types of work and education. This often takes effort as it requires disembedding and disassociation. The third is to nominally remain within a community but to secure access to resources, usually classed forms of cultural capital which copper-fasten one's position and protect self and family from the worst effects of inequality. The latter two trajectories are usually described as a move away from the idea of shared community. This was quite common and all three trajectories appear to suggest that established solidaristic notions of working class community are indeed being dissolved in an "acid bath of competition" (Beck, 1992, p. 94). However, the fourth trajectory- which importantly is also based on the assumption that reflexive biographical strategies are absolutely necessary-indicates that the reality is more complicated and less drastic than Beck suggests.

The fourth trajectory described by the participants is to make a move through social space to secure access to resources with the intention to use the things accrued 'to give something back'. It is notable that this was the most common response of the interviewees in confronting the biographical dilemmas created by coming to university (see also Fleming, Loxley, Kenny & Finnegan 2010). This sense of responsibility to one's community was articulated in a variety of ways; for example the participants often discussed being able to create opportunities for their peers and talked about being 'an example'. Others would suggest they wanted to use their life experience to communicate with neighbours as part of an effort to ameliorate deeply rooted social problems (usually by encouraging people into education). This desire to give back was not simply altruistic and I think for many people it was a way of discussing changes in self-perception and was used to indicate that they believed by coming to college they were becoming better educated, wiser and worthier and ultimately more socially valuable human beings. My point here is that while there is very strong evidence in the data that class identities are no longer moored in stable communities

and as a consequence we are witnessing new highly differentiated modes of biographical action and new, and largely more individualised, ways of thinking about class, space and agency. But it would be a mistake to make a leap and discern in all of this the corrosive effects of competition. I think this underestimates the extent to which attachment and responsibility to community and others has been refigured rather than erased by new modes of biographical action.

I indicated earlier that I think one of the main problem with Beck's theory is it lacks political insight. It would be remiss not to point out that the students accounts of community and their social trajectories are also underpinned by local and international political changes which have remade place and space. For instance, one can point to how state and local authority housing policies have encouraged intraclass distinctions within communities for most of the history of the Irish state (McCabe, 2011; McManus, 2003). In documenting this McCabe (2011) has gathered evidence that county council tenant purchase schemes introduced in the 1980s in Ireland has had an negative impact and in some cases led to cohesive communities unravelling as this policy created an incentive for the better off to sell up and buy elsewhere and those without resources were left in 'sink' estates. This policy measure led to the concentration of social problems in certain areas and diminished the amount of cultural and economic resources available in some working class areas. The deleterious effects of this are still being felt and recent housing policy, even when financial and economic resources were definitely available, has done little to alleviate these problems (Bissett, 2010)[109]. I think it is self-evident why these sorts of political decisions cannot be left out of our analysis of how people experience and perceive their areas in the era of 'reflexive modernity'.

I think this needs to be contextualised in even broader terms and I would argue that these changes are part of a global, neoliberal politics of space based on the increased mobility of capital and the polarisation of wealth. As a consequence of this polarisation the gated communities of the elite have sprung up in cities around the globe (Davis, 1990, 2004) which are a world away from the ruined spaces of the despised poor (Wacquant, 2009) -the so called underclass, chavs, trailer trash and the youth of sink estates, ghettoes and banlieus. This is of course precisely what has happened in Ireland as well (Bissett, 2010; McCabe, 2011) and is just what has occurred in James' community where deindustrialisation has been followed by

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109 See also Breathnach (2006) for a very thorough historical exploration of class and space in Dun Laoghaire

partial gentrification. The key thing is that for many working class people in Ireland and internationally the old forms of working class community are now becoming a distant memory and elite gated communities remain an unlikely social destination so individual strategies ensuring upward movement make a great deal of sense. Of course when we conceive of class, space and mobility in this fashion it changes the way we think of education as well and the implications of this will be elaborated upon in Chapter Seven.

Conclusion

I think these types of narratives of self and place tell us something important about class and identity in contemporary Ireland. On a basic level these accounts emphasise firstly that our conception of place are tightly tied up with notions of class and secondly that living in a working class community can often entail problems and issues that wealthier people simply do not encounter in their day to day life. However, broad notions of shared collective class identity cannot make sense of the biographical narratives in which disaffiliation and strategies of intraclass distinction are now more common than solidaristic commitments to community. In fact, for most of the interviewees "class cultures can be usefully viewed as modes of differentiation, rather than types of collectivity" (Savage, 2000, p. 102). Yet despite clear evidence of a modern reflexive notion of self in these individual narratives they nonetheless remain firmly anchored in historical context and material processes and despite some of the more extravagant claims in recent social theory there is very scant evidence of completely fluid and decentred identities. It is also significant vis-à-vis atomistic notions of individuality or apocalyptic notions of the growing influence of a reinvigorated social Darwinism that many participants chose to frame their biographical choices as part of an effort to 'give back' to others.

We can conclude that how physical space is imagined, how it is marked and marks the self, is indispensable to how class processes become entangled with questions of identity. However, the way this is connected to broader notions of class identity is largely contingent on political and social factors. In the current conjuncture, in which high levels of social fluidity and increased competition people have to devise ways of thinking through the dilemmas and opportunities this brings. Listening to, Kieran, James and Luke the extent to which the demand for biographical reflexivity and movement in social space is a very real, sometimes challenging, and sometimes generative, part of contemporary working class experience, is I

think clear. Of course this also has profound implications for how education is valued by these people.

Working class jobs, identity and development

Place, social space, work and worth were the defining issues in how people spoke about class and this part of the chapter will explore the third major theme -how the interviewees talked about their working lives. I think one of the weaknesses of certain versions of postmodernism (e.g. Lyotard, 1984) and even some versions of class theory, including Bourdieu's (1984) description of 'the space of lifestyles', is they lack a clear theory of the labour process and also overlook the subjective experience of work. That consumption patterns, forms of leisure and everyday culture are important to understanding class is beyond dispute and it is a banality at this point to highlight the limits of economism and the obsession with class identity at 'the point of production'. But reading writers such as Lyotard (1984) one could be forgiven for thinking the fact that supermarket shelves are stocked, toilets cleaned, phone calls screened, data entered, drinks served, sick bodies cleaned and cars fixed are minor but nonetheless completely uninteresting miracles. It simply does not feature in how he describes knowledge in the modern world. In stark contrast to this the data gathered during the research, primarily but not exclusively from mature students, suggests paid work continues to be absolutely central to working class experience, both in the obvious and important sense of levels of income and access to resources but also in terms of the formation of identity and access to developmental opportunities. So to relate this directly to previous arguments made in Chapter Three I think types of employment, linked to ownership and the division of labour, has an enormous effect on determining an agent's overall position in social space.

Burawoy (1979) has convincingly argued that our adaptation to the labour process offers a more credible starting point for understanding social reproduction and hegemony rather than thwarted psychic needs or through the operation powerful, and mysterious, ideological apparatuses. Based on the conversations with the research participants I am inclined to agree with this proposition. Their accounts underline the simple fact that paid work consumes vast amounts of our time, effort and creativity and embeds us in daily relationships and activities with their own specific rhythms and symbolic weight. The biographical accounts also suggest this helps to define our self-image and expectations and through work we adapt in a profound, but largely unremarkable way, to the way the social world is constituted. The availability, type, tempo of work is necessarily related to the global division of labour and the

flows of capital (Harvey, 1989, 2005, 2010a; Lefebvre, 1991a). Despite the importance given to work in the interviews it is telling that only two people-one person from the middle class cohort and one person from a working class background discussed work in a consciously political way

Again I think this shows that we need to circumspect; we should not mistake signs for wonders and on the basis jump to the conclusion that the politics of work does not affect biographies. While the exploitative aspects of work were rarely foregrounded one of the major themes in the data was the negative impact of feeling a lack of control or a sense of choice over employment immediately after school and in securing productive and rewarding jobs in the medium term. It was also noteworthy, and this I think will help to define more precisely the idea of trajectories in social space discussed above, was *the way* the interviewees framed their concern to move upward in occupational structures. For most of the interviewees this was rooted in a desire for greater autonomy and, to a lesser extent to avoid subordination, rather than the pursuit of money for its own sake or the result of unalloyed ambition. Again the differences with the mature middle class cohort were instructive; these interviewees also discussed feeling dissatisfied with jobs and the desire for more meaningful work but their description of their career trajectories indicated a higher level of expectations and a far stronger sense of having control and choice over their working life

David *"It had no future, it was brutal"*

Leaving school is an immensely significant transition point in modern biographies (Alheit, 1994a) and for many of the people I spoke with it was the point at which their social 'fate' became clear and illusions were dispelled as hopes and vaguely imagined plans were put to one side. David, an extremely helpful and self-effacing man in his early forties explains that he was a reluctant to leave school and at age sixteen

> *I entered the workplace. One of the first jobs I had was in a factory. I was very lucky to get it. It paid £30 pound a week [in the 1980s] and it was very hard work. It had no future, it was brutal. I think I lasted four weeks and then they let me go because I wasn't as good a worker maybe or I didn't fit in. I ended up doing lots of jobs after that. I have only been unemployed for one period of my life which was when I was eighteen, for six months. At that point I received the dole for £10.15. I went into work in fast food places. I would work weekends, nights. I did okay and it didn't occur to me even at that point to go back to the education system. I was enjoying it, earning a few quid with your mates to go out at the weekend. I was just being a teenager. Again it was in the 80s so there were no real opportunities.*

This sort of staccato review of early working life was a common feature in the interviews with mature students. Like many other interviewees, David stresses that even though the service jobs "*were menial and you were treated like shit*" the fun and camaraderie to be had in the first year or two made up for it and gave him sense of being capable and was a milestone in becoming an adult. David's story and the data in general indicates that over time this usually changes and the cumulative experience of doing jobs in which one has very little control over one's work and in which there is limited autonomy and very few developmental opportunities begins to weigh more heavily.

One of the telling things about the way David expresses himself is that he paradoxically felt lucky to get "*brutal*" work and this gives us some insight into what David believed he could realistically hope for when he left school[110]. This is tied up with class, family and his peers. David's parents had very little education, which he explains by talking about their class background and the enduring effects on the family of his grandfather's negative experiences in state institutions. His circle of friends in west Dublin also shared the same expectations and David eloquently explains many of friends from his youth have had very difficult lives. Although this is all clear to him in retrospect, he did not think about this at the time and his main concern in his twenties was to put in the effort and ensure that he stayed in work- whatever it was. The admixture of compulsion and resilience and a firm determination to make the best of circumstances, is completely characteristic of many of the biographical accounts of work gathered during the research.

Despite his desire to buckle down and get on with things he says he felt "*like a square peg in a round hole*" in his early jobs and he eventually became a taxi driver- initially in a small family firm. For a variety of reasons he did not stay with this company but all the same he has now spent most of the past twenty years driving a cab. David says the money was quite good in the first half of the Celtic Tiger, before the industry was deregulated in 2000, and he also feels he has learnt a lot from his customers but he is unequivocal that he does not enjoy his job at all. He explains why

> *A few years ago I tried to get out of it because I worked nights, in town. Anything that can happen to you in a taxi has happened to me. If you have a nightmare scenario, mark me down for it. When I started I was very nervous. I was actually scared, because*

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110 See Finnegan (2010b) for early treatment of David's story

I was a very skinny kid. I wasn't very fit. I didn't have any experience of the world really.

This sense of vulnerability has been reinforced by the experience difficult and dangerous encounters he has had over the years many of which he links to social problems such as heroin addiction which he says *"ravaged"* some of the areas where he has worked. He also does not enjoy the long hours away from his family or the routine, and believes that there is not much respect or status in being a taxi driver. Besides which he finds thing have got worse since the deregulation and recession and he now actively dislikes the work

Customers don't have any sympathy towards you [...] other drivers are pulling in front of you, just the usual. It's the way the business had gone and it's not a happy place to be. It's very competitive. I don't want to disregard anybody else.

David's description of work is deeply infused with a sense of mild, but long-standing frustration, and he feels his life is bound to a job which has locked him out a world of opportunities which remains just outside his field of vision. His personal life though has been much better and he adds

I never had any luck in my career choices. I've been very lucky with love. I have been with the woman I love since we were teenagers. I am lucky in that respect. I am lucky in my health and that my kids are very healthy.

He stresses in each interview we did together that family is at the core of what he is about and how he motivates himself. Nonetheless, he has had enough of driving and he decided to try to get a degree on the basis that this will allow him to do something else. According to David the degree is about taking control and getting the respect and the opportunity to do more rewarding work which he can vest something of himself into. He wants a better life and he also says he wants to 'give something back'

As I got to know David a little better through the research process it became clear just how resilient a person he is but also just how deeply frustrating he has found working as a taxi driver. He persistently came back to the issues of agency, autonomy and control in his narrative and, as the quotes above suggest, he feels his 'public' life- of work and education- before coming to college, were submerged in the flow of larger events and forces outside of his control. Reviewing this now he thinks this is mainly due to leaving school early-an issue which he brought up frequently in our discussions (this will be returned to in Chapter Seven).

This is the moment which left him without options yet he knows *"In the mid-80s, that's what people did. They went out to get jobs, to try to make money".* As time has elapsed this career path has left him feeling that he had in some way *"failed miserably"* and wondering *"am I capable of achieving anything?"* This is rooted in work experience but affects the way David speaks in general and he often talked about how fortune and misfortune arrives and leaves without bidding or intervention but tellingly this is not the case when it comes to his family and when he talks about them it is all about making things happen on his terms.

I suspect that in going to college he is attempting to make the pleasures and rewards of his private and public lives match each other. One of the most noticeable aspects of his account was the importance given to agency now and a sharp awareness of being pushed and nudged by external events previously. Reading the interviews with David through the years it is striking the extent to which they are above all a narrative of intention and sustained agency which describe a patient working against the pull of earlier circumstances. His stories of earlier frustrations in work and life are in part a way of highlighting his recent decision to steer a new course for himself. David talks about moments of missed opportunity and grasping whatever chances comes his way now in a vivid and detailed way-both with regard to small things, such as competitions, and bigger things like his prospective career. He says "*I am considering my options very carefully for once in my life and it is all a bit scary*" and he tells me "*failure is not an option*". Above all David "*wants to do himself justice*" by which he means do work that he cares about and that gives him more time with his family

There are two schemes of action and temporality in David's narrative and I want to suggest this is linked to his experience of class inequality. According to Bourdieu (2000, p. 208)

> the experience of time is engendered in the relationship between habitus and the social world, between the dispositions to be and to do and the regularities of a natural and social cosmos (or a field). It arises more precisely, in the relationship between the practical expectations or hopes which are constitutive of an *illusio* as an investment in a social game and the tendencies immanent to this game

In accounting for adaptation and breaks in social experience Bourdieu (2000, pp. 208-210), drawing on Husserl, distinguishes between two modes of being each of which are linked to specific conceptions of intentionality and time. The first mode of being is 'protensive' which is deeply embedded in a practical sense of the social game; this is a form of cognition and

practice in which immersion in the here and now lends plans and actions a 'quasi automatic' quality in which the future is indistinct. This is perhaps the most common way of acting and being for all of us and in which there is clear 'fit' between the given social world and individual habitus and between our expectations and the course of events. In contrast, the second mode of being is "the *project* as a conscious aiming at the future" (2000, p. 207) which acknowledges the future as contingent and subject to the effect of human agency. The two modes are distinguished by the level of conscious reflexive planning and ways of envisaging the future and in David's biography there is now an evident 'project' orientation which he directly links to education.

So what exactly does this have to do with class? In the onrush of events in his teenage years, in a situation determined by class expectations and exigencies in both his family and society, David left school. For him and his friends there was neither the time nor space to imagine other futures nor were the sort opportunities available in their lifeworld which might make this seem possible. Getting by was enough. This was a commonly told story and it would be facile to treat these social facts as accidents of individual fate rather it bespeaks the power of class to shape habitus. To support his family David has made the best of his situation but this has left him partially unfulfilled; he circles the city, chatting, learning and thinking but feeling undervalued and frustrated. He says this is not the worst fate and discusses several people in his immediate circle as a young man who have since fell by the wayside or got swallowed up by events. Nonetheless, beyond casual conversation his work offers him little opportunity for the sort of development he craves. What is clear in David's story is that much of the restriction he feels now is rooted in his day to day activity in which it is hard to sustain interest in but which he is compelled to keep working at. This is experienced by David and many other interviewees as a massive limitation on his personal development. However common this experience might be it is far from trivial.

David's story indicates how our work ties us to immediate demands which are bound to the distribution of *social resources for protention*. What is interesting here is that this has shifted in David's case and grasping how resources and social context, linked to class, age and family circumstances, lays the basis for a generative biographical change strikes me a absolutely fundamental to understanding what is deemed important by many of the working

class students. Education and most especially Higher Education are linked to personal development, mobility and agency.

In David's case getting to college was no simple matter it was nurtured through personal learning projects and required family support over many years. More crucially access to Higher education in Ireland changed in the 1990s. When David saw that is might be possible to change what he had been doing for decades he did not hesitate. He has been pursuing this goal, of getting more rewarding work and living a less trammelled life, through education for over seven years now. I think his efforts indicate how biography and educational projects, in a reflexive era, can be traced back to lived experience in work and, ultimately, the division of labour in society.

Mark: *"Jesus, I hate being subservient to people"*

For self-evident reasons mature students usually have much more to say about work than younger students. However, the description of work, agency and education given by Mark who at age 21, after a couple of years of work, decided to go to college is, in many respects, very similar to David's. Many of the same themes cropped up; Mark sees HE as an escape route from the boredom and subordination of working class jobs and crucial to gaining a greater amount of respect as part of a project of self-making.

> *When I left school I went to work in a lot of different jobs, plastering, welding, roofing and I just got dog sick of it. So when I was twenty I went back and did the Leaving Cert again because I only got a hundred and twenty points the first time. I got four hundred the second time [...] Well it was just... I don't why I just fucked school up so bad in the first place. .I was well able for it but I was just too lazy or whatever to do the work. Then I was out working, I couldn't settle in a job. Always some part of the job was annoying or somebody in the job was annoying me and at one stage I just got sick of it. I had a real prick that I was working for at the time so I said I'm sick of doing fucking donkey work for an arsehole like him so I just went back to the school*

Mark's workmates mocked him when he told them of his decision to return to education-bringing in empty bottles and telling him to put diluted orange in them when he packed his lunch for school. He explains that they did not really understand his decision because they

> *could be making like €700 or €800 a week slabbing walls or whatever and they'd go 'Do you think you're going to make more money if you go back to school and all this? You can only make €400 a week in an office'*

His workmates friendly mockery and scepticism about his decision was, from a certain perspective, well founded. At this time a labour shortage in construction due to massive speculation in the property market meant that wages in this sector were comparatively high (Fahey, Russell & Whelan, 2007). So why did Mark walk away from a well-paid job at a young age? Well, again and again Mark chose to emphasise how much he values his autonomy saying *"I hate running around after people"* and later *"Jesus, like I hate being subservient to people. You know the way you have to all eager and willing"*. Mark could not be more explicit, for him working class jobs often entail a form of subordination which offends his sense of dignity. He is equally scathing about welfare and grant agencies who have made him feel the same way.

Over the interview two other factors, apart from his negative experience at work, were highlighted by Mark; he says he has always had a strong sense that he had always been capable of doing something else and a keen awareness that although the money was good in the building trade it was not going to offer him the sort of prospects he wanted in the future. According to Mark his ability to learn and his capability for long term planning distinguishes him from his friends and peers in his home town who are all working in building or have joined the army. Mark is not arrogant but does say that he does not think he is a 'typical' lad from his area mainly because he believes is academically brighter than his mates. It became evident in the conversation that Mark subscribes to a meritocratic and individualistic notion of social mobility and when I ask Mark if education is making Ireland more equal he confirms this impression

> *A: I don't know about equality but it might be a ticket to personal advancement.*
> *Q: Yeah, I mean part of what's going on here with this research project is asking people if education facilitates social mobility.*
> *A: Yeah it does, definitely.*
> *Q: So what's your best case scenario? What are you doing in a couple of years?*
> *A: I suppose doing the H Dip. I can do a Masters next year and then a H Dip. and then just get a job secondary teaching.*
> *Q: And why do you want to do that?*
> *A: Just get off at 3.30 pm for the day (laughs).*
> *Q :(Laughs).*
> *A: And three months off at the summer (laughs).*
> *Q: (Laughs) You're not full of a passion to teach?*
> *A: I have a bit of that as well like. I know, I'd like to... I think I have experience I can bring to bear on that situation….*
> *Q: What situation?*

A:Like I'd love to figure out a way if I saw somebody who was like me when I was in secondary school, try to figure out a way to just get to them to wake up, you know.

His general orientation to education is undoubtedly instrumental (as his discussion of essay writing and exams later in the interview confirms). For Mark education is about getting away from subordination and securing an easier life. However, despite initially talking about his choices as fairly clear-cut and straightforward for most of the interview and presenting himself as sceptical, humorous and agentic it turned out to be a little more complicated than that. His desire for personal autonomy and better working conditions is also linked to a desire to help others who find themselves in a similar position to his own. He explains that he found college difficult at times and almost left twice because: "*I just I couldn't study and I couldn't stop rolling, you know, personal shit over my head. I was sitting there doing nothing; it was like a block in my mind that I just couldn't study*

Mark goes on to talk about how he was helped out by his family, especially his mother and his sisters, and student services in college on several occasions. I think it would be a mistake to either deny his instrumental, and largely individualistic, orientation to his degree or to pass over his acknowledgement of care. As with many other students who discussed working class communities Mark wants to know he can move away, he wants to be upwardly mobile and thinks this is now the norm, he is looking for more personal autonomy and greater security but hopes to do this in a way that allows him to use his experience to work with students who he thinks *"just need to wake up"*.

According to both David and Mark one of major frustration of being in many working class jobs is that you do not feel in control of your fate. What is pertinent for this study is that both of these men, a generation apart, arrived at college with the idea that formal education is about choice and agency and is believed to offer access to greater resources of respect and dignity (see for similar findings in the US see Sennett & Cobb, 1977). In both cases these men describe a biographical transition from job to career and from protention to project, and the two men are seeking upward mobility and both believe that education is the most effective way of ensuring this happens. In neither case has this transition been a simple or easy process but it definitely occurred far more seamlessly and quickly for Mark. One could point to individual predilections or the onus of family responsibilities but it seems to me that it is mainly conjunctural factors-such as easier access to HE and the economic boom- that

most readily explain the difference between these two men's trajectories. Both of the life stories also support Bourdieu's contention about the adaptive nature of social practice but, and this anticipates the discussion later in the thesis, I think it would be a mistake to underestimate just how important a restless desire for respect and development has been for David's and Mark's choices and social strategies.

What Mark and David say about the day to day experience of many working class jobs was echoed by most of the research participants who had been in full-time work. Anna the cleaner says she is sick of her life *"working, working, earning money"* in a punishing routine of ten to twelve hours a day in a tedious and physically demanding job. Eithne, a shopworker remarks *"it does depress me. I hate going in (Laughs). [...] I love communicating with the customers, I love that! I am a people person, I am not afraid of work"* but finds the routine and the subordination wearing and difficult. This social experience of work could be illustrated ad nauseam. Interestingly, this was also a very strong theme in interviews with a number of mainly mature female students, who were in the administrative roles such as payroll or information processing, some of which were unionised and secure semi-state or civil service positions. This matters because this group were the least likely to self-identify as working class or discuss working class areas and communities in the terms outlined above. In fact there is clear evidence of sharp intraclass differentiation in the data. Nonetheless, the majority of them also described deadening routines, lack of agency and boredom as key elements in choosing to come to college. In a couple of cases the disjunction between sense of potential and the reality and rhythms of bureaucratic work had resulted in very profound frustration and one interviewee said it had been the cause of an extended, and serious, bout of depression.

The extent to which our jobs, as part of a broader labour process, affords or us to exercise autonomy of judgement and action and offers developmental opportunities for one self and one's projects seems to be key to explaining this. I think we can usefully link these empirical findings to the discussion in Chapter Three of Marx and Smith on the division of labour and what Amartya Sen has termed the 'capabilities approach' to human development (1999, 20090. Sen has argued that we need to attend to how social relations could be refigured to allow for "the expansion of the "capabilities" of persons to lead the lives they value- and have

reason to value" (1999 p. 18) as part of a more complete theory of development and freedom. An important aspect of being working class in Ireland, according to the interviewees, is that one can easily find oneself confined to work for long periods of time that hinders and restricts this expansion of these capabilities. I think that this set of widely shared social experience alongside the belief that formal education offers a way of by-passing these limits is absolutely key part of how education is understood constructed and valued.

"Not so much a glass ceiling as a brick wall!" **Class, credentials and social mobility**

There is another identifiable cohort, just under a quarter of the interviewees, who had worked in full-time jobs after school, who expressed less frustration with the day to day activities of their working life. One of the characteristics of this group is that they have enjoyed some measure of upward mobility and/or their work has served to confirm their ability and worth in one way or another. Work is still a fundamental part of their biographies and learning stories, and there is often the same desire for greater developmental opportunities and a greater level of security, but this is framed slightly differently and the sense of feeling trammelled is far less acute. For this cohort the decision to go to college was often precipitated by a change in personal circumstances- such as redundancy, sickness or suddenly having less care responsibilities- but very commonly, this was rooted in labour market experience in which they had encountered the need for college qualifications for promotion.

Over the working lives of many of the mature students who took part in the study the structure of the labour market has altered and the importance of credentials has in society has increased. Sarah felt *"stuck with a certain label due to the lack of a third level qualification".* Josie says she was looking for something more secure in administrative work and *"a few jobs came up but my lack of education. I didn't have the Leaving Cert so [so] before I went inside the door and when I was interviewed I used to kind of fall apart".* Perhaps Steve, an ex-hotel worker in his late 30s, summed up the feelings of this cohort best when he remarked that you can get promoted by dint of hard work but eventually in most modern workplaces the lack of credentials will surface and you hit *"not so much a glass ceiling as a brick wall".*

Katy *"the person who fell through the cracks"*

We can see how the need for credentials alongside some of the issues already highlighted in previous stories play out in Katy's biography. She is a bright and precise person in her 30s who proved over the years to be a very fluent, candid and engaging interviewee. Each time I met Katy it was clear that she had thought through many of the things we talked about in great detail and in real depth beforehand[111]. She grew up in a loving family in which there were nonetheless some serious difficulties. Home life could be *'"turbulent"* and *"poverty was a big, a huge issue"*. She went to a school which had a mix of social classes but feels she was overlooked there-and some of this she feels was related to her class background. Katy's social trajectory after school was informed by the intersection of class, family and schooling

> *I always refer to myself as the person who fell through the cracks in community school because I never went to a career advisor. I never got a teacher who said 'you might be good at this, or why don't you try this?' So I thought I would go and get a job because my parents needed the money and it was a financial problem more than anything else. When I left school I worked in a shop and then I left and worked in a warehouse. That was awful, and then I worked in on a CE scheme. By that stage I decided that I liked teaching. I was a teaching assistant [..] I loved that but I had to leave it after two years because it was a Community Employment scheme. Then I ended up doing a few private courses in Word and Excel. I did the ECDL. Then I went to work for 'Premiumcorp'. I ended up there as an administrator. Then after two years a job came up in the training department. I thought I would apply. I didn't think I would get it, but I went for the interview and I got the job. I enjoyed it, but it was limited to customer care and admin and I trained them on the packages we had.*

We have the same lack of choice and making the best of circumstances that featured in David's story. However, the situation in the 1990s was different than the 1980s and Katy eventually found work that gave her some confirmation of her capabilities although she later tells me that deep down she still very worried that she was *"stupid"*. She also became sharply aware that she was at distinct disadvantage in a corporation which required college credentials for most of the career paths.

> *I think that held me back a lot [..]. I was in the training department and I would see people who would come in and I would feel 'I could do that job, not better, but as good as them', but I didn't have the academic qualifications to back me up or to go on and manage this department.[..] Then I was made redundant. I was made redundant from Premiumcorp-800 people and jobs were all gone to Asia. So I had to go there to train the new workforce. We didn't have to do it, but you were encouraged. How else were they going to train them because at that stage most of people had left? So when I was*

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111 See Fleming & Finnegan (2011a) for a related analysis.

over there I thought 'what I am going to do when I get home?' I am in this job but I am not qualified per se to be doing it. I want to have a qualification or a degree in training. I don't have any piece of paper that says this person is the best person for the job because of A, B and C. I have lots of expertise and I am qualified by experience, but I am not qualified in any other way. I thought that would be a huge obstacle to me, even in being able to get a job in that field. I looked for about four weeks and minimum qualifications were a degree in training or other related field. It was really hard because already I had seen it in my own job. I would go to an interview and I would produce a report and I would feel it is really good. Then somebody else would come in and not even have five per cent of the experience would get the job and then I would have to train them in. That was really difficult. It is a bias or a prejudice but it is across the board in any kind of corporate job you go into.

This excerpt offers a somewhat unfamiliar yet very valuable perspective on 'the knowledge economy'. First of all we can see how the credentials impact on employability. On a more general level the increased mobility of capital, and the specific industrialisation strategies employed by the Irish state described in Chapter Five, mean that Katy ended up working for a famous multinational. But the global mobility of capital also meant that she was eventually invited to train herself out of a job and was flown to Asia to do so. This, I think, is a clear example of how a theory social space requires an understanding of how durable structures are affected by flows of capital. Once Premiumcorp left Ireland she faced another dilemma; while she was inside this corporation her knowledge of the work processes there and her reputation meant that, with or without credentials, she was afforded some limited mobility but outside of Premiumcorp this was not the case. Forced back into the wider labour market earlier disadvantage, in which class, schooling and family dynamics all played a part, became important again and affected how she was valued in the labour market over a decade later. In other words despite some upward mobility Katy's story is an example of what Goldthorpe (1996) calls a classed 'educational career' in which initial social and educational inequality has a significant effect on opportunities over a lifetime.

There is one other important strand in this part of Katy's story- her paid work had to be balanced with the demands of her unpaid work. In the period in question, in the five years before she was made redundant, Katy had been looking after her dad following a very debilitating spinal injury. Her father, with who she had a difficult relationship before, became very reliant on her for care and in fact ended up living with her and her husband. As it happens residential care became available at this time and Katy "*thought this is the best thing for my dad and for my own sanity was for him to try this as a trial*" and when it worked.

I felt so relieved of the burden of my own guilt of putting him in there. I looked up the Back to Education [scheme] and just that year in the budget they made it possible for people who had been made redundant to go back immediately without having to be unemployed for 12 months.

It is hardly surprising but to a striking degree the exigencies of 'love's labour' was a far more prominent theme amongst the female research participants and even though it was less pronounced in the stories of younger women the data indicate that care work remains profoundly gendered. Katy's decision to go to college was based on prior experience in paid work, Like Mark and David she has drawn on institutional supports. However, unlike them, Katy needed support for unpaid care work. Once again we see how the provision of time and space outside the demands of quotidian life is a prerequisite for open reflexive planning. I think her story, confirms that we are predisposed to adapt to circumstances but also underscores how often the desire for something else remains hidden in the crevices of everyday life.

As I got to know Katy better I began to understand that her decision, although motivated by the immediate need for certified knowledge that can be traded as a positional good, her decision to return to college was related to other aspects of her life story. We shall return to Katy's experience in university in the next chapter suffice to say that the desire for autonomy, the hunger for learning and development, and the need for recognition and self-respect is just as strong in Katy case as it was for David or Mark's . Katy's story alerts us to how the experience of power and disempowerment, of gender and class, of occupation and care work, of respect and disrespect, of recognition and misrecognition, of the micro and macro processes of social change can be interlaced in a single biography. I think she also shows us how trajectories in social space in a 'reflexive' era remain classed not least because of the effect of inequality over the whole life course.

Section II

Class life and learning lives: Respect, dignity and worth

Injustice is the medium of real justice (Adorno cited in Honneth, 2007, p .99)

'What lies beneath?' Narratives of class and self

As we have seen although many of the students describe themselves as working class they do not usually talk about class identity in a simple way. Instead, class is articulated through patterns of (dis)identification based on a shared experience of social power in communities

and workplaces related to one's position in social space. Specific modes of (dis)identification are contingent on a variety of biographical and political factors that play out in the form of classification struggles across society. There is another absolutely crucial layer to this argument-which was alluded to in Chapter Four and has been run as an unseen thread right through the preceding section; this is the argument that we need to pay far more attention to the affective and normative dimensions of class experience. In particular, the research underscores just that we need to examine very carefully how class informs notions of worth (a term which has been chosen because it has material, moral and emotional connotations), This, of course, includes include the familiar notion of status but goes well beyond this and touches on 'the moral significance of class' that is to say the embodied and ethical dimensions of socio-economic inequality (Sayer, 2005).

Engaging in an extensive amount of biographical research has convinced me that there is no way, to discuss one's life without talking about the issue of worth. As Andrew Sayer has cogently stated "we are sentient, evaluative beings: we don't just think and interact but evaluate things" (2011, p. 1). These evaluations are often based on assessing our vulnerabilities and capacities and inevitably this involves considering what is harmful, damaging or on the contrary what is generative and developmental for ourselves and others and for the projects which link these things. Thus each of the interviewees gave detailed and nuanced accounts of their concerns and attachments and offered evaluations on their lives and Irish society which *necessarily* involved their affective and moral perceptions of the world. Having worked through the transcripts I think Charles Taylor is entirely correct when he says that moral and evaluative judgements are an inescapable and important element of human life and "the horizons we live our lives and which we make sense of them has to include these strong qualitative distinctions" (1989, p. 27).

I am certain that this is absolutely fundamental to understanding the people's life stories I have gathered for the research and this has informed the way I have described the participants' stories thus far. For instance the descriptions of work and community offered by the students above are, I suggest, best understood as deeply emotive and evaluative, and ultimately moral, accounts of self and society embedded in various conceptions of worth. Importantly, this was not how I saw these issues at the beginning of the research and this

conviction has emerged as a direct response to the way the interviewees consistently chose to highlight the evaluative, affective and moral dimensions of their experience.

The fact that life stories *always* make moral and normative claims and this is based on embodied and affective human experience should be uncontroversial but in fact this is not the case. For disciplinary and socio-political reasons, mainly the influence of positivism and economism, it is precisely these dimensions of human life that often get purged or explained away in much social scientific theory (Sayer, 2011). I am making a very broad argument about the nature of social practice and everyday reasoning here but it is one which I think is supported by all the empirical material in the thesis. I want to go a step further and say not only do I think it stands up to scrutiny in this particular research context I concur with Sayer (2011) and believe that if we pursue the full implications of these propositions seriously, and fully integrate them into research projects and social theory, we will arrive at a more realistic description and explanation of agents and social structures.

However, there is little purpose at this point in elaborating in general upon the uses of normatively orientated sociology beyond these remarks rather I want to focus on how we might begin to rethink class inequality from this perspective. I think in a very unequal society there is no way that we can discuss human flourishing, which relies on both material and moral resources, without discussing class. More specifically there is a strong argument that the three axes of class power-ownership, authority and legitimate cultural capital-explored in Chapters Three and Four and the interviewees' discussions of place and space, of autonomy, developmental opportunities, voice, dignity and respect are all strongly bound up with notions of worth. This is certainly what I now believe. Despite the fact that this is still very much a minority position within class theory there is nonetheless a very valuable body of research which has explored this argument in various ways (Bourgois, 2003; Charlesworth, 2000; Honneth, 2007; Kefalas, 2003; Lamont, 1992, 2000; Sayer, 2005; Sennett, 1998, 2003; Sennett & Cobb, 1977; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009[112]).

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112 The most influential of these books currently is Wilkinson & Pickett 's (2009) *Spirit Level* which has become a sociological phenomenon in its own right and is undoubtedly an important intervention in public sociology. It gives the least sustained attention to this topic of all the books listed above and its understanding of class is quite basic-seeing economic inequality as a sort of skeleton around which other principle of differentiation then coalesce (see pp. 29-32). Nonetheless, it does acknowledge how inequality has important *psychosocial* dimensions and is included for that reason.

The proposal here is that class inequality is tied to notions of both worth and wealth linked to the experience of restricted access to power, valued social goods and developmental opportunities. It cannot therefore be made sense of through theoretical frameworks which highlight-through either an exclusively culturalist or narrowly economist prism- one dimension of this experience and/or avoid the political and ethical implications of acknowledging that class affects human flourishing. This statement needs some qualification though; it is not at all being suggested that there is a *single* schema of action and evaluation underpinning the interviewees' biographical accounts. Rather each person offered biographical accounts in which practical reason is informed and shaped by a range of moral and material concerns which are understood and articulated in a variety of ways but which are also tied to a notions of 'the good life'- and what Aristotle (1999) called eudaiomonia- human flourishing and happiness. I can also say that the vast majority of interviewees did link the good life with notions of autonomy, dignity and respect articulated through different frames of reference and discourses. What the narratives certainly do not offer is much evidence of nascent collective class consciousness linked to a conception of shared material interests, as many Marxists suggest, or that people operate as rational monads careering through empty social space maximising pleasure or profit as certain types of liberals seem to maintain. On the contrary the participants' stories suggest that a narrow notion of material interests is a very weak and limiting theoretical basis for describing, practices, interactions and relations in social space. My conclusion is that attempts to explain social practice in this way cannot be done without traducing and radically simplifying how people make sense of their own lives.

I think although there is no *one* schema of action or a single motivational orientation, such as profit seeking, there is nonetheless a structure to how people make sense of their own lives. I can see no way of disentangling the moral and material, the individual and the intersubjective in biographical accounts of flourishing and worth. Framing things in this way is also part of an attempt to develop a form of sociological description which respects the terms in which people chose to represent themselves and understand the social world. This is not to say some of the interviewees are not strategic or calculating, or egotistical or somehow this cohort, by some extraordinary accident of fate, is made up of the pure of heart but simply that the truth is not to be found in taking the wheat of social interest from the chaff of affective and moral concern. Rather I believe attention to the way self-interest and ethical concern are framed *in*

relation to each other in everyday accounts will deepen our understanding of lived experience, help us understand why class matters and ultimately offer a more realistic way of describing social practices.

Now with these preliminary arguments made and some of the interview material is available to the reader I am in a position to state one the main arguments of the thesis more explicitly- that is the complex relationship between access to cultural and economic resources and people's inner conversation about their worth and capability is right at the heart of what class means to many people in modern Ireland. During initial coding it became noticeable how often the interviewees talked about what might be called the 'politics of respect'. The participants frequently used phrases like 'self-esteem', 'confidence', 'becoming somebody' in explaining aspects of their biography and their decisions. Initially, I misinterpreted this and passed over it but it became apparent that the clustering of these terms, and the patterns of action and belief in the narratives, indicates something very important about how worth is understood and the absolute centrality of the politics of respect in social relations. I discovered there was a repeated pattern in the accounts; a rejection of class stigma, a claim for basic equality and the desire for social recognition of one's worth based on merit, Just as frequently the students discussed their desire to develop through work and learning in order to enhances their capacity for autonomy, meaningful relationships and bolster a healthy relation with self. [113]

At the heart of the politics of respect and notions of worth is the need and claim for dignity which Sayer (2011, p. 191) says

> if we examine it, and what threatens or secures it, or threatens it, it reveals much about our relation to the world of concern, our extraordinary sensitivity to the quality of our relationships with others, about both our autonomy and dependence, and our embodiment

I think that James' sense of shame, David's struggle for agency, Mark's hatred of subordination, Kieran and Luke's accounts of self and community and Katy's need for full affirmation of her capabilities are best understood in relation to worth, respect and dignity. In

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113 This formulation is indebted to Sen, Bourdieu, Sayer, Skeggs and especially Honneth (1995, 2007) and my work and conversations with Ted Fleming about our research together (Fleming 2011; Fleming & Finnegan,2010b, 2011a). Ted Fleming drew my attention to a paper by Murphy (2010a) on this issue which was very thought provoking and was later published with some minor amendments see Murphy (2010b).

each case this is also completely central to the way they think about education. This will be explored in this section and the next two chapters in various ways and I will ultimately outline an integrated perspective on these issues which critically extends and amends the theory of social space that has been outlined above by drawing on Axel Honneth and Andrew Sayer to grasp the moral dimensions of class experience (Honneth, 1995a, 1995b, 2007, 2009; Honneth, Butler, Geuss & Lear, 2008; Sayer, 2005, 2011).

Before I do so I want to acknowledge that there is a difficulty in making a claim for analysing narratives through a notion of worth based on an idea of human flourishing which is linked to the exercise of autonomy, the protection of dignity and importance of recognition. How can one analyse this in a precise and useful way? After all one of the reasons that, for instance economist Marxism or rational actor theory are, whatever their limitations, regarded as analytically useful is that they offer simple but credible accounts of needs, motivations and human practices. While I am convinced that a more integrated and complex description of social practices linked to notions of worth will give us a more realistic account of the social world there is no doubt that this picture is more complex and fuzzier. There is no one way of settling the competing demands of complexity and parsimony in description and explanation but I have tried to resolve this by the presenting the interview data in a way that makes the variety of factors at work in any given biographical account clear[114]. With this task in mind I now want to examine through the data how dignity and respect are denied or partially withheld in Irish society and how this informs how people think about class.

Dignity and disrespect: The dialectic of personal reckoning and social value

> I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fibre and liquids-and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me....That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. [Its] A matter of the construction of their inner eye

This is how Ralph Ellison begins his celebrated novel *The Invisible Man*, an extraordinary account of twentieth century African-American experience. This is a very rich exploration of how domination is experienced and how hegemonic expectations, norms and values saturate

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[114] To return to the a line of argument established in Chapter Two this also has affected the hermeneutic process which reflects my strong belief that critical inquiry should rely less on the reductive accounts of agent's motivations and far more on reconstructive analysis of context. My approach is to first describe an agent's account and then ask what are the necessary social conditions for what that agent describes.

social life and shape self-perception. I have mentioned it here because throughout the research I have been told stories about how the social evaluation of our worth become an important element of self-evaluation and I have little doubt that these ideas of social value insinuate themselves very deeply into our sense of who we are. But the narrator of Ellison's book, the eponymous Invisible man, also knows that this mainly a "a construction of *their* inner eye" and despite what structuralists and reproduction theorists, such as Althusser (2008) or Bourdieu (1984), might claim there is scant evidence in the data that the internalisation of dominant notions of low social worth or lack of worth is *fully* accepted. Rather people both internalise *and* try to overcome negative evaluations (Honneth, 1995a; Moore, 1978; Scott, 1990). These two things- the way we internalise dominant evaluations of worth through our experiences in social space, and how we struggle for dignity and recognition in response to disrespect, are I think crucial ideas for exploring working class experience in Irish HE.

One of the classic, and I think justifiably famous, treatments of this subject is Sennett and Cobb's *The Hidden Injuries of Class*. In this book the authors argue that class society is above all a system for limiting freedom through material deprivation, enforced passivity, and perhaps above all, is characterised by limiting people's access to resources of dignity and respect. In many of the interviews they conducted with working class men [115]they noticed (Sennett & Cobb, 1977, p. 33)

> a fear of being summoned before some hidden bar of judgement and being found inadequate infects the lives of people who are coping perfectly well from day to day; it is a matter of hidden weight, a hidden anxiety, in the quality of experience, a matter of feeling inadequately in control

I want to suggest that this hidden anxiety is still there[116]and this lack of control and the sense of shame and anxiety about not matching up to society's standards and of somehow being answerable and responsible for having less resources runs through a large portion of the data. Also a significant number of the interviewees, just under a half, discussed misrecognition as

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115 The female cohort was interviewed separately and was intended for a different volume by a different researcher and although Sennett and Cobb do interview some women in the book their attention is firmly on men. Consequently, like so many books on class it is affected by an acute form of gender blindness see (Steedman, 1986).

116 A review of some the relevant literature (Silvermann, 2001) and discussion with the community activists and Terry Fagan (personal communication) suggests that this is an important dimension of working class experience historically.

an important element of their social experience and this was particularly common amongst those with small amounts of cultural capital at their disposal and amongst migrants. Based on the data I think class misrecognition occurs along a continuum which ranges from encountering open disregard and clear snobbery to a more diffuse feeling of being denigrated or of being held in a gaze, or kept in a social situation that refuses to acknowledge one's full worth as human being. In this sense class misrecognition is not so much rooted in the experience of complete invisibility but stems from being seen mainly through inaccurate clichés, being overlooked and being partially visible and powerful others setting the terms of evaluation of one's worth. This is has a strong affective content and can lead to anger and frustration rooted in unused or undervalued potential and even, as we shall see, self-contempt.

In the accounts of place, space and work discussed above I think we can see some of the force that class misrecognition exerts on people. Two provisos are required here before I proceed. I have already suggested that there are a very wide range of responses to misrecognition and the extent to which this is internalised and, on some level, accepted is an issue for empirical investigation. For example Ger, a sharp witted young man says he lives a divided life between his working class friends and his university life says to me that *"being from the council state it's almost like it's shameful or something"*. Ger sees this but nonetheless appears to have avoided the truly corrosive effects of being viewed as inferior. This is also the case for Mark, the young builder who became *"sick of donkey work"*. However, for others it is less easy to push aside; so Kieran had to find a credible way of proving he is not a *"scumbag"* from Neilstown. What I think is telling is that all of these people recognise the force and power of class based social evaluations but their different circumstances, especially in terms of access to social and cultural capital, means this is internalised in very different ways. One has only to think of the difference between how James sees this issue, the man who is desperately is trying to move into a mental space which affords him more freedom than his *"block of flats"* allows him to have, and Luke who was uncomfortable discussing class and feels after college meritocracy will bring him *"to the level playing field"* that he deserves.

I need to mention one other proviso. The extent to which misrecognition is a general class experience is moot, although much of the literature suggests it is very widespread and even the defining characteristic of everyday class experience (Charlesworth, 2000; Jones, 2011;

Skeggs, 2004). However, there are good reasons to believe that universities are particularly fecund ground for class misrecognition. As Reay (2001) and Bourdieu (2000) have pointed out the habitus of such institutions, their collective history as elite and upper middle class institutions, their rituals of grading and differentiation, clear hierarchies and often reified forms of knowledge expressed and maintained through elaborated codes means that there are good reasons why the misrecognition might surface so regularly as a theme in the interviews conducted for the research.

With these provisos in mind-there is no doubt that one of the major themes of this research is the way these classed stories of respect and misrecognition and internalised and worked through. In highlighting this I want to begin to explore the interrelationship between the affective, normative, and ascriptive ideas of class and puzzle out how this exactly relates to education. The best way of explicating this is through the research data and I am going to explore the biographical accounts of three participants to examine these issues in greater depth. Kevin is a middle aged taxi driver who went through college, graduated with an arts degree and now teaches. Terry is an ex-chef who in his late twenties returned to college to study science and Amy is a nineteen year old access student studying Arts. Each of them said things which I believe illuminate how class misrecognition affects notions of worth and informs social strategies to overcome disrespect. As we shall see they all believe that education can be used to combat misrecognition and gain respect. The fact they come from different generations will also allow us to chart some changes in the way class and class disrespect has been experienced and framed over the past forty years in Ireland.

Kevin *"Ireland to me was a terrible, terrible place. It was demeaning to be from certain areas of society. You were held down"*

Kevin is a Dublin man in his 50s who says he was brought up in a poor *"lower working class"* family. There was eight of them living *"in three rooms"* in Dublin's inner city. He says *"I went my merry way and left school at 14"* and had lots of different types of jobs before he *"fell into taxi work"* which he never liked as *"there was no satisfaction in it"*. Kevin married quite young after which he moved to the suburbs and now has five children. He discusses growing up in Ireland and says it

> was a very segregated society, in every way. I was involved in youth clubs from an early
> age and I remember being down in churches in the country. The local wealthy family

had their pew at the front of the church. Bizarre things like that are stuck in my mind. Irish society was like 'who are you?' and 'where are you from?'-you know. You were judged on that. I was a very shy introverted young lad probably again because of my background. I teach kids now from dysfunctional families and they are shy or divisive. That is the reason is they have no confidence.

This is fascinating statement for a number of reasons. Here we have confirmation of the historical research of Silverman (2001) discussed in the last chapter of how sharply status and hierarchy were signalled in everyday space. More importantly we have a very frank account of how coming from a working class background means often being subject to more powerful people's standards and being judged according to these criteria. This shapes dispositions and although the nature of such processes is that they are hard to explain Kevin definitely descries an organic link between modes of judgement, class and the making of the self. He goes on to say

Driving taxi wasn't all I did. I was apprenticed as plumber at one stage, putting central heating in very affluent houses, in places like Howth and that, and I always felt you were lower class, I didn't know how to address, to talk to and I'd feel uncomfortable... For instance, I was twenty years of age I went to an upper class hotel I didn't know how to behave. This is where it comes from, your upbringing the rearing that you have you never feel you're the same class as other people, and in many other ways as well. So university, it had an aura, it was something that wasn't for the likes of me, and of course you never assumed you were bright enough

Kevin's account offers a clear an example of how class power sediments in people leaving them with a sense that they do not live up to an external 'norm'-which is diffuse but well understood while the mechanism for establishing and maintain these norms remains somewhat mysterious. Kevin's sense of being at a disadvantage was particularly acute in middle class and elite environments and class underpinned certain everyday interactions, social evaluation and expectations of education. Class relations become meaningful and re-enacted through the recognition of boundaries and even now in the choices of verbs in the excerpt above-*to address, to talk, to behave*-suggest the anxiety he felt about ensuring these boundaries were handled correctly. These boundaries are also both moral and material-lines that mean having less and being less. Like Nora Fahey, the woman who worked as a servant in the 1950s in Ireland, quoted on the first page of this chapter, certain types of working class experience is fundamentally connected to a sense of 'beneathness' (see Roper, 2012). Kevin continues

There are lots of frustrations, and I've always had the perception, I could never articulate it, but there wasn't ever a pure democracy in Ireland. [...] To me, you can talk about democracy and equal rights, but people were not getting the same opportunities. [..] I felt very frustrated. Ireland to me was a terrible, terrible place. You were ...it was demeaning to be from certain areas of society. You were held down deliberately. You know the Louis MacNeice's poem 'Grey brick upon grey brick, declamatory bronze, on sombre pedestals".[117].' it was a great place for certain people [but] lots of people never had the opportunities.

Here again is this feeling of restriction and withheld opportunities but a claim is also being made against this state of affairs both through a notion of basic equality and the idea of individual *potential*. We can also see material inequality carries sharp emotive and evaluative connotations. The shift from passive to active and the use of the participle in the phrase *'You were...it was demeaning to be from a certain area'* is instructive carrying the sense of being stripped of dignity through an arbitrary external process which nonetheless has such force behind it that it was difficult to ignore and, at least on some level, accept. So in Kevin's account class evaluations are imposed and internalised but also questioned.

This though is in the past and Kevin's story is above all a narrative of biographical and social transformation. He remarks "*It has changed now. This country is now a different place. It is another country-Gene Kerrigan wrote a great book called 'Another country-'[118] [..]. You look on the country of your birth in a different light*". Like many others that I spoke with Kevin associates this above all with the widening of access to education. Kevin continues "*this is the thing that mostly changed my life*" and thinks the fact that he "*went to university for three years and the government paid for that*" and for "*working class people to get the assistance I got*" is not just financially important but an important cultural marker of respect and the breaching of a long established and defining class barrier.

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117 This is an interesting choice of poem. The opening stanza is "Declamatory bronze/ On sombre pedestals - /O'Connell, Grattan, Moore -/And the brewery tugs and the swans/ On the balustraded stream/And the bare bones of a fanlight/ Over a hungry door". The poem is absolutely suffused with a sense that Dublin, and post independence Ireland, is as a place of constraint and disappointment see (MacNeice, 1979).

118 This is a memoir of growing up in Cabra- a working class suburb of Dublin by the well known journalist. Kerrigan is unequivocally proud of his working class background. The book describes a number of significant transitions in Irish society especially in terms of secularisation. Interestingly, his celebration of working class life, his own family and the process of secularisation is is based on an emphatic rejection of negative moral judgements (most explicitly in terms of his mother who reared him with her sister and without a husband in 1950s Ireland). He also discusses something which is far too rare in the literature on working class Ireland-the decency of most people he lived with and just how marginal criminality and social problems were at this time.

This is also a family story; he talks about how his father valued education but had no possibility of becoming more educated and he is very proud that his daughter is in the process of entering university. It is also about the value of these credentials in the labour market; since graduation he has become a teacher in a working class suburb and although he is on temporary contracts and earning less money than he did as a taxi driver he believes this will improve. Besides he thinks it is unlikely he will be unemployed again and receive a pension. But it is also important because *"you know you are doing something....and you get job satisfaction"* and part of this is

> *I hold the position of teacher in esteem. It is a job with esteem and I still feel that. When you are working class, you look for esteem...We held teacher, priest, and garda sergeant in esteem. I had the perception that these are positions of recognition. I was probably psychologically looking for that*

Becoming a teacher will ensure him dignity and respect and I think there is a direct link here in his biography between the earlier experience of misrecognition and the form and strategies subsequently used by Kevin to struggle to overcome this. It is also important that his degree is part of a longer process which has allowed him to learn and to accrue cultural capital. Right through the interview he uses poetry and literature to articulate his sense of the world, he has plans to write and thinks his time in university has enhanced his ability to engage in self-directed learning and given him the right *"structure"* to learn in the future. This is not simply about the pursuit of distinction but is a *celebration* of overcoming barriers which has given him tools to make biographical sense of his own world; "*It takes years for me even looking back on this to develop these thoughts in my head. It's about acceptance and your worth being recognized"*. The whole interview is a confident claim of the right and ability to name his world and I think offers a powerful example of reflexive agency within structural limits.

Evidently these biographical changes are contingent on important social changes in society and education but I think to depict this simply as an adjustment to new opportunities would be a gross error. There is nonetheless some ambiguity here both in the way he maps change and continuities in Irish society and his form of identification with his pupils who are not described as victims of broad social inequalities but as members of dysfunctional families. In this we see how biographical knowledge is shaped by widely diffused social science categories. Overall though the important thing for Kevin is that the terrible power of class has

been weakened and the way he frames this as a progressive narrative of personal and social change is both thought provoking and telling.

Terry: *"You see I am trying to prove to myself that I am better than that. I suppose, there is no hiding from it, I am trying to prove to other people that I am better than that too"*

Terry is a thirty years of age and grew up in a medium sized town. He is from a different generation than Kevin but he is less optimistic than him about the passing of class divisions in Irish society. He talks deliberately and quietly during the interview and tells me later this is because he wants to express himself properly and to get his story right in the hope that he can help others like himself. It transpires he has had some very difficult experiences in the year before we meet and that coming to college is all part of a longer effort over his adult life to *"better himself"*.. Almost immediately Terry starts by explaining to me how important university is to him and how much he loves studying science I ask him why it is so important to him he takes some time to think and then he says

> *It's very relevant. It's something that I suppose I have soul searched and I've been looking at myself and where I came from. It was very important for me to get to university. I grew up in a working-class background. And, eh, well, I have a good work ethic I became a chef. My father worked; he is just after retiring in the last month after twenty one years in the army. He worked, he is from a farming background, and he's proud about work and never being on social welfare.[...]. I grew up in a disadvantaged area and I Ioved school. [..] I was completely different from everyone who lived around me, the people who surrounded me. Nobody wanted to go to school, people on social welfare people who didn't want to work or [..] couldn't work. I wanted to escape for some reason. When I became a chef [he breaks off and pauses for a long time}*

> *I saw there is a different way of living. I don't want to bring class into it but it is there at the end of the day [it was] a class above the one I was reared into, brought into. I preferred that. I constantly changed the way I spoke-this is not my original accent. Nobody from where I grew up speaks like this. I use good grammar. So I consciously changed my image and the last thing to fall into place was to go from working class to middle-class and when I became a chef. I went to college. I studied hard. I wanted to be a Michelin star chef and I always wanted to be the best at what was doing. Same now on the academic side I want to be the best. Now, I probably cannot be the best that ever was but the best that I can be (Laughs)*

Again we have the initial reluctance to use the language of class and there is a marked sense that he feels that simply by being working class you are getting it wrong. He mentions grammar and accent again later in the interview and discusses checking spelling and grammar

on the web and on YouTube. Deep down Terry believes to be curious, to be educated, to be hard working, to be right, to be respected is the opposite of being working class. His concern with work and his work ethic, which also surfaced repeatedly, is telling as well. The experience of intermittent mass unemployment has meant at least since the time of O'Casey[119] that being in a family of workers and managing to avoid the dole continues to be a key signifier of respectability in some working class communities. What may not be clear from the section quoted above but is abundantly clear from the interview as a whole that this is part of a defensive strategy which anticipates negative judgements from others rather than just a strategy of distinction. Later, in the interview he talks about friends and neighbours who are proud of being working class and how they support each other and are committed to their families in a very admiring way. Ultimately, I believe Terry's doubt and anxiety is existential rather than accusatory. Going over the interview what I think he wanted me to understand was the loneliness of his desire to improve himself, how difficult this has been and ultimately how this put him at odds with himself.

As it transpired achieving the upward mobility proved to be trickier than he hoped. He disliked the subordination he encountered and was bullied by a famous chef and he was mocked by others because of his accent and his demeanour. "*I just got used to being treated as second class [..] I am in the same uniform, same kitchen cooking for food for the same customers but the division was definitely there*". The bullying by the celebrity chef was both physical and verbal and eventually he dropped out of catering college because of it. After leaving college he says

> *I would still have that work ethic but I was drinking, coming in late sometimes losing interest. The passion, the artistic side of it was definitely gone it was just a means to an end it was just work solely for money. I worked in a few restaurants. At the time I really wished that I was studying physics [he had explained earlier that he had an interest in science since childhood].When I was peeling potatoes I was thinking it would be great to study quantum physics [..]. I started to get more and more depressed with my situation because I felt that I could not become a chef. That, with loans and things like that, meant I could not change career [..]. I was going round and around and around in circles [..] my back was against the wall I couldn't change future or change career.*

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119 For example respectability is contantly at stake in the discussion between the tenement dwellers in *The Plough and the Stars* (O'Casey, 1980) and willingness to work is one of the key axes of distinction. This was talked about as a key source of intraclass distinction in two other interviews with working class community educators and activists. However, this may be geographically specific and I can only speculate on how widespread this is.

The frustration, boredom meant the pressure kept building and

> *As a result of that I kinda of took the bull by the horns. I didn't care about my debts, [or] not being a chef anymore and I decided I was going to do what I always wanted to do that is to study science.*

He worked through an access course and did extremely well and then came to university. For Terry attending university has been fantastic and he talks about the pleasure of discussing things, of his daily interactions with peers and staff and his love of his subject. *"The feeling with was kind of indescribable. It was all new. I felt I was after escaping my old life".* Yet he knows his hold on this wonderful new world -which gives him the stimulation and respect he wants- is fragile and it is clear from other things he says that this is not a seamless or frictionless process.

To link this to the general arguments I have already made Terry is very concerned with social mobility but there is little point in explaining this in a simple way. He is not particularly concerned with money, only in the sense of getting by, he is not pretentious at all and shows very little interest in proving he is better than others despite his continuous emphasis on his work ethic. There is also a familiar double mapping of place and space and the centrality of experience in family and work in the making of class identity. This he makes clear to me is about becoming somebody in his own mind's eye and about control, dignity and respect. In other words it is about worth. Towards the end of the interview, in which the sense of trust had become stronger between us, he gave me some more background on why he feels the way he does. He discusses how when he was young he developed a sense that he was inferior through encounters with institutions and officials. Despite saying he loved school he recalls a petty humiliation that he says he will *"always remember"*

> *I was about six in school I was talking with someone. A teacher gave out to me and asked me to stand up and said 'What are you at? 'I said 'nathin'. 'It is not nathin it is 'nothing' she said.*

In the end he was asked to repeat the word 'nothing' in a different accent than his own, a posher accent, by the teacher several times. This ordeal went on for some time and by the end of it he felt ridiculed and deeply embarrassed and then he quickly added *"so escaping the working class and becoming middle class or whatever, seems to me to mean having more respect"*. He delved into this a bit further. The emotional tone of the interview shifted at this

point from an introspective account marked by his new joy at being in college and some doubt and shame to a muted sense of anger. At this point he says

> *If I was to contrast where I came from -I remember feeling embarrassed, less than, basically having, having less worth than other people, not being listened to and not being taken seriously, condescended to, looked down upon, frowned upon- people expecting you not to understand. Personally, I believe I am better than that. You see I am trying to prove to myself that I am better than that. I suppose, there is no hiding from it, I am trying to prove to other people that I am better than that too. In this, world or class that I am striving towards ehm.....I feel that my previous life exists... Then you put a monkey in a tuxedo, it is still a monkey. So I am still going to be who I am where I came from the same person I suppose. I am trying to evolve from it.*

Terry's experience of class cannot be described in simple terms by occupational title or income. For him it is about material resources and opportunities and feeling denigrated and disrespected. He says several times he want to *"escape"* and this is a desire to escape the trap of systematic misrecognition and to do this he has to prove his worth but in reality this is never straightforward. He is intelligent and self-aware, he can describe his inner life with great acuity, honesty and insight but he is entangled in way of making, and demonstrating, value that lie outside his control. The final two sentences of the quoted transcript sum up the dilemmas of trying to remake what Diane Reay (1998b), using Goffmann, has called a 'spoilt' working class identity-this sense of class identity as wholly negative (see also Charlesworth, 2000). Terry thinks this can be overcome by education but the description of monkeys and evolution- bespeaks his own concern that his *"previous life"* shaped largely by his socio-economic background and access to legitimate cultural capital, defines who he is at a profound level. He has absorbed the idea that this means being inferior and has therefore chosen a line of flight which he hopes will bring him the resources for dignity he require but in the course of doing so risks self-estrangement. He discusses feeling that being at college has opened up a gap

> *There is no-one in my family. There are no chefs or no scientists. There is nobody, there is nobody in my family I can speak to about these things. I get a lot of slagging. I was encouraged to go to school but not in any direction.*

This is not an easy situation to be in especially as unlike Kevin and similar to James he is much less sure he will be successful in his 'escape'. Terry's biography has been affected by financial resources and occupational opportunities but it is also about the politics of respect and how contempt and snobbery can feed a sense of inferiority and can even lead one into the

shadows of self-contempt. Terry's story gives one a clear sense of the damage of misrecognition, which plays out in undramatic, but profound, ways in everyday life, and how inequality becomes a question of human worth. The way Terry envisages education as *necessitating* a move away from his community is familiar but the centrality he and Kevin give to respect adds something else to the way we think of social space.

Amy: *"Busy, busy, busy ....proving them wrong"*

At the time of the interview Amy was 20. Inequality seems to weigh less heavily on her than Terry and her whole way of telling her story, and making sense of class and Irish society, is quite different to both Terry and Kevin. She has come to college through an access programme "*because I wasn't sure what I wanted to do and that gave me perspective"*. Amy talks about coming from a *"disadvantaged area"* but unlike many of the other young access students I spoke with she does not concentrate on the difficulties faced by her community. Instead, she articulates a sense of belonging and attachment to her peers and friends and is sensitive to how they are viewed by people outside of her community. Money is very tight for her and her family but she sees this as eminently manageable. Amy is fuelled by great deal of optimism and displays an impressive account of determination to succeed and flourish. She is bright, hardworking and she *"absolutely loves"* college both because she has made new friends and because she enjoys studying the subjects she has chosen. When she began college she was considering doing law after her degree but at the time of the interview she is thinking that she might become a teacher.

There is little sense here that university, to paraphrase Kevin, is '*not for likes of her'* and financial and cultural supports were readily available to her in the formative period in which she was making her decisions. Amy's school was, by and large, very helpful to her, although she does say some teachers were *"stuck up"* about the fact she comes from a single parent family. One teacher in particular encouraged her a lot and she is still in contact with her. She discusses her time on community and university based access programmes in a very positive way and says the time spent on the pre-university access course meant she had an all-important network of friends already established the day she came in the gates: *"we text all the time"*. Her mother has cared and supported Amy and her siblings through this. *"I have an older brother and sister. She has done well with the three of us."* Amy adds

She is always giving out to us about education. She left school after 2nd year and she would love to go back but she can't because she doesn't have the financial support. She is always saying 'you need to do this for yourself, don't let anyone else dictate what you do'

Moreover her mother has put real effort into creating space in the house so she can study

When she found out I got the course here she bought me a new laptop as a surprise. I got my desk for my room so I have my own study space at home. I don't have to go out to the library if the weather is bad.

Her grandmother who lives with her it also supportive *"she helps us all, she makes sure the dinner is on the table"*. Nonetheless, despite her optimism and the availability of these supports, Amy is still to some extent working against the gravitational pull of circumstances. One of the most striking aspects of Amy's account the tempo and rhythm of her student life which says several times *"is hectic"*

Yes, it is great fun. When I was starting I didn't know what to expect. It is busy, busy, busy but in a good way. It keeps you on your toes. In between the lectures I have a four hour gap so I can get study done or I can meet up with people

Amy gives very detailed descriptions of time use and schedules - what she does where and when - because she is so pressed. When she started college she was working over eighteen hours and half hours a week in a part-time job but she has reduced this down to twelve hours a week now and this has improved her grades. The way her interview revolves around the management of time and money is noticeably different from the interviews with better resourced middle class students of the same age. She says *"My mam can't keep me as well. She has to keep the house. She has been on a CE scheme and in January her three years will be up"*. Asked how she finds time for herself she says *"I fit it in. It is kinda more important to have college done before I play. I want to get through it. I don't want to fall behind"*.

This determination and willingness to put fun on the back burner to get her education was a common feature in interviews with both young and mature working class students. This is her opportunity and she firmly believes that *"there are not many good jobs open unless you have a degree or Masters"*. Keeping her head above water also means careful budgeting and keeping records to avail of supplementary benefits

Well I am with the access, I got in through that. We got a book voucher off them as well. But I still entitled to apply for a higher education grant, but they keep sending me my application back. I need to send in more documents [...] I get forty Euro every two weeks which does not go far. It is seventeen Euros every week on the train then with books it doesn't go very far [...] I have to show all my receipts.

Despite the fact money is tight and she is frenetically busy things are going well. It is tempting to think Amy's story indicates just how much access policies have succeeded in shifting the way access to education is viewed in a relatively short period. Amy is just the type of student access policies are designed to help and her way of framing her story does mark just how much cultural expectations of education have changed in working class Ireland. It stands in sharp contrast to the expectations of people of Kevin's age group or for that matter her mother's generation. There is one other strand in Amy's story that suggests that this very modern account of working class life is anchored in the search for respect and autonomy. One of the first things she says in the interview is

I'm from a one-parent family. Yes, there are obstacles. [...] You would hear it on the radio that children from one parent families are nothing but trouble and they don't really get anywhere. I have a few friends who are from one parent families either their mams or their dads and we are all in college or working. I don't feel that everyone should be tarred with the one brush.

Apart from finance and time it is her status as a member of a one parent family that concerns Amy most. Towards the end of the interview when she is asked what is behind her determination she responds

A: To prove people wrong.
Q: Ok, that's your vision, to prove people wrong?
A: Not only that, I want a career for myself [..] and going my own way.
Q: And going your own way means that you are independent?
A: Yes, I don't want to have other people supporting me.

I want to suggest that disrespect feeds her determination and is an integral element of her own self-understanding. So once again education is seen as a positive thing because it offers access to social mobility, greater autonomy and dignity. There is one other important aspect to this story. Amy is from a working class background but does not talk about class the way Kevin and Terry do. Amy instead talks of being from a 'one parent family'. Amy associates her class position, which is specific and gendered, with being answerable to external agencies, with financial constraints, and to a lesser extent with being from a working class area and with her mother's occupation. Significantly, this is also inextricably linked to how

she discusses social worth and dignity. Amy weaves her biographical narrative around a familiar category - the one parent family - which links family life, economic situation, public discourse and state welfare taxonomies. I think this deserves comment as a similar approach was taken by other access students from designated 'disadvantaged areas'-such as Luke. It became apparent that these social scientific constructs -'disadvantaged area' and 'one-parent family' often *have* to be negotiated biographically. The way Amy handles this is fascinating. She identifies with her family and area very strongly and completely rejects the negative public discourse about one parent families which claims that *"they are nothing but trouble"*- which is, I think, a modern, and highly gendered, reworking of a stereotype about the disreputable and feckless poor which historically has often included a strong hostility to independent women (Skeggs, 1997). I do not think this is a question of a 'spoilt identity', Amy has not internalised the negative evaluations associated with her position in social space in the manner Terry or James have. But although it has not been internalised as deeply it does still need to be answered; she trusts she will be able to prove the stereotype wrong *by virtue* of her work and her proven merits. In doing so she will affirm her worth and the social value of her family and other people she knows in similar circumstances.

I have chosen Amy, Terry and Kevin's story to illustrate how the politics of respect and notions of worth linked to class often inform biographical strategies. In these accounts we can see how people construct maps of social space through their experience of work, family, place and social space and how ownership of resources, authority and cultural capital define class relations. In all three narratives moral and material concerns are inextricably bound up with each other. In each account the experience, and threat, of misrecognition is linked to class position, and is handled in various ways biographically, and there is a strong sense of being defined as lesser according to the dominant social norms. It supports Axel Honneth theory that in a class divided society "the experience of having intuitive notions of justice violated" is both a common and sociologically significant phenomenon. (2007, p. 71). Honneth continues "the normative core of such notions of justice is always constituted by expectations of respect for one's dignity, honour or integrity". I think this is correct and I think we also see Kevin, Terry and Amy acting in a way that they hope will secure dignity and recognition linked to a notion of human flourishing.

This has definitely shaped how they reason, interact, plan and act and move in social space and how the make sense of their own lives. These biographical accounts-or for that matter those given by Katy, David, Mark, Luke, James, Kieran- make no sense if we try to present material needs as separate from moral concerns, nor can we subtract shame and pride from notions of personal advantage to offer a more tidy tally of economic benefits and costs in these life stories. I began the chapter by saying class is not simply about occupation or income and I now want to go further and say nor can it be defined just in relation to the identity we make through our experience of power mediated through work, family and community. These narratives suggest that to understand social practices and trajectories in social space we also need to pay attention to what denies and secures a sense of worth and dignity[120]. I think this goes to the heart of what class means and the data suggest that there is an enormous, and largely hidden, issue of class disrespect and misrecognition in Irish society which is powerful, often damaging and routinely resisted.

The generation game: Class stories and social change

Terry, Amy and Kevin's stories indicate that there has been an enormous generational shift in the way working class people view education. Amy feels that it is almost a normal thing for her to do. This was echoed by other school leavers like Molly who at age 19 said *"I am from a single parent background, disadvantaged area"* but nonetheless thinks going to college *"always the next step. There was no alternative"*. Another young woman Jane said it is *"like the next level on a video game"*. It has become far more typical to attend HE in *certain* working class communities and this is no small thing. Kevin grew up in a city in which severe poverty and tenements were commonplace, working class occupations were still predominantly manual and staying in school beyond the age of sixteen was extremely unusual. Molly, Jane and Amy became adults at the tail end of an economic boom, working class jobs are now far less likely to consist solely of manual activity and shared notions of what even constitutes a working class job these days are much fuzzier. Amy's story also highlights how class experience is mediated through state supports and interventions in a far more intensive way than would have been the case a generation ago.

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120 I am not claiming there is a universal formula for defining this. What this precisely means will vary according to socio-historical context. I do think though that in any given context that this *can* be be provisionally identified through extended dialogue and debate in civil society.

In between these two people in age is Terry who became an adult just before the Celtic Tiger but the meaning of work and education had already begun to change. Many of these general themes were discussed in the last chapter but listening to Kevin, Terry and Amy we can grasp far more clearly how these changes are narrated in biographical terms. Arguably the most significant social transformation detailed in these accounts is not in the labour market, the family or even the community but in education. Again and again the interviewees highlighted the difference in intergenerational opportunities in education. Family stories and community stories often revolved around the issue of educational access; both knowledge of one's class position and fate and the erasure of class barriers were, more often than not, linked to educational expectations. In other words the role of education now has in mediating class experience in the community, family and work is absolutely crucial. Moreover, I think education has become a key space for 'proving them wrong'. This idea will be further explored in the next chapter.

I think this has helped create a sense of social fluidity and encouraged the hope and expectation that individuals can achieve upward mobility. If one listens to what Kevin, Terry and Amy, whose remarks are indicative of the generational differences within the main research cohort, we can advance, with a good deal of confidence, the proposition that the horizons of possibility have been radically altered and that class boundaries, for the most part, were much seen as more sharply delineated in the past. There is a higher level of expectation and a greater sense of possibility amongst most of the young cohort. However, when one breaks down the mature cohort into different age groups, and takes account of gender and class fractions the picture is more fragmented than it might first appear to be. It was noticeable that those students who came straight from school from families from the upper working class or the middle-class and/or had access to dominant cultural capital spoke very differently about coming to college. There was a strong tendency for students who felt they were upwardly mobile to downplay structural restrictions in their interviews. However, young people who spent time at work, some of whom were not much older than the cohort who came straight from school, especially men from manual working class backgrounds, tended to retain a much stronger sense of the strangeness of entering third level education. This same group also reported more difficulty than women of a similar age and class background in building support networks in college. So despite a broad generational shift in the way class and education is viewed we need to cognisant of how belonging to specific class fractions,

time spent in work, gender, school experience and level of cultural capital affect biographies in mapping class and educational opportunity.

The data also indicates just how much gendered expectations about education have also shifted-six of the mature women, including one middle class woman, grew up in families in which resources for education were explicitly directed to the sons rather than the daughters of the family. This was completely absent as a theme in the young female cohort.

I think these generational shifts-in work and in gender politics- point to the existence of what Beck (1992) has called a process of 'detraditionalisation'. The important point for this study is that this does appear to have altered modes of biographical understanding and expectations of education over the lifecourse; as one student Josie put it *"the older generation see that there's a time for everything, like progression, slow progression [..] I didn't do the slow progression. I kinda, I probably went, jumped a step and then came back a step, back to education"*. Josie and the others are saying that our horizon of expectations has changed and the way we plot our life course according to those expectations has altered and is less predictable. It would be foolish to overlook this. When we factor in the other forms of social polarisation that have taken place in Irish society detailed in Chapter Five we can begin to see why so much hope is staked on education by the research participants. However, if we bear in mind what Terry, Laura and the others have to say I think we can also see why rash and undifferentiated judgements about the diminishing power of class and the inevitable progress of access are unwise.

Conclusion: Acts of agency and the force of circumstances

We are now in a position to offer a summary of how class is seen and understood in the lives of the research participants and how this informs the way they view higher education before we explore their experiences in HE in greater detail. Making strong claims or assumptions about identity based on class location has proven to be a flawed and fruitless endeavour in the past and there are good empirical, historical and ethical reasons for being careful in any research dealing with class identities. Within the data there is little evidence of clear-cut or uncomplicated class identities even amongst those participants who spontaneously described themselves in class terms. It should be stressed, as might be expected from the overview of Irish class formation in Chapter Five, that class experience and patterns of identification was very rarely associated with collective action or with emancipatory projects even amongst the

small cohort who had worked in highly unionised workplaces. In fact, there was a good deal of ambivalence about class and a large number of people displayed a strong sensitivity about the negative connotations associated with being working class and, to a lesser extent, an awareness of the limits of classificatory practices in social science.

However, the research suggest that people's lives remain classed in profound ways because of unequal access to material, cultural and moral resources in society. When the various accounts are read together we can begin to map how this differentiated access to resources creates classed experiences of social space which has identifiable boundaries, that both constrain and enable agency, and affects how shared conditions are registered and narrated in everyday life. Class emerges in accounts of self in relation to place, linked to conceptions of social space and hierarchies of power, and in accounts of paid work, especially in the way this restricts opportunities for development. As such one can clearly point to forms of class awareness, class sensibilities, class and intraclass distinctions and ultimately class interests in the data but this is quite dispersed and how this experience of power is internalised, framed and narrated is very varied indeed. I believe that class is negotiated, negated, coded and denied in biographies and the different nuances and shades of meaning given to class experience are important.

Furthermore, upward movement is social space appears to be expected and this is important in making sense of how the interviewees understand themselves and education. It was also noted that this is not simply about occupational mobility but is related to a desire for control and autonomy in shaping one's life. The interviewees' concern with capability and autonomy and with dignity and worth, within complex accounts of motivation, is very telling and I have argued that the affective, evaluative and moral dimensions of class cannot be ignored. Many of the interviewees' conversations about self and society highlighted the experience of disrespect and the struggle for respect. The research strongly indicates that for many people misrecognition can be truly corrosive. This dynamic process, of self-making through the struggle for respect and dignity, within class society deserves far more consideration than it currently receives and I think it is of particular importance to understanding how education is viewed and valued by working class people. This is perhaps especially true in Ireland in which there is a long-standing and firmly embedded historical discourse which describes the working class as inferior and lesser and where class position has long been read in moral terms (Silverman, 2001). Moreover, I believe Irish neoliberalism has further contributed to

this deficit discourse where a relative lack of power or social immobility is taken as indicative of an individual's failings. In these circumstances the working class is often seen as something to be moved away from and overcome.

By working through these accounts and the relevant literature we can conclude with some propositional arguments relevant both to the next chapter and more general theoretical debates about social inequality. Class is primarily defined relationally through sets of positions within social space-defined by ownership, authority and access to dominant cultural capital. This also affects how agents think about their 'realistic' future trajectories. In everyday life we necessarily encounter boundaries in social space which are reproduced, altered and transformed through our social practices which carry both sedimented history and conceptions of the future. In this way class is diffusely powerful and relevant to the making of the self but does not determine identities in a complete and predictable way. If this is correct this is has considerable implications for how we view class and education- in fact the social map outlined through the chapter and the trajectories described by the interviewees, the desire for movement and the struggle for respect, have already indicated, at least in part, why education is seen as such an important activity. We will now explore these ideas and the interviewees' experience in Higher education in further detail.

Chapter 7

Desire, recognition, adaptation and reflexivity: Working class students' experience of Higher Education

> Knowledge both enlarges and multiplies our desires.
> (Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*)

> I've always loved thresholds, the stepping over,
> the shapechanging that can happen when
> you jump off the edge into pure breath and then
> the passage between inner and outer
> nothing can harm you or cure you.
>
> You've found a clear path through the chaos, a loaning
> from history and whether you are free or bound
> is still in the balance. There's no gain in owning
> Old riddles still posit the same –what is the sound
> of one hand clapping? Is the door opening or closing
> (Paula Meehan- Liminal)

> It is the cultural possession of the world that gives happiness
> (Pier Paolo Pasolini)

Introduction

This chapter will examine in detail how working class students view and value third level education. It builds on the findings discussed in the last chapter which examined how class identity is made through patterns of (dis)identification related to work, community, family and conceptions of worth and respect. We have already seen how class conditions affects how people see HE in relation to social mobility, agency and human flourishing but we now need to examine far more carefully how this is related to these students' specific experiences and particular expectations.

The main question that the previous chapter sought to answer was how does class impinge on the way the interviewees think about themselves? The present chapter will pursue a number of new questions. It will examine how the interviewees developed a sense of themselves as *learners* before attending HE and how this was affected by the time they spent in college. This chapter will also make full use of the longitudinal aspect of the research and examine the students' time in HE as a biographical learning process charting the changes and shifts that occurred as the students progressed through college. By offering a processual account of

education linked to people's biographies as whole the chapter will offer a 'thick' description of contemporary HE institutions from a working class student perspective.

So in short the aim of the chapter is describe and analyse how these students imagine, view, value and experience HE. This will be explored in three interlinked sections. The first section will return to James and I will then offer a summary of the main findings of the research on student experience. In particular it will look at how many of the students learning stories are constituted and defined by a desire for learning, for personal development and for intellectual pleasure. On the basis of the interviews it will also be argued that formal institutions have a crucial role in the construction of learner identity and that third level education is imagined as a space of recognition and potential transformation by working class students. The sort of transitions and transformations, that are hoped for, and occur, within HE will be one the major topics of this chapter. I will also argue that this way of viewing and valuing HE can be directly linked to class inequality. The section will conclude with a summary of the implications of these findings for the way we think of learning and education in contemporary biographies.

The second- and longest section of the chapter- looks at the process of learning and identity formation through a series of individual life and learning stories. These biographical accounts have been chosen because they illustrate the key findings of the research-on the role of habitus, student resilience and reflexivity and care in learning. This will lay the basis for the third section in which notions of habitus and reflexivity will be retheorised through the findings. This is will provide a theoretical summary of some of the key arguments of the thesis and will pave the way for a discussion of the implications of the research in the final chapter

Section I

Learning, biography and class: The promise of transformation through education

James: *"I wanted to learn more .I just wanted more. I wanted more for myself"*
In the previous chapter we met James an ex-builder from Dublin's inner city who discussed feeling overwhelmed by his identification with the place where he grew up and with the sort of life this place has given him. Let us return to James now and look at how his experience as

a learner inside and outside of formal education and explore how he sees education in relation to his efforts to overcome the challenges and difficulties of inner city life. In his twenties James found himself struggling to make sense of his own life and started thinking about returning to education because

I wanted to find out what my problems were in my life that caused me how I was feeling and stuff like that. I was living a life of fear. No matter what I thought it was, you know, I was living a life of fear and the biggest fear that I had was the shame of not being able to read. The shame of not being able to write and if somebody asked me to read for them the fear of that [was massive] like [..] if somebody handed a pamphlet to read in public-you'd be afraid that it would rip you up. I got it into my head that the way to confront all those fears in life [..] would be, education. I was terrified of teachers and if somebody was a teacher I would be afraid and I'd want to look up to them because [of] their judgement

As discussed in the preceding chapter I think James' powerful feelings of fear, shame and anger stem from not being able to control his life in a generative way. I also mentioned that international and local economic changes meant that he grew up in an area profoundly destabilised by deindustrialisation, mass unemployment, ghettoisation and more recently partial gentrification[121]. What the passage above makes clear is just how readily he associates these conditions with *how he sees himself as a learner* in formal education. James talks about learning in his family home, at work and on the streets but nonetheless he puts far greater weight on his successes and failures in the formal education system. James says "*I was a dreamer in school*" and spent most of his time thinking of being elsewhere, had difficulties reading and eventually fell behind. Over time he grew to hate school which contributed in a major way to his belief that he was a complete failure. The force of this feeling is captured in the following anecdote

One day one of the teachers stood me up in a class and he was just taking the piss out of me. It wasn't the time for spelling but he stood me up in the middle of a class and he asked me spell a word even though it [..] was a simple word to spell but that word could have killed me. But I had fair idea he was going to do something to me [..] this was going on an awful lot [..] but I was after drumming these couple of words into my head and I just lucky enough he gave me one of the words that I had in my head and it just..., you know, [it was] probably the best day in my whole life that I ever, ever had [..] Jesus, I would have been about nine, ten, eleven, very, very young you know [..] and I think once you love that feeling-[that] one good feeling- I wanted [more] you know. That's what I wanted and it dawned on me [..] because I never felt like that afterwards

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121 See Charlesworth (2000) and Bourdieu et al (1999) and Wacquant (2008, 2009) for studies which examine the effect of living in similar communities on people in the UK, the USA and France.

This feeling was, he says, *"better than winning the lotto"* but subsequently *"I was back down to failing and underachieving. Not achieving and failing everything that I ever did"*. Like Terry's experience of being humiliated for his accent (discussed in Chapter Six) this incident in school, which may seem humdrum, is replete with meaning. Hidden in these daily interactions, in James' brief triumph and routine failure, is a powerful personal narrative about worth, how he is valued by others and his place in the world. Failing at school was further confirmation that he was condemned to a life at the margins and being an educational 'failure' compounded his sense of being *"stuck in the block of flats"*.

Despite his mother's insistence that he remain in school on James decided to leave at the age of 15. His life unravelled further in his late teens but he managed to disentangle himself from street life, and all the associated problems this brings. James identifies three things which began to have positive impact on him and helped to change the way he saw himself - getting work as a builder, peer learning and a course he took in Further Education.

> *I went off working and I wanted to learn other things and I just wanted to learn things. I knew nothing [..] I started off as a labourer. I put it [the sense of failure and social claustrophobia] out of my head and I progressed with that. I learnt very fast. Give me building blocks and I'd build a Taj Mahal.*

The sudden growth in skilled and semi-skilled work in the building trade in the 1990s meant that James and his contemporaries could finally get jobs. In a community in which mass, long-term unemployment had become 'normal' for a whole generation this was an immensely important change. Apart from getting a good steady income bricklaying also offered him tangible proof that he could excel at something and gave him some sense of his own power as a human being. An even more fundamental change came through friends he met in the same period through *Narcotics Anonymous*[122] and on an FE course. Nearly all of the people at the meetings and on the course were from the same social background and area as him and many had been through very similar life experiences. They piqued his curiosity because they were asking questions about the world and were articulate; "I *would have been hearing words that I never heard before*" and says that having *"seen that in other people I gradually realised that I had it in myself"*. I think it is salient that James' burgeoning sense of capability relied primarily on his relationships with peers and did not discuss the tutors or the material on the course in any great detail. James' desire to learn is rooted in a perception of absence and a

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122 See Bateson (2000) for a stimulating discussion on peer learning related to AA.

new sense of capability and this dialectic of lack and possibility in a peer learning group is very interesting. James says in most respects these friends were the same as him- yet they had something that he did not have- and they had obtained this through learning and reflection. This was a revelation for him and made him think of learning as a source of power rather than part of why he was a 'failure' and this helped James to tackle his reading and writing difficulties.

Bit by bit James began to see himself as a more capable learner and because of this he decided

> *I wanted to find out more. I wanted to develop my language. It was always in the back of my head to start the reading and the writing and stop being afraid of that. I wanted to learn more about that. I wanted to, you know, I just wanted more. I wanted more for myself. I wanted, and I don't mean like. I didn't want a big car; I didn't want that, I wanted to be educated. You know I wanted to be educated and I wanted to be able to stand to an argument*

The amount of times James uses the word 'want' in relation to learning is telling but even so this excerpt does not fully convey the strength with which he expresses his desire to learn. James' whole way of framing his story is deeply permeated with longing. He moves back and forth between different parts of his biography but returns again and again to his desire for learning and education. He wants to *"become educated"* to unpick his sense of failure and as part of his more general effort to overcome the difficulties he has faced in the past. James explains what he thinks it means to be educated; he thinks it will confirm his worth and help create a new public self that can *"stand to an argument"* Later in the interview he elaborates on this and says being educated is about having the right words and ideas to explain his experience to himself and to others and the right and the resources to become something different to what he has been in the past.

For James education is described in glowing terms because it offers him the opportunity to prove he is more than he has been permitted to be. One of the most significant aspects of James' story is just how strongly he believes and hopes that the self can be remade through learning and that the most effective place to achieve this type of learning is in a formal educational institution. The past six years of his life-on an basic adult education programme and then an introductory FE course, on an access course and then onto university- have been

dominated by this hope and in fact James' whole narrative and understanding of education make no sense without taking account of this belief.

The link with the main themes outlined in the last chapter is obvious-this is patently a story about learning and unlearning the lessons of class society. He doesn't talk about shedding his working class self but he does weave the various strands of his learning story through the larger life story about the restrictions of place and his class situation. Just as clearly both his biography and learner identity are structured by his position in social space and the 'injuries of class' have been sustained by internalising the negative evaluations of school and society. By entering education he wants to learn, he desires a new relation to self, he craves recognition and is seeking meaningful interaction with others.

This is not a reassuring tale of the transformative power of education though. James is very unsure about his future and he is not finding college easy and has sometimes despaired of getting through it. He has found it difficult to adapt to the new environment *"because I come from a different background"*. He perceives a profound disjunction between the habitus and practices of formal education and his own personal habitus shaped through family, community and work and remarks somewhat ruefully that college is "*a foreign country*". He explains that when he was growing up he developed a habit of being very careful of people and learnt to intuit ulterior motives behind words or actions. This is not an issue with his peers or friends in his community-he can read them very easily- but dealing with people in college is a different story. As a consequence he has found it hard to trust the other students because he does *"not want to be a burden"* to others but also because he worries about there being a hidden agenda. Besides which has had to work far harder than he imagined-before coming to college he had in certain moments envisaged student life as a life of leisurely chats over coffees- but keeping up with the academic demands of the course is hard. Although he has got a lot of help from the access office, and a number of lecturers and has slowly developed a network of student friends he still finds "*I'm in a constant battle with myself all the time and even like now I'm just drained, you know, drained like. I'm not sleeping, I'm not eating"*. Asked why he is willing to put himself through so much trouble he quickly retorts *"this is the most important thing I've ever done in my life"*. It is difficult, even wearing and exhausting but says he has discovered a freedom in studying *"which is unreal"*.

I have learnt all these things-these things that have enriched me so much and made me a much a better person and made me open my eyes up to other people that I would have got wrong years ago just because I did not know, just because I was ignorant and I didn't understand [things. It has] opened up all sorts of things, I'm aware of a bigger world out there and so many different ways of going on [...] and wanting to be better in myself [..]

I want that piece of paper. I'm not doing it for the job. I'm not doing it for anything. I'm doing it for the piece of paper that says I can. It's for me- it's -not for anyone else but [..] the main thing is that piece of paper is for me. I'm always worried since I started [that I will] fail which I expect in myself a lot of the time, I expect to fail

There is no mistaking the heartfelt desire to learn in James' account and it goes right to the core of how he now sees himself. For various reasons-not least his previous experience in formal education -but also I would argue more broadly the way access to resources of dignity and respect are distributed in a class divided society-formal credentials have assumed an extraordinary significance for James. This is made clear when he later shifts from the language of desire to the language of necessity. *"I need to get that degree. I need the things that people think I can't do. I need to get it".* Like Amy and Terry, who we encountered in the last chapter, going to college is about acting in a way that invalidates the prejudices of others. This has been, and continues to be, a deeply stressful, process and the way he talks about his time in college is in certain respects very ambivalent. It is not the easy remaking promised by self-help manuals or the 'journey' promised in college brochures. It is tricky and risky because, unlike popular psychology and prospectuses, his story it is situated and contextual and ultimately, I want to contend, is aimed at overcoming the injuries of class. James wants to flourish, he wants to be able to say he is educated; he wants to be somebody in his own eyes and prove that he is more than his early problems and more than the clichés bandied about the poor working class. In doing this he puts an enormous burden on himself and on education to undo the worst of inequality and to provide him respect and recognition he yearns for.

It is worth pausing to consider why James, this self-possessed, laconic and slightly wary man, a person who has experienced a great deal in his life and who has reflected a lot about the shape it has taken, a man who has found a supportive peer group, who has proved himself a capable bricklayer and handyman should be possessed by such an intense desire to get a degree whatever the cost. While many aspects of James' biography are distinctive and his community is a particularly hard pressed one, I think it is appropriate to open this chapter with his story because it offers a particularly clear introduction to several of the key themes in

the data. As the chapter will detail the desire for learning, the hope for transformation through formal education (which is seen as providing resources for respect and personal and social development) emerged and again and again in the interviews.

An overview of how the interviewees view and value HE

The increased importance of formal education in social life is a well-established fact and the various reasons underpinning this phenomenon have already been reviewed. In fact amongst the working class interviewees there was a remarkable level of agreement, almost a consensus, that HE was very important to them educationally but also to their sense of who they were outside of college. In other words for the majority of interviewees- of all ages- HE was seen not simply as a way of 'upskilling' or acquiring credentials but was regarded as *biographically significant*. Within these accounts there were several recurrent explanations for why this was the case- most commonly that would offer space for the proper recognition of their talents and would create new biographical possibilities.

Despite the fact that many interviewees offered very sharp criticisms of the day to day functioning of the colleges they attended and a small number did report very negative experiences with staff and institutions a large majority of students firmly held onto the idea that HE was very, very valuable right through the course of the research. The number of times this was voiced as an opinion by the participants surprised me and effort was made to falsify this finding through in-depth discussions with the longitudinal cohort and in interviews with individuals who has attended but left before the end of the course. But even amongst students like Anthony, an ex-builder in his twenties, who was forced to leave before he graduated- partially because of departmental insensitivity and partially because of personal circumstances- he still saw HE as worthwhile and even precious. A similar opinion was also expressed by students who found the course they were doing incredibly taxing or, much less commonly, too easy. This positive evaluation of HE was even offered, albeit in a far more muted way, by students, six of the interviewees, who described themselves almost as 'accidental students' and who had floated or were 'steered' into HE through the career advice at school or in FE colleges. Moreover, interviews with both recent graduates and those who completed their degree several years ago confirmed that even when ex-students ended up in work and social situations which were less congenial than they had expected after graduation they remained largely positive about their time at college (see also Fleming, Loxley, Kenny &

Finnegan, 2010). Of course the students had reservations and felt equivocal about many things but more often than not difficulties tended to be associated with an individual lecturer, a particular module or subject choice rather than HE as whole. The exceptions to this rule are illuminating; one young middle class man, who had better options through the family business and decided to leave in first year and one somewhat reluctant working class mature student, who through a change in personal circumstances and the increasingly credentialised nature of the labour market felt 'forced' back into education.

So despite the rapid expansion of HE and the pressure to enter HE simply to ensure access to entry level jobs most working class students do not see themselves as being shunted into 'knowledge factories' (Aronowitz, 2000). Rather for Irish working class students HE is seen in a very positive light and tellingly this idea-that HE is potentially a space of generative change-was firmly maintained *even* when the reality of HE did not match these high expectations. Interpreting this finding properly needs some care and circumspection. It certainly does not mean, as we shall see, that HE cannot be improved. Nor do I think it means that HE exerts such a power over the social imagination that these students cannot see beyond its mystique and allure. To unpack this properly we need to examine how people describe learning and education in more detail and specifically how this is tied to modes of biographical action and forms of class experience outside of college.

A life less ordinary? The importance of the desire and formal education in the student narratives

It may seem self-evident but for many of the participants the value of HE is rooted in a more general love of education but, as I argued in Chapter Four, this fact is often lost or deemed irrelevant in many accounts of class and education. Even in very critical and, in many ways, astute accounts of HE the force and power of educational desire is underestimated. For instance in a recent study of the changing nature of mass education in the USA the critical theorist Stanley Aronowitz has written that students choices are, more often than not, informed by a "rudimentary understanding of the job market rather than intellectual curiosity, let alone intellectual passion" (Aronowitz, 2000, p. 10). This may be the case for traditional students in the US but there was very little evidence of this sort of attitude amongst Irish working class students. We have seen how James values education and many others shared the view that education is something vital and enlarging. We have already have some idea of

Terry's profound love of science and the importance of literature for Kevin. Elaine a woman from Finglas in her 30s says

> *For me education is like a light coming into your head. Education to me is like food. You need it. You need it in order to have a normal healthy existence..well, I need it [..] I need it like I need food and water*

Similarly, Suzanne feels that *"not to have books is a deprivation"*. These are not at all unrepresentative accounts and just over half of the working class interviewees discussed being in college feeding their intellectual passion and curiosity.[123] Often this desire is rooted in long established informal learning projects, either consistently or intermittently pursued, which maintain the idea of active and conscious learning as an important facet of one's life (see Tough, 1967). Just over half of the participants discussed informal learning in their interviews and in relative order of importance they were; 1) a love of reading, 2) memories of past or ongoing interactions with a teacher, parent or friend-that gave people a sense of being a capable learner and of having potential (what might be usefully termed recognition figures), 3) participating in non-credentialised courses, 4) travelling 5) listening to and performing music, 6) involvement in political and community projects, 7) blogging and use of new media, and 8) positive learning experiences at work. These informal learning projects were just as important for younger students as they were for mature students the only difference being younger students were, for obvious reasons, more likely to mention new media and less likely to discuss travel or non-credentialised courses as key aspects of learning.

The link between education and other types of learning is not a novel discovery; learning theorists, educational psychologists and developmental theorists have long drawn attention to the diverse sites and ways in which learning occurs (Dewey, 1916; Engestrom, 1987; Freire, 1972; Gardner, 1993; Illeris, 2007; Knowles, 1970, Lave & Wenger, 1991 Mezirow, 1991; Rogers & Allender, 1983; Tough, 1967) and my own perspective on this question has already been delineated in Chapter Four. It is mentioned again here because what the data unequivocally indicates is that those who are interested in class and education need to pay more heed to how participation in education often draws on a more general desire for meaning which is linked to a concept of the self and the exploration of possible selves. Evidently this type of desire goes beyond the love for a particular discipline or subject and is motivated by a more general passion to explore what one is and what one is not. Many of the

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[123] This featured in the middle class cohort as well but was less emphatic.

interviewees' description of themselves supports the idea that we are, to return briefly to Freire (1972), radically unfinished beings, and learning,-at least the deeper forms of learning-is rooted in a fundamental ontological curiosity about self and the world. This is necessarily intersubjective and contextual and the specific form this takes is highly mediated. We have already seen how this sort of desire for meaning is central to James' story and we will see a similar notion articulated in a variety ways in most of the learning stories in the second section of this chapter. To disregard the interviewees specific intellectual interests or the force of this more general desire to comprehend oneself and the limits of self, would be to overlook some of the core themes in the data and to ignore one of the most important aspects of the formation of a learning identity.

This type of desire is also precisely what the worst forms of radical analysis of class and education choose to exclude. In certain structuralist theories of class and education (Althusser, 2008) the systemic power of domination and exclusion trumps phenomenological and everyday meanings and 'science' gains its power through its claim that it dispels ideological misapprehension[124]. I think this is a wrongheaded approach; it is pointless to claim that-for instance, James is mistaken about the value of education because on a macro level class we can demonstrate that inequality persists. I think the challenge for a critical analysis of education here should be to fully understand the logic behind everyday evaluations and to ask what is significant about this desire and the largely positive assessment of HE rather than to immediately point to a larger logic that 'disproves' students' own accounts.

It is thus a mistake to ignore the plural and varied way the desire to learn gets articulated and it is not enough to trace this solely along one grand axis of power in which learning is

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124 An extended quote will give a flavour of this and I think needs no further comment. Althusser says at the centre of the process of social reproduction is "one ideological state apparatus, although hardly anyone lends an ear to its music: it's so silent! This is the school"(Althusser, 2008, p 29). He continues in this vein "It takes children from every [social] class at infant school age, and then for years, the years in which the child is most 'vulnerable ', squeezed between the family State apparatus and the educational State apparatus, it drums into them, whether using new or old methods, a certain amount of 'know-how' wrapped in the ruling ideology. Somewhere around the age of 16, a mass of children are ejected 'into production ': these are the workers or small peasants. Another portion of scholastically adapted youth carries on; and, for better or worse, it goes somewhat further, until it falls by the wayside and fills the posts of small and middle technicians, white collar workers, small and middle executives, petty-bourgeois of all kinds. A last portion reaches the summit, either to fall into intellectual semi-employment, or to provide, as well as the 'intellectuals of the collective labourer', the agents of exploitation (capitalists, managers), the agents of repression (soldiers, policemen, political politicians, administrators etc) and the professional ideologists [..]. Each mass ejected en route is practically provided with the ideology which suits the role has to fill in class society. (2008, p. 29).

deemed either a form of social reproduction or a type of resistance but to be sensitive to the varied uses of education and *then* relate this to systemic logic. Jacques Ranciere makes a similar case in his fascinating, purposefully elliptical and at times frustrating book *Nights of Labour* (1989). Ranciere, through archival research, exams workers' quotidian lives in France in the nineteenth century and concludes that it was not just the official activity and political organisation of the workers movements which concerned radical artisans. He describes (1989, p viii)

> those nights wrested from the normal sequence of work and sleep. They were imperceptible, one might almost say inoffensive breaks in the ordinary course of things, where already the impossible was being prepared, dreamt and seen: the suspension of that ancient hierarchy which subordinates those dedicated to labour and those endowed with the privilege of thought. They were nights of study.[in which people wanted] to learn, to dream and to talk

Ranciere argues that when we look at class and learning we need to be careful with the way we interpret lives within the familiar political terms of emancipation and oppression. This was an important aspect of artisans' lives but Ranciere shifts away from the established foci of labour history and says we need to cognisant of the multiplicity of personal desires and aesthetic needs that shape learning lives. In terms of James' learning story I think it is very apparent that he sees 'breaks in the ordinary course of things' which contribute to a sense of possibility and freedom as intensely valuable[125]. This is relevant to the research as a whole and while I think critical research requires a general account of social power and institutions this has to be done in a way which does not negate or overlook these sorts of desires and perceptions.

One other remarkable aspect of the students' learning stories is the importance they ascribe to formal institutions. A large majority of students saw HE the place where 'real learning' occurs and informal and non-formal learning were not given anything like the same value as formal education. Over four years of talking to a wide variety of students only one interviewee questioned the purpose of HE explicitly and only five students gave accounts in which their

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[125] Social inequality limits us and can create cultures of silence and resignation but, as J. C. Scott (1990) has argued, there are always 'hidden transcripts' in which alternatives lives are imagined and planned .There are different ways of thinking this through (see also De Certeau, 1984; Lefebvre, 1991a, 1991b,). To elaborate on the brief reference to Ranciere's (1989) discussion of the intellectual passions of worker earlier what I take this to mean is that desire is often a transformative thing which seeks to transcend limits and frequently involves rejecting the social role one has been allotted within social structures.

informal learning projects were valued equally or more than formal learning. Arguably, this represents an important shift in the working class educational experience; we know that historically the figure of the working class autodidact was a common one (Rose, 2001) and that autonomous informal learning was very important both inside and outside working class organisations. [126] Informal and semi-formal community education has also part of the landscape of working class life in Ireland in the 1980s (Inglis, 1993). The expansion of formal education at all levels appears to be making this far less common[127] but all the same I still found it slightly surprising the extent to which credentialised learning dominated the interviewees' educational hopes and expectations. It is worth remembering that this may not always provide the most conducive circumstances for learning. So to return to James-who moved from a peer learning circle to a university- I think it is entirely open to question whether this has really has provided James with the most congenial educational environment. Certainly during his degree he had to struggle with the dominant culture of the university in a way he did not have to do in FE or in NA.

Obviously a widespread desire to learn allied to the belief that formal education offers the best way to make something of this desire is part of a longer history of exclusion and inequality. For most of the working class students I spoke to going to college half a generation ago was simply unthinkable. This was mentioned very regularly and becomes particularly clear when one compares the way different class cohorts described education. So while young middle class students valued their education very highly they described it as a normal part of the life course and were far less effusive. For example Jim, a twenty one year old from a professional family says there was never any question about whether he would go to college it was just *"the accepted natural order"* but for working class students, especially mature working class students and young working class students from very disadvantaged communities the university retains an almost magical aura. Sinead, a working class woman in her late twenties offered a short anecdote that captures this sentiment very succinctly. At an induction day she was brought into the canteen and on the table there were napkins stamped with the college logo and she says

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126 Of course autonomous learning *outside* of institutions is integral to the way Ranciere (1989, 1991) sees education, freedom and equality.

127 See (Bennett et al, 2009) on learning, cultural activity and class in the UK. Their contention is that patterns of cultural activity remain deeply classed and find little evidence of the democratisation of culture and believe there is a clear relationship, perhaps stronger than ever, between class and formal educational attainment. Their research also suggests that working class autodidactism is currently very rare.

> *I took it .I was afraid it might be a dream and I [still four years later] have the napkin. That is how important it was to me. It was a chance to learn, to learn about myself [..] to be on an equal footing with other people- more mainstream people*

Other students talked about pinching themselves. I was also struck, especially in the first year of the research, by how regularly people would make remarks about old buildings and green spaces of the universities as something extraordinary and beautiful (this was sometimes directly contrasted with the cramped environment in some working class communities).

"I am the new me": The university as a transformative space - self-development and social power

While this sense of HE as being an almost magical place diminished over time one of the most arresting findings of the research has been the widespread belief in the efficacy of third level institutions as transformative spaces. Perhaps this is unsurprising because of the history of the university as an institution of the elite lingers on and for many of the interviewees just getting in the door of a college was seen as really significant. But the range of personal transitions and transformations discussed by the students was nonetheless genuinely remarkable. Tellingly these real or anticipated changes were not small or trivial. For example Rachel, a mature working class science student from Dublin, who is for the most part a humorously sceptical woman, wholly subscribes to the idea that HE is a positive, transformative space both for herself and for others. She said

> *I knew a girl from a tiny little farm. She was like a mouse and you want to see her by the end-she just metamorphosed in front of my eyes [into] a rock chick. It must be wonderful for the youth, a lovely thing, but as a mature student you grow just as much, just in a different way. You just end up with more…I think you become more of yourself.*

This quote neatly summarises one of the most important changes discussed by the participants. Amongst mature students, most commonly women, *'becoming more of yourself'* was seen as one of the main benefits of attending college. Amongst younger students HE was also described as a vital liminal space for learning and for forging relationships as well as providing the necessary foundation for a good career. Of course neither personal development or transformations of the self can occur in a disembedded way; people make themselves and their knowledge of the world within a given social context and we can see how this idea was articulated by Rachel who after talking about "*becoming more of yourself'"* went on to say

I don't care even if the child wants to be a dustman I think they should go to college to learn how to do it. You learn more than is in a book I think that you get to be a much more rounded person [...]. A good education is maybe everything it gives you the foundation of your adulthood [..] it teaches you how to reason, it gives you a way, it teaches to you empathise, to look at different ways and different lives, instead of becoming...I am from a very working class area and in the school you could see that they didn't have a hope-their parents didn't care if they went to school or not. What hope do you have of getting out poverty, out of ignorance [and understanding] there is a better way of being? They don't know how to ask questions. Education opens the doors. Just like they say that education is the way out for the third world education is the way out for the whole world get them to look at different lives. Stuck at home where they are not educated how can they?

This is illustrative of how many students understood the relationship between class, self-development and education. To link this to the arguments in the last chapter about how complex biographical accounts of class and belonging are it should be noted that although Rachel is upwardly mobile[128] and describes working class life as 'out there' and in deficit terms, she still identifies herself as working class later in the interview. The comment above also brings us back to some of the other main themes outlined in Chapter Six. Her transformative notion of education is tightly linked to a notion of overcoming the restrictive, immobile and closed aspects of working class life and of finding a break in the ordinary course of things.

Rachel was not alone in articulating the desire to be more and to be other. If we recall the way James, Luke, Kevin, Terry and Amy spoke about college it is also tied to the idea that HE can facilitate significant personal development and overcome the injuries of class. Tertiary education is seen as a place where the rules-especially about who deserves what in society-are suspended or may never apply again. I think that it is this belief alongside the related experience of disrespect and imposed scarcity which gives such force to these student descriptions of the transformative power of HE. For example David, who we met in the last chapter, the taxi driver who has been tirelessly looking for a way to change his job said of his entry into college" *I am the new me. I am somebody else now. I don't associate myself with Jobstown, that background [..] I would call that a deprived background, deprived of education and knowledge, deprived of capability and opportunities".*

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128 Rachel was in service work before college and became a technician after successfully finishing her science degree.

This idea of HE as a transitional and transformative space which can ameliorate social inequality surfaced in relation to gender as well, For women of all classes attending university was often described as *"time for me"* and about carving out personal space in the home away from incessant demands of domestic work and emotional labour. After a few months of the degree, Aileen recalls with quiet humour and a little triumph *"it was [all] university and very little house. It went by the wayside".* Again and again the university is imagined as an institution which creates new biographical choices through which one can begin to redraw the boundaries of self. Of course in reality this not always straightforward process but the salient point is that the way education is viewed and valued cannot be understood with taking into consideration these hopes and desires.

Maria "I want to become normal like the Irish"

Migrants' student experience is distinct in certain respects because movement across borders affects the amount of social and cultural capital one has, breaks established patterns of employment and changes one's legal status and rights. As a result many migrants find themselves in class positions very different to the one they occupied in the country of their birth. Several of the migrants I met discussed HE as a way of 'realigning' their class position and most of them of them discussed HE as space which would allow them to integrate more effectively into Irish society. Some of the migrants clearly felt obliged to prove their worth to Irish society. This interlocks with issues of race and ethnicity and being seen as *essentially* lesser deeply rankled some of the interviewees such as Maria who arrived as a refugee from Africa in the 1990s explains why, as a consequence, she values her education so highly[129]

> *Everyone looks at you as a refugee-as a poor person. They put you in this category so by going to college you change that….They can see my life is bit different. Many things have changed. I want to become normal like the Irish. I have changed the way some people look at Africa when they look at me because I am sure people used to think when you are African you are not talented, or able to do anything, They can see Africans can do something*

The first years in Ireland were difficult for Maria. She lived in a very poor area of Dublin, was restricted by her legal status from working or studying and found the strain of understanding the complexities of a new culture while being continually misconstrued and sometimes subject to racism very difficult. Things improved once she got refugee status-she

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129 See Fleming, Loxley, Kenny & Finnegan (2010) and Finnegan (2010d) for further discussion of migrant experience

first worked as a care assistant and then went to an access course and then onto college. She feels by participating in education she has both become more of herself and will overcome other people's prejudices.

Gwen *"I always felt I'm stupid"*

This idea of HE as transformative was also used by working class students with disabilities. For example Gwen, an ex-chef, from Dublin, who first returned to learning when she was 30 years old, says of HE

> *I did not have a job in mind at all. I was there for the education. I didn't care if I never got a job. I missed out on it (education) I felt I was picking up. I was there to be part of it, I really wanted the experience, it was huge. Just knowledge, learning things, I really wanted to learn, learn as much as I could [..]I [went to] university for me. Not necessarily for work, a career it was for me. Not necessarily what I was going to get out of it or where I was going to end up that was for me because I wanted that. You know what I mean. So, I find that [..being] dyslexic is not a hang up any more. That's a huge thing. It's not a hang up. If anybody has a problem with whether I'm dyslexic that's their problem. I have an honours degree. I have a postgrad qualification and they can do what they like. It does not… I always felt I'm stupid. You know what I mean? One girl said it to me 'We thought you were thick but look at you now' and they did think I was stupid.*

In the interview she also links this to getting out of council estate and leaving the most difficult aspects of working class life behind. Gwen's layered account of her experience in which class and dyslexia are both important describes HE as vital for her development and enhances her sense of dignity and worth. This 'outsider to insider' narrative-based on overcoming previous exclusion and accruing greater respect- plays a prominent part in over half of the working class biographical accounts. These stories make explicit that the transitions and transformations described and hoped for by working class students are linked to overcoming class barriers through personal agency and gaining esteem by doing the 'unexpected' in a society where higher education is seen as the preserve of the middle class. But as Gwen and Maria's remarks suggest this experience of social power is multidimensional and linked to other forms of exclusion and social inequalities and different aspects of our social self are foregrounded depending on the context.

If we take the different themes mentioned thus far – the hope for social mobility, the positive evaluation of HE, the desire to learn, the importance of personal development linked to overcoming class barriers and other social inequalities, and the university as a space of

transition and transformation we have the main contours of how HE is envisaged by these students. A large number of the interviewees indicated that HE was for them (West, 1996, p.10)

> basically a space in which to manage and transcend feelings of marginalisation, meaninglessness and inauthenticity in interaction with others; and which it is possible with the support and encouragement of others to compose a new life, a different story and a more cohesive self.

As we have seen the interviews are studded with comments that suggest this idea is widespread; by doing a degree you can become *"more of yourself"*, forge *"the new me"*, become *"mainstream"* or *"normal like the Irish"*, develop your *"actual self"*, *"prove them wrong"* or *"prove that you are better than that"*, gain *"acceptance and [have] your worth being recognized"* and obtain *"the piece of paper that says I can".* These are bold hopes and they are very widely shared ideas amongst the people I spoke with. So in an era of lifelong learning in which there are ever multiplying systemic demands on the university- to ensure economic growth and social integration, produce new knowledge etc., etc., we are confronted with student expectations which are if anything even more demanding than these raft of policy objectives[130].

Imagining the university as a recognition space

What the quotes from the transcripts cited above suggest and the research as whole confirms is that higher education is valued because it is believed it can lead to a larger change in one's life and that by entering college and acquiring credentials one can begin to overcome economic and cultural inequalities. It is also important to mention *how* this was discussed; commonly previous, or even ongoing difficulties, were given less weight than the fact that by entering education these students were acting on their own lives in a decisive way. Studying was widely viewed as a positive act of agency and self-making. Furthermore, I think there is a definite underlying logic behind these student descriptions of HE as a place of personal transformation which can be directly linked to the findings on worth and respect in the last chapter. I think it is very clear that HE is valued because it seems to offer a chance to overcome misrecognition and being 'allowed' to prove one's individual worth. I think if we

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[130] Perhaps-as Stefan Collini has recently observed- the university is now more accurately described as a 'multiversity' (Collini, 2012).

listen carefully to these students we realise that the university is seen by the majority working class students as a *space of recognition*.

My theorisation of the university as a recognition space builds on bold and suggestive critical theory of Axel Honneth which has been discussed briefly in the last previous chapter[131]. It has been argued, pace Honneth, that everyday moral intuitions and sensitivities disclose something very important about the order of things and the nature of power and Honneth (1995a, 2007) argues that by examining the experience of disrespect, and humiliation, including class based subordination, we can discover unrealised claims for justice within quotidian life. Furthermore, Honneth, building on the insights of Barrington Moore (1978) and E. P Thompson (1993), posits that the social experience of disrespect often results in *struggles for recognition* and justice. Such struggles occur on both a small and large scale and are the motivating source of much social action (1995a; Fraser & Honneth, 2003).

According to Honneth (1995a, p. 92)

> the reproduction of social life is governed by the imperative of mutual recognition, because one can develop a practical relation-to-self only when one has learned to view oneself, from the normative perspective of one's partners in interaction, as their social addressee.

Honneth also argues that the grammar of mutual recognition and the type of needs and expectations which underpin intersubjective recognition is differentiated in modern capitalist society (Honneth, 1995a). Honneth posits, based on a reading of early Hegel, Mead and Winnicott, that recognition in the intimate sphere of family and love relationships lays the basis for self-confidence; the recognition of rights through law helps define the subject as worthy of respect, and finally through work and community participation one is given recognition of one's unique abilities and achievements and this is fundamental for self-esteem. This fascinating analysis of identity formation through the intersubjective and socially mediated experience of love, law and solidarity is open to the accusation of being too linear and in some ways even dehistoricised (Alexander & Lara, 1996; McNay, 2008) and

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131 Debates over recognition have loomed large in social theory in the last decade and a half and has been most closely linked to theories of social change and identity politics. Given that the purpose of this chapter is to offer an account of student experience of HE it falls outside of its remit to explore the main lines of argument in the debates over redistribution and recognition here. My reading of Honneth is indebted to the following literature (Adkins & Skeggs, 2004; Alexander & Lara, 1996; Fraser & Honneth, 2003; McNay, 2008; Murphy, 2010a; Ricouer, 2005; Sayer, 2011; Taylor, 1989; Taylor & Gutmann, 1994; Yar, 2001, 2003).

there is certainly a residual Hegelian idealism in his conceptualisation of recognition. Yet this is still an enormously suggestive theory of socio-psychological development and I think Honneth's theoretical framework, is invaluable in analysing why respect and disrespect are central in accounts of social practice. The specific significance of this idea for educational research has not yet been fully explored outside of a small body of work (Huttunen, 2007; Finnegan, 2010b, 2011b, Fleming, 2011; Fleming & Finnegan, 2010b, 2011a; Murphy 2010a, 2010b, 2011). I believe this framework- albeit one I want to link to a clearer theorisation of capitalism and social power- is enormously useful and I think it helps to explain why the research participants often discussed their biographical transitions and transformations in HE as somehow linked to misrecognition in the past and why the interviewees so often put an emphasis on overcoming disrespect through developing one's abilities and publicly merited achievements.

I now want to link this argument about the university as a recognition space more tightly to the investigation of social space in the Chapter Three and Six. It was suggested that the connections made in life stories between physical places and cognitive maps of social space was fundamental to grasping how we experience and make sense of class. Furthermore, it was argued that in a relatively fluid society the idea of moving upward through social space has become increasingly important idea in our culture. In the last chapter I documented just how frequently the university is associated with social mobility but we can now say more far more explicitly why this is rarely seen solely in terms of occupational mobility. Adapting Honneth's tripartite division of society into family, state and civil society which are subject to differentiated modes of recognition related to confidence, respect and self-esteem we can say that the university is imagined as a place in which a basic claim to respect through the law can be made - viz the right to education- and is also a space in which one can prove one's own specific and unique worth and thus enhance self-esteem. In a great number of the student accounts the search for respect and self-esteem are powerfully fused. While I may have certain reservations about the terminology[132] and think Honneth's approach needs to be supplemented with a clearer theory of power, the state and political economy (Fraser, 2000; McNay, 2008) I nonetheless think that right at the heart of most of the biographical accounts is the claim for a better and more flourishing life through education. This pivots on the idea

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132 Arguably the notion of self-esteem has been largely colonised by a 'self-help' discourse which have very strong, individualistic connotations and may even be a contribution to a 'culture of narcissism' (Lasch, 1979). This is clearly not what Honneth or the research participants have in mind when they talk of self-esteem.

that the university is, potentially, a place in which social disrespect can be undone and humiliations can be overcome or at the very least a site where a strong normative claims for such respect can be advanced. Regardless of the other economic, social and technical imperatives driving the expansion of HE the data strongly suggest that the university is now envisaged as potential space of recognition linked to a conception of the basic rights of citizenship and a desire for self-development. I think the students I met are largely aware that this is a possibility rather than an automatic effect of HE but I am certain that this hope is key to understanding a great deal of what working students say about third level education.

A meritocratic or egalitarian recognition space?

The argument here is that the way HE is valued and imagined by the participants is underpinned by an assumption of basic equality and the idea that one should be afforded the opportunity to prove one's worth. The students certainly see HE as an open space and one in which identities are less defined in the boundaried spaces of work and community. It is a grey zone, a liminal space and the attractions of this seemingly less tightly defined space for dominated groups is obvious. This cluster of ideas inevitably is fed, and feeds into, some of the dominant public discourses that seek to make sense of what HE could and should be in our society. Most students said the university should be egalitarian or argued that it is, or is becoming, meritocratic (see Young, 1958 for the classic study). For example I think it is fair to say that Mark, the young ex-builder discussed in the last chapter, used a fairly restrictive concept of meritocracy, based on academic intelligence, while Luke discusses a more open version of meritocracy based on effort. Most of the participants who addressed this explicitly made a case, with varying degrees of ambiguity, for an egalitarian notion of the university and claimed that everyone should have the opportunity to attend HE if they so wished. In fact a good deal of the participation in the research appears to have been motivated by the idea that by offering their story it might contribute in some way to a more egalitarian and open educational system.[133]

These ideas were articulated through anecdotes and reflections on personal experience rather than fully elaborated arguments. This meant that people often offered layered accounts of access, equality and HE. For example, Anthony said at one point everyone should have a right to be in university but then went to say how *"grateful"* he was for the chance and he

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133 I think this reflects the general readiness and desire to 'give something back'.

was worried he had *"taken somebody's else's place"*. Clearly none of us offer wholly consistent accounts of the world and it would be ludicrous to examine these statements as if they were made in a seminar the only reason for highlighting this is that when we come to the extended learning stories in the next section of this chapter we shall see that shuttling back and forth between ideas of equality and meritocracy is quite common.

Affirmation as a 'capable learner' as one of the goals of the struggle for recognition in HE

I think one of the most interesting aspects of the student narratives is the extent to which attending college brings up these questions about personal and social worth. The relationship between worth and being a competent learner was another very clear theme in the data (especially amongst mature students). This is discernible even in the most instrumental accounts in which credentials and their use are strongly foregrounded. Fascinatingly, whatever other advantages third level education might confer on students one of the most important things for the participants in the research is that participation in HE confirms one's capability as a student We have already seen in James' account and in the excerpt from the interview with Gwen above becoming a capable learner was seen as one the main goals of their studies. To be a capable student seems to have a certain moral weight-it says something about who we are. Some of the importance given to proving oneself as a learner can be gathered from what Samantha a lively 32 year old mother from West Dublin has to say. She remarked that before attending FE and HE she lacked confidence in her ability to learn

> *Yes, it never showed. I was chatty and had a laugh, but I was always afraid I would say something stupid. Now if I had something to say I will say it, before I would have to think about it. 'Oh God no. not me', I know now once I put my mind to doing something I know I can do it. Doing that degree means to me I can do anything I put my mind to. With college and the access course together I have done 4 years of school. If it comes up that I want to do a Ph. D. I know I could do it. I understand a lot of things now. It is not that I didn't understand anything before, but I just didn't have confidence in myself that I could.*

Repeatedly students stated, almost in a Deweyan fashion (1916), that they valued HE because it indicated that they could engage in more learning in the future.

Connected to the affirmation of learning ability, and this again was particularly common amongst mature working class students, was the belief that this allowed them to reshape a notion of their 'public' self. Thus it is vitally important for James to be educated because he

will *"be able to stand to an argument"*. Samantha encapsulates this widely held sentiment when she remarks that the confidence one gets from attending tertiary education is about finding one's voice and feeling that you have the right to your opinion. She says proudly *"I was always afraid I would say something stupid. Now if I had something to say I will say it"*.

In other words for Samantha and James becoming a student made them feel more entitled and more sure of their own capability of entering into public debate- something which they and many other students had previously felt excluded from before entering college. Sayer (2005) has reviewed a range of research which suggests the type of social experience working class people have at school, work and in the community often actively discourages a sense of entitlement. On the other hand a wide body of research has detailed how the formation of an entitled self is one of the most powerful functions of upper class education (see for example research in the US (Ho, 2009) in France (Bourdieu, 1996), in the UK (Ball, 2003) and in Irish private schools (Courtois, 2010). It was noteworthy that with the exception of some of the younger working class students, one of the strongest contrasts between the different class cohorts in the initial stage of the research was the varying levels of entitlement and confidence in their capacity as learners.

Schools out! Remaking oneself as a learner

I realised that for many mature and some of the young working class students getting into and through HE brought a recognition 'dividend' that freed them of the burden of a feeling like they were unsuccessful learners. It is significant that over three quarters of the interviewees chose to discuss schooling in relation to college. Given the importance of school in biographical narratives of all kinds (Alheit, 1994a) and that just fewer than half the interviews had been attending school between one and three years before the interview were conducted this might have been expected. I do not intend to give an exhaustive analysis of what the interviewees said about schooling but it is important to trace some of the ways in which a learning identity made in school is confirmed or altered through participation in HE and to elaborate a little on how this is linked to the notion that HE is a space of recognition and potential transformation.

Interestingly, apart from geographical signifiers, it was in the discussions of school that the issue of class was discussed most unambiguously by the participants. In fact the day the day

life in schools and the likelihood of moving onto third level education from a specific school was frequently couched in quite bald observations about class. However, the interviewees rarely described HE in the same terms and the education system generally appears to be imagined as a bifurcated system; in which a highly classed school system stands beside HEIs which are described as meritocratic or egalitarian. The interviewees' stories of compulsory formal education are also far less positive than their descriptions of HE. Over half of the interviewees gave negative or ambivalent accounts of schooling and a number of mature working class men and women reported having very negative experiences at school. Overall only a fifth of the interviewees were very positive about compulsory education. It should be said though there were far fewer negative accounts of school amongst the young cohort and this group was also a little less likely discuss class inequality as one of the key characteristic of the school system.

One other common feature of the participants' stories about school was, like the narratives of community detailed earlier, they were nearly always described in some sense as family stories. Again this is not surprising and as Devine (2004), Lareau (1987) and Reay (1998a) have pointed out a family's access to cultural capital is fundamental to how parents interact with schools. This contention is strongly supported by the data. The role of schools, family and class in shaping a learner identity will be held in view through the remainder of the chapter in various ways but for now I shall specifically trace how a learning identity made through school can then be remade through HE through a single biographical account.

David's story: family, school and biographical change through HE
David describes leaving school as a crucial turning point in his life and he returned to this subject every time we met. He experienced being edged out of school at 16 as very disempowering and now sees it as a mistake and associates it with losing control over his life. When one bears in mind how he describes his decision to attend HE as part of his struggle for agency this is very important. He thinks he left school too early because first of all his family had had very little education; his two brothers left school at a young age, his mother had very basic literacy skills and whatever learning his father had acquired was self-taught. Schools played a very marginal role in his family's life and his parents, he says, did not appreciate why he ran in to trouble or why this might be important and "*they didn't really know how to support me*".

As ever these turning points in a life are only truly comprehensible through an examination of a the context and he explains the school "*was pretty dire looking back*"

> *Going there, there was certain discrimination because of where you were from. I was from a poorer area. We didn't have an influence in the community; we didn't even have the opportunity to have an influence in the community. There is a community college there now, but it wasn't there back then. You were just lucky to be there. You were on short order. I cut my hair, I was a mod, and I shaved my head. I was kicked out of the school for two weeks! I was a kid who always conformed. I didn't cause any trouble. I was the quiet kid, who tried to fit in and make as many friends as possible but you're still targeted. There is no getting under the radar*

The fact he came from a poorer community within the school catchment area, one which had a reputation for being 'rough', was mentioned by teachers to David a number of times -the implication being that he was not to be trusted and he was being watched. Interestingly, he connects this to a lack of community influence or power in the school (even though he also says his parents were not capable or willing to get involved). His depiction of the school's relationship to the surrounding working class community tallies with the findings of research conducted on parental involvement in Irish schools (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002). The authors note (2002, p. 46) that working class families "involvement in decisions about matters such as curriculum, discipline, and school organisation is withheld" by these institutions and remain very peripheral in the life of schools.

So David's educational trajectory was shaped by both an unresponsive and classed institution and his family's lack of cultural capital. Even though he had been an "*ok'*" student and had consciously distanced himself from a group of friends who were "*messers*" at the beginning of secondary school in his mid-teens his grades started to plummet. He discovered girls and going out and dreamed of becoming a sportsman. When he failed his Inter Certificate he was "*devastated*" but still hoped that things would pick up for him. However, he was moved into a "*mickey mouse*" vocational stream within the school which operated according to a different timetable to mainstream classes and was to all intents and purposes a holding exercise. The school's limited expectations for the students on this course were made very clear and they spent much of their time messing around with a stripped down car. David says he became cheekier as a result. In fifth year he recalls when he realised his school days were

finally over. He was at a school disco and there was one of his teachers outside who was acting as a *"sort of bouncer"* and was

> *nicknamed Basil Fawlty because he looked like him. I said to him 'I am going to come back next year'.[..] I remember distinctly your man saying 'you are not coming back here!'.[..] It might of been an off the cuff remark but it stuck with me and the changed my direction, I decided I was going to get a job, it affected me, it was one of those moments of clarity. That one statement meant I did not come back. I wasn't a particularly bad student I don't know if he was peeved with me .... I don't know what was going on in his life. That one statement sent me in a different direction [I don't know what would have happened] if I would have put my head down I don't know because I am doing ok in college. I am not just passing the assignments and the exams they are giving me. I am doing well*

David's position was tenuous beforehand but he thinks this encounter sealed his educational fate. He tells me his failure at school really bothered him subsequently. He put school behind him but driving a taxi and dealing with various types of people made him aware that education can enhance people's lives. As we have seen, he also became more and more frustrated with his job because he felt bored, vulnerable and was not spending enough time with his family. Over the years he began to build a sense of being a capable leaner through his own informal learning and especially his love of films eventually led him to do a script writing course and later gave him the confidence to sign up for an access course.

Becoming a capable learner in his own mind is described as very tentative and largely informal process but like many others he only felt fully validated once he entered college. In all his interviews David expressed the idea that by obtaining formal qualifications he could undo his earlier educational misrecognition. It is not an accident that during the interviews David would often cite the exact percentages he received for different essays both because he needed to achieve high marks to enrol in the postgraduate course he was interested in doing but also because by doing well he has been confirmed that he was *always* a capable learner. For David's HE is the exact inverse of school; he says it is a space of freedom where *"anything goes"* and then remarks *"Its poles apart. The majority of lecturers are approachable, not aloof, I love the place"*. In this the experience of college is seen as transformative because it provided him with an opportunity to prove previous formal educational evaluations wrong and this set the basis for a greater sense of self-worth.

The capable learner and biography: Reflexivity and 'the explosive potential of unlived life'

One of the interesting aspects of David's story is the way education and a changed learner identity is linked to the possibility of a deeper biographical transformation-what David called the *"new me"*. This is of course linked to the idea that David associates education with protention and agency but what needs further comment is the extent to which these ideas of change and transformation *rely* on him seeing himself as capable learner. A series of previously fixed and unwanted designations-taxi man, early school leaver, from Jobstown etc. –become provisional and contingent once he goes to college. He keeps working as a taxi driver but as a student he proves he has the 'ability' to be something else – this is why I think he says *"I am not just passing the assignments and the exams they are giving me I am doing well"*. Despite the fact that like a lot of working class students he was overworked right through his degree course the change in routine creates the perception that the future is unwritten. In positing an 'unfinished' learning story David subjects his own past to scrutiny as well and thus his family circumstances, educational institutions, class and notions of self are, at the very least, now open to question. In his account university has encouraged him to ask 'what if?' and especially what might have happened *"if I put my head down"*?

This brings us back to a theme dealt with in Chapter Four -reflexivity. I argued that reflexivity is key aspect of learning as well as social and biographical change. The data suggest that choices which break routine patterns are particularly conducive to "the exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people to consider themselves in relation to their social contexts and vice versa" (Archer, 2007, p. 4). This capacity "enables human subjects to design and determine their responses to structured circumstances in which they find themselves, in the light of what they care about" (Archer, 2007, p 11). So by coming to college as a mature working class man I think David has begun a conversation about necessity and contingency in his own life. This does not of course mean he is free of constraints but like so many students the break in established routine and the promise of recognition and transformation does appear to encourage a deep form of reflexivity.

This was very common and raises an important question which will be answered through the rest of the chapter about the relationship between reflexivity, learner identity and biography. Alheit has argued that (1994b, p 285) "Biography itself has become a field of learning in

which transitions have, to be anticipated and coped with, and where personal identity is liable to be the result of long and protracted learning processes". The data suggest this is the case and certainly we can see how this immediately applies to James and David's accounts in this chapter but I also think this contention holds good for most of the student stories (and is clearly discernible in the narratives discussed in Chapter Six). This is undoubtedly related, as I have noted, both in the review of class relations in general, and in the examination Irish society in particular, to the fact that the nature and meaning of work has changed. We have also seen that there is quite good evidence within the data of a process of detraditionalisation linked to the breakdown of these established patterns of work alongside changes in gender relations and the increased importance of the flows of global capital. This fluidity in capital and social roles and the concomitant growth in the importance of credentials and formal learning are what I think lies behind the way David and others envisage HE and why education is so often linked to the promise of meaningful agency and the possibility of reflexive change.

This is not a one way process and reconfigures the interplay of structure and agency in society. Based on this insight and doing extensive research on learning lives Alheit (1994b, pp. 289) has boldly concluded

> Biographical background knowledge is at the same time, however, an emergent potential for changing structures. The modification of individual self- and world-referents - even in the limited context of specific life constructions - contains opportunities for the transformation of the institutional framework conditions of social existence. Substantial elements of these "structures" are the unquestioned certainties functioning in the background to which social individuals relate intuitively when they act on the everyday plane, but also when they act biographically. As soon as such prescripts - or only parts of them - enter our awareness and become available, then structures begin to change. Unlived life does indeed possess socially explosive force

Alheit's argument is that we live in a period in which human reflexivity has an enhanced power to create new forms of social practice . As we shall see, I am not at all sure that I share his optimism on this issue and I think that socio-cultural and institutional conditions affect and limit reflexivity and agency far more than this formulation suggests but nonetheless I do think the basic thrust of his argument idea is pertinent to understanding the research findings. In fact, I would contend that the desire and hopes for transformation and recognition reviewed above completely depend on the idea that the right type of biographical action will release the 'explosive potential of unlived life". Whether these aspirations are realisable is a

completely separate question and although I would argue that Alheit has somewhat overstated our capacity for reflexive action I think he is absolutely correct to suggest that this idea is widespread and has social force.

A summary of Section I

In the previous chapter I concentrated on how the interviewees understand class and HE through their experience in families, work and the community and how this is linked to notions of worth, dignity, and social mobility. Building on this and the findings detailed in this chapter I think we can conclude that HE is very highly valued by the participants because it is 1) a social good which the working class has been denied access to in the past, 2) it is believed that HE facilitates occupational and social mobility 2) it is seen as a liminal biographical space in which important transitions and changes in identity are possible, and 3) it is viewed as a powerful recognition space in which previous humiliation and disrespect can be overcome through self-actualisation and social validation. Obviously a particular individual may be more or less concerned with one or other of the three things listed above but for most students these various hopes were seen as interrelated and interdependent.

It should also be said that for a majority of the students, especially mature students, a key part of their recognition struggle is receiving affirmation of their capacity as learners. The data also suggest that HE is prized because it creates opportunities for reflexive learning where one can think through the gap between lived and unlived life which allows people-at the very least- to refigure early educational hopes and failures but also holds out the promise of personal transformation. Although there is evidence of widespread and rich informal learning in the biographical accounts this type of learning was not given the same value as formal education by the participants. One can imagine many socio-cultural reasons why this might be the case but I think this primarily an effect of credentialisation of the labour market. Framed like this I think we can begin to understand why the students who were interviewed were so willing to sacrifice time, effort, money and sometimes their sense of security even when the experience itself was not very positive and/or positive outcomes seemed uncertain. So although I do not think we can forget that education has a role in reproducing class divisions we also have to be cognisant of how the experience of inequality also feeds a desire for recognition and a hunger for learning and self-exploration which has an effect on how education is viewed and used. However, this unheralded drama of everyday agency and hope

and the belief that the university can serve as a permeable transitional social space has been largely ignored in critical educational scholarship.

At this juncture we can say that there are several new elements the need to be added to the general picture outlined in Chapter Six not least that the data illuminates how crucial one's learning story can be to the way we construct our biographies more generally. If we link these findings to the analysis in Chapter Three and Six I think we can now contextualise them within a broader sociological horizon. In a world which is profoundly bureaucratic and credentialised yet increasingly fluid and where work and community are being constantly remade by hidden global forces; in a country where class disrespect is almost ubiquitous and inequality commonplace and the consequences of not reflexively acting on one's own life are all too apparent; in which the basic human desire to know the world and self remains as strong as ever and notions of self-actualisation are now part of 'common sense'; and in an era in which we are all encouraged to become lifelong learners HE has become something out of ordinary. However humdrum and banal the reality of tertiary education might be it is nonetheless a place of hope for many of the participants I spoke with. They say it offers them a space where the possibilities of an 'unlived life', often away from dull work and hard pressed communities, can be explored. The hope for various forms of transformation and recognition fuels the desire to learn and this lends even the most punishing and unsatisfactory experiences within HE an aura of significance for many working class students.

For the moment, and this may well be just for a brief period of time, it appears that higher education occupies a very unusual and highly valued place in the Irish social imagination. To step in the door of a college is to step into a highly mediated and symbolically rich space which is imagined by many as a space of transition and transformation. To step across this threshold is to have some hope of upward social mobility, some new developmental opportunities and gain access to resources of dignity and respect. These are powerful hopes which engage all of us in a very deep way and in a profoundly unequal society are likely to be especially attractive to working class people who have been previously denied these things.

Section II Meritocracy and its discontents: Seven life and learning stories

Introduction: Student experience, reflexivity and habitus

We now have a picture of how HE is viewed and valued by the students I spoke with. I have also outlined how this I think this is embedded in the conditions of working class life. However, there is one vital element in this account of class identity and education that needs far more elaboration. Although I have illustrated how the student learning stories draw on the way we imagine the university I have not indicated how these ideas and aspirations alter over time. In other words how do the frustrations and pleasures of study and the reality of everyday experience in HEIs impact on these students? What happens when the university does not satisfy the high expectations working class students bring with them? How are changes in learner identity negotiated? What gets people through and what gets in the way of successful participation? The aim of this section is to address these sorts of questions about the reality of everyday experience in HEIs and concentrate in a more focussed way on how learning is shaped over time. The intention is to enrich and compliment the synchronic overview given in the first part of the chapter with a more diachronic account of the biographical changes and adjustments involved in going through college.

Analysing learning as a biographical process

Most of this part of the chapter will be taken up with descriptions of individual learners' stories which explore learning as a longitudinal and biographical process. We will meet Elaine, Tara, Dermot, Niamh, Aoife, Ger and add to what we know of Katy. These particular students have been chosen because their stories illustrate the main findings and the major patterns of differentiation that I identified within the data. Besides the issues already highlighted in the thesis- the moral significance of class and the complexity of class identity and the importance of recognition, transformation and social mobility as themes- these stories will illustrate a number of other core findings including the cultural fit between institution and self; the search for agency through education, the importance of resilience for getting by and the burden and legacy of care and carelessness in the making of biographies. My interest here is explicating all these findings in greater depth and illuminating how this process is narrated biographically because I think this is the most effective way of accurately delineating the role education is now playing in many working class lives.

These specific students have also been chosen because their stories cast light on two important topics- the varied forms of learning that occur in HEIs and the impact of specific educational institutions-both HEIs and schools-and particular practices and interventions have on learning lives. In doing so I will also be able to sketch out what the data suggests are the conditions for successful participation and the sort of limits and barriers that these students face in making the university a truly generative learning space. In fact these seven stories alongside what has been said about David, Luke, Terry, Amy, Kevin and James offer the reader examples of all the most common types of 'learner identities' [134] discernible within the data as whole, clear examples of the sort of practices that students value and insight into the impact of differentiation and diversification in currently having on Irish HE. Just below the surface of the forthcoming learning stories are three bigger questions which I think can only be fully answered following the presentation of the data. The first question is 'to what extent are the bold hopes for transformation voiced by the participant being met and on what terms?' The second question is 'to what extent does going through university influence broader shifts in biographical identity?' Finally, what do these stories and the research as whole suggest about learning, equality and class in HE and what does this say about Irish society?

Between habitus and hope: Tensions and contradictions in students' experience

In the previous section I outlined how the participants imagined and valued the university. What I have not said yet is just how extraordinary I think these students views are in the light of what we know about the historical development of the university as an institution. This has been a discontinuous and complex process but nonetheless one can still say that from the establishment of the universities Paris and Bologna nearly a thousand years ago right through to the formation of the modern university in the past two hundred years university education has *always* been elitist and exclusive in form and function (Bourdieu, 1971, 2000; Collini, 2012). Universities have never been truly popular and democratic institutions in which all classes can participate equally and, as we have seen, this remains the case today despite the

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134 By coding how students *themselves* described their participation I could identify six main types of learner identity, They were 1) struggling learners 2) floating learners 3) tactical and achieving learners 4) self directed learners within a discipline or field 5) narrowly reflexive learners and 6) broadly reflexive learners (how I exactly conceive of reflexivity will be explored in greater detail below). Tactical and narrowly reflexive were the most common form of learner identity. However, many students shifted between these orientations over the course of their studies and I do not at all want to suggest any of the interviewees can be neatly boxed as 'types'- my interest is solely in noting varying levels of integration into college courses and investigating the conditions for successful participation.

arrival of 'mass' tertiary education (Thompson, 2000). Claiming the university as a space of personal and social transformation and, ultimately, as something akin to a democratic public sphere -and this is what these students emphatically and repeatedly did- is remarkable. The concomitant hope that HE can make up for the limits and failures of the rest of the education system-as James and David and many others also suggested- is equally noteworthy.

In articulating these ideas most of the participants tended, either on the basis of hope or by generalising from personal experience, to state that third level education is now an inclusive, open and, even a class neutral space. But as we have seen in the discussion of class identity in Chapter Six and in the types of transformation people were hoping to effect by getting a degree class remains central to the way people construct their learning and life stories. Furthermore, we know that there are still massive disparities in the participation rates of various social classes in HE. This was reflected in the biographical accounts gathered for the research and people would frequently discuss the fact that neighbours, friends and family had not attended college. This brings us to a very important paradox within the findings. While the narratives indicated that class inequality exerts a powerful, if uneven and sometimes diffuse, influence on social relations outside the walls of universities-in work, schools, families and communities-this was rarely discussed in explicit terms as a problematic characteristic of Higher Education. Furthermore, when this issue was addressed it usually surfaced in remarks about the composition of the student body rather than staff (who were not expected to be from a similar background to the students as long as they were 'approachable'). In general, with a couple of notable exceptions, the culture and practices of HE were accepted, taken as fixed and were rarely questioned. In other words class inequality in HE is seen as normal. Yet, as the forthcoming biographical stories attest, attending predominantly middle class institutions can create some difficulties in personal relationships and frequently involves high levels of cultural dislocation. Despite the very positive evaluation of HE offered by most students it is not a frictionless process, and participation entails psychic and cultural challenges for many working class students (see also Charlesworth, 2000; McMahon, 1997; Reay, 2001, 2002a; Skeggs, 1997). In fact, the disjunction between prior lived experience and the norms and cultural characteristics of a highly valued institutional space created biographical dilemmas for a large number of the working class interviewees which were simply not an issue for the young middle class students I interviewed. As most of the participants I met greatly prized HE they then usually

put the onus on themselves to adapt to HE and the tensions, contradictions this created were, with a couple of rare exceptions, seen as biographical rather than institutional concerns.

In other words in thinking through the interview data I found myself confronting a familiar question about the role of classed social space and habitus in HE. As a consequence I think Bourdieu's concepts still have enormous explanatory value but need to be amended to interpret student experience in its full depth. The basic position taken here is probably already clear; I think that Bourdieu is too deterministic and ignores the role of reflexive agency in social practice and also overlooks how agency is often connected to people's concerns, cares and attachments. Issues that are usually left to one side in Bourdieu analysis-such as desire, resilience, the efficacy of some institutional measures and the uses of cultural dissonance as a resource for reflexivity will also be discussed. Thus my intention is to retheorise Bourdieu through the data. This is of course connected to the theory of social space developed earlier in Chapter Three and the observations about recognition and worth above and in Chapter Six but the focus below will be more sharply focussed on educational and learning processes. The seven learning stories will be followed by a more systematic and propositional account of what I think these stories suggest about the interplay of class structures with reflexive and ethical forms of agency. At the very end of the chapter I will tentatively sketch out some of the implications of the findings for thinking about class inequality across society as a whole.

I want to begin with a single extended account -Elaine's story- in which many of the main themes will be established or further consolidated. This will be followed by six somewhat shorter life and learning stories which will amend and elaborate on the points made in Elaine's story and in previous sections. Ultimately, the aim is to reproduce for the reader, albeit necessarily on a smaller scale, a sense of the multiplicity of voices that I encountered in the research, and communicate something of the individuality and specificity of individuals' biographical accounts while also deepening an analysis of the general social logic which shapes all our lives. In this regard I hope this section fleshes out for the reader what I meant when I discussed the 'melding of perspectives' which I believe has come about through my immersion in the participants' stories described at the end of Chapter Two.

Elaine: Class, reflexive learning and biographical change

"It's like a river, it's like there is a river flowing in between the doers and the ones that tell the doers to do and the thinkers and non-thinkers"

Elaine was 33 when she started college. She grew up in Finglas in a large family and is the eldest in a big family. Throughout the research process she was very frank about her life and extremely generous with her time in exploring how she viewed education in relation to her personal identity, her work, and her close relationships. When we met first she said of herself *"I'm from a working class background. Parents unskilled-they left school at thirteen".* In this terse and telegraphic statement Elaine established some of the key themes upon which she expanded upon in various ways over in the next three years in our conversations.

Like many others Elaine primarily associates being working class with the everyday experience in specific geographical communities, like Finglas, which *"are really affected by social circumstances such as [..] high unemployment".* Over the interviews she indicated the circumstances she has in mind- apart from unemployment- are badly resourced and planned housing, poor health, feeling crowded physically, dealing with 'anti-social behaviour' and being confronted by the consequences of substance abuse and addiction. She also associates being working class with being from a big family like her own.

Elaine often returned to the topic of working class areas and when we first met said

> *There's so many people out there they don't even get the opportunity. They never actually know that the help is there. Do you know what I mean? So they grow, especially young men, and we see [this in] suicide rates and everything but they grow up in these areas and they're fighting all their lives. They're fighting from the day they're born.*

The way she discusses this is generally empathetic rather than condemnatory and distancing and describes the problems in these areas as a tangled set of social issues linked to a lack of economic opportunities. That said in the first interview she was quite clear that she thought that *"the support is there".* Later she would change her mind and had come to the conclusion that people are *"not encouraged"*. I think this ambivalence is based on partial identification

with the people who have to *"fight all their lives"* but knowing that her own life demonstrates to her that it does not necessarily have to be that way.

According to Elaine class is intimately connected to educational expectations; *"they're not expected to go to college or further their education"*. But she passionately believes *"everybody has the same capacity to learn and everybody has the same brain power unless, you...kill your mind with drugs or drink"* and thinks education can make an enormous difference to the quality of your existence and your life chances. As a consequence she believes that working class people should be actively encouraged into education and given the requisite financial and personal support. This includes being provided with the right information and backing from schools which is an abiding concern of hers because of her own personal experience. She says of her family *"they did the best job that they could and to be honest with you we [the family] are all alright. We all do what we can and we're all good"* but like David and Katy when it came to helping her make educational choices her family was simply not in a position to help her. Although she did quite well academically and was moved up from a pass to an honours stream in secondary school and stuck with it right to the end she did not get the direction she needed; *"I mean if we did our Leaving Cert it was like 'Oh God, she did her Leaving Cert!'. I'm the oldest and nobody has ever been to college, cousins, nobody has ever been to college"*. She recalls towards the end of school

> *I was in school the CAO was going around, the word 'CAO' I didn't know what CAO was. I really didn't and I felt stupid like, you know, the girls were all sitting there and I felt intimidated [..] and I was too embarrassed to ask and if I did ask I was told and I didn't understand it was brushed off. In fact I wasn't encouraged, it wasn't thought you know 'Elaine might go to college 'and 'where are you going to study?' My parents didn't encourage me but I don't think they knew about grants that were in place and I suppose they weren't aware of it and they knew they didn't have the money to send me*

Yet again we see financial resources, family cultural capital, and social expectations cited as the crucial factors in determining educational trajectories. Elaine *"went straight into work"*. She became a trainee beautician- a job which she could not abide *"Oh my God, I hated that! I hated the bitchiness-that made me feel physically sick. That gave me knots in my stomach, that made me an aggressive person"*. She remembers the day she decided to leave. She was driving her car to work and she saw a field covered in morning dew and pulled over to look at it and at this point she suddenly knew she had to do something else. This type of event- reflecting on her life by looking at landscapes- surfaced again and again in Elaine interviews

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and it is not simply an incidental detail; her conception of the good life is tied up with notions of simplicity and a lack of stress and she sees, and seeks this out, in nature.

Things improved for her when she got a new job in *"the good old manufacturing industry, Celtic Tiger took off and I was part of it"*. Like many other mature students who went into the workforce at entry level during the boom she did well for herself and she was reasonably comfortable. For the next nine years she kept working in light electronics, got some on the job training, secured a mortgage and then bought a house in Finglas and settled into a stable relationship. The work was fine but in retrospect she thinks something was always amiss. She says *"I'd easily flip, I'd easily fly off the handle"* and *"I was going along one road and I was always very angry and it was the wrong road"* but *"I couldn't understand why I was angry.* The full extent of her dissatisfaction only became clear to her over a year of crises in her late twenties

> *I had a lot of things in one year. I had lost a job-we got redundancy. I lost my lifelong partner of seven years and I lost my father all in a year so off I went. I went travelling [..] pack up everything and head off and I came back and I decided that, you know, now is the time but I wanted it all now and I couldn't have it, you know. I wanted to just apply to any college and just go.*

When Elaine discovered she could not go straight into college she was undeterred because *"I knew that I needed to do something that would sustain me for the rest of my life"*. So she did a return to learning course but continued working full-time in her new job (in a skilled service industry).

Like many others she tells me she *'always'* wanted to go to college and she *"did a lot of courses years ago"* in her spare time and was an avid reader. This was mainly because she wanted to understand what made people tick and how they reacted to each other. It is important in terms of how she frames her own learning story that she says this was sustained in part by the sense of achievement she got from partaking in community activities when she was a teenager and her contact at that time with an adult, a parish priest, who bolstered her sense of confidence in herself as a learner. To return to a theme outlined earlier the way Elaine describes learning turns very much on the idea that it offers a way of exploring alternative selves. However, this remained in the back of her mind and was only brought it forefront when she was faced by serious biographical dilemmas.

She also indicates that her decisions were not just a response to biographical events and were influenced by wider social changes and institutional initiatives. She highlights the importance of state support for education and says she was really heartened when she *"became aware that it was possible for me to go [..] and that the country actually encouraged people to go to [college] because they want everybody to have an education"*. I should add that Elaine did not qualify for any funding except a very basic grant and she worked full-time throughout her degree. All the same for Elaine widening access policies and initiatives and things like the Back to Education Allowance had a symbolic value and, similar to Kevin, she was enthused that working class people were finally being actively encouraged into HE. For Elaine this was welcomed as an act of recognition that people from all walks of life have the right to higher education.

After applying two years in a row to university she was accepted and when we first met she had been at college a month and remarked *"I've been taken to this fairy-tale world"*. She enthused

> *I love it. It's the best thing I've ever done. Yeah, I'm right where I want to be. It's perfect. It's going really great and I feel very welcome here and I feel like I'm making a lot of friends. Yeah, it's going great. I'm loving it. I'm putting in the work as well which helps I think. I'm still working [..] I do five days here and two days at work where I get up at half two in the morning and then I start work at four to make some money. It's worth it, every penny. I finish at one and I would study on Saturdays and Sundays.*
> *Q: Okay, that's a pretty punishing routine...*
> *A: I'm loving it and I don't think it is punishing. I think it's a pleasure actually. It's a pleasure to be here*

Elaine was unequivocal that if this schedule did become a problem she would leave her the job. *"It is money. It is not a career and it is not for the rest of my life. College is more important and if I came down to a choice then it would be college"*. She asserts this stems from the passion she has for her subject and because going to college creates a measure of biographical openness. All the same she noticed very early on in her degree that there were not a lot of working class accents to be heard on campus or people she would easily recognise as being from a similar background to herself

> *For example I would see three people [..] who would be more or less the same as me if you know what I mean? We're from probably working class backgrounds, probably had a bit of tragedy in our lives, who doesn't you know? We're not represented on campus at all. I don't see them. I think I've seen one, two, three people and I can see them in my*

mind's eye. They don't know me. They don't know me but I recognise them. I recognise them in the sense that I know that I, ah... I don't know their backgrounds, I don't know anything about them but I can almost tell, you know that way? And I wonder if they can tell that about me? (Laughs)

According to Elaine class can shape the way you look, how you sound and the way you carry yourself-in other words through an identifiable, embodied and shared habitus. The dearth of people she perceives as similar to herself on campus does not make exactly make her feel ill at ease like some other interviewees or provoke the same concerns about being able to read people correctly that James has encountered. But despite her deep and genuine happiness she found herself rethinking some of her assumptions about equality and education. In the pre-degree access course she found the praise for her as a working class participant a little irritating and almost patronising. She had thought then

Anybody can do anything if they want all they have to do is want it, you know. Go for it! You can just do it so [but] when I came here I realised that there's a mind-set, Alright, this is just my opinion, it's not gold, but people who come from middle class families and who are expected that they will go on to further education they tend to, you know, they just do. They just go to school and they just do and everything seems to fall easily into place whereas people like me, and I don't know if it's me being negative about the situation, hopefully I'm not, but for people like me [..] well I had to work for it [..] I have to come in here and I have to put the effort in but I also appreciate what I have.

The tone is important; she believes middle class people have a greater level of social opportunity and this was noted matter a factly rather than with rancour. They 'just do' and they fit in without a struggle. She does not dwell on this because what is important for Elaine is *her* determination to do something different for herself but she does indicate that she thinks that the university-this place that she loves- is in some sense not fully hers. One of the ways she asserts her right to be in college-and this was a recurrent feature of her interviews- is that she thinks she has demonstrated her commitment through hard work. This was also part of how Amy, Terry, Luke, David, and James asserted their value in a predominantly middle class space. This sense of being different brings her back to how she felt when she was younger *"I've never wanted to be [working class] even as a child I realised that, say for example, if I had friends that were middle class, I always felt inferior to them"*. This sense of inferiority is no longer an issue but the sense of distance from the 'norm' is palpable. She ruminates that college has turned out to be far lonelier than she had hoped and although she has good friends who supported her outside of college her life on

campus became mainly about doing academic work and proving her worth rather than socialising.

Despite applying herself and dedicating most of her free time to study over the next year she suffered from "*chronic self-doubt* "and began to feel "*I had no right to be here*" She was also surprised that *"I don't really have much contact with the people who teach"* and was also dismayed by how competitive the course turned out to be. She disliked this partially because she is worried about achieving the required marks but also because she is quite ambivalent about competitiveness in general (for similar sentiments from another working class student see McMahon, 1997). She wanted a tolerant and collaborative atmosphere but instead the lecturers and other students constantly discussed who would make the grade and get selected to continue in the following year. She says of the department *"I know they want the best and I know they want the crème de la crème but they can't [..through this process] see how a person evolves in one year, especially if you put that person under pressure"*. Even though Elaine was quite worried she decided to redouble her efforts and eventually came around to thinking

> *the self-doubt was good because it served as motivation. Whereas some people would have let that [..] defeat them. It wouldn't defeat me. It pushes me forward.[...] I don't want to be a 'poor me!'[..] I didn't want to sit there and say I feel sorry for myself*

In the end she was successful in gaining the coveted place the following year. But as the recession worsened money became scarcer for Elaine. She also found herself getting into rows with her family which she ascribes to going to college. The data suggests this is quite widespread and seventeen other interviewees of all ages discussed how going to college could lead to arguments, chosen silences and more muted exchanges with family and friends. In Elaine's case this would start over the discussion of factual matters but was on a deeper level underpinned by the feeling that her efforts were not being supported or valued by other family members.

As a consequence of these experiences the first couple of years in college made her reconsider who she was, how meritocratic Ireland really was and what she really wants for herself. Half way through her degree she found herself thinking about her community and asking herself *"Am I with them or am I with myself"*. Her answer to this question is fascinating

You know before I had this belief that the government wants to have us educated and it wants to have us trained because it wants this smart economy. It wants to develop us as a nation and you know blah, blah, blah but then you see cuts in education. I mean come on! [..] but I don't think they really fully realise how… Let me be more precise. If you are dealing with people who are from backgrounds where they're not expected to go to college or further their education, backgrounds where there are a lot of drugs and negative outlooks on life-people are dying younger. They feel like its survival of the fittest in order to get along [and] that [..] the system is so bad and so cruel. Then you offer free education [just] for a limited amount of years, okay, [but.] if you take education away from people you are taking away food and water. You're taking away their basic human needs and their basic human rights.

She then immediately segues into a series of observations about class and identity

Well I hope that I'm going to jump across...it's like a river; It is like there is a river flowing in between. [...] the doers and the ones that tell the doers to do, [..] and thinkers and non-thinkers. I want to be a thinker and so like that's getting wider and I'm just so lucky that I might jump it, I might jump it but I didn't say I will. I don't know. I don't know myself [..] I don't know how deep it is and only hindsight will show us how big it was, fifty years down the line maybe. (Laughs) [..] I see myself as working class but [someone] who won't end up that way. I reckon I will be the only one in my family who will go [to college].They're all happy, they're all happy to be where they are and that's good, [..] all the roads led to where I am now. The fact is before I used to hate that I was born working class like (Laughs), you know, and that I wasn't given more opportunities or took more opportunities, Now I think it's all added to my depth as a person and my character as a person so I [have] embraced it

Again we see that attending college can pose questions about self and place in the world that are profound and potentially difficult to manage for some working class students. The slippage between 'we' and 'I' here is indicative of this tension-she is working out how becoming a college educated woman positions herself in relation to her family, community, and imagined others. She believes that Ireland became more socially open for a short period and that now this may be over and she worries if she will make it across the divide in time. Tellingly her account deploys both normative and practical arguments about class; access to resources is again about both wealth and worth. In her narrative there are quite clearly all sorts of tensions and contradictions which she manages to make cohere by integrating these various elements into a story of the resilient self. This allows her to negotiate the dissonance between institution and self, between habitus and agency, between family and her ideal individual self in a generative way.

These tensions are negotiated but were not, and in all likelihood could not have been, overcome. Subsequently in the following year she says to me *"I really do not feel supported.*

[..] I feel disillusioned. In my head the professors would meet with students and laugh, [and would] build relationships" but instead staff are sometimes offhand and frequently do not explain what they want in a satisfactory way. The recession has bitten further into her hours at work and is now really struggling financially and in Finglas *"every time I open the door it is doom and gloom"*. To make matters worse her car was recently robbed. The river appears to be wider than she hoped and remarks *"I wanted to become middle class [and thought] I would be more comfortable, marketable"* but remonstrates now with herself for thinking in these term saying *"where do I get off as a working class girl?"* She then talks about overhearing a young man and woman in the library. They were saying "*God, did you see the amount of [..] scumbags that they are letting into the college [..] They are just about letting in anyone these days!' and I thought 'how dare you! You don't even know these people!"* She is really offended by their snobbery. It is interesting that she immediately assumes, as I would do as well in most circumstances, that they are talking about class and that she sees these remarks as personally relevant and based on misrecognition. Besides which she is tired, she feels the college buildings are unwelcoming and it "*is always cold* "on campus. She has been loaded with a project which she thinks is more about the lecturer's personal research interests rather than what really absorbs her and there is a complete lack of spark in classroom discussions. Overall as college comes to the end she appears to be quite disenchanted. Yet again Elaine found it in herself to persevere; she buoys herself up and talks about reading widely and enthusiastically, enjoying her friends, and travelling and thinks her study has allowed her to see things she comes across on her trips abroad in their full depth.

We meet again after she has graduated and even though she cannot afford to do a Masters and she has to change her plans she is much happier and says with hindsight the experience was really worthwhile. She knows she could study again in the future and this is one of the main things she values in the experience-a sense of her own capability. She feels she was mishandled at times by the department but that this is cancelled out by the fact that there are things she can now do that she could have done before and there are people she can help in the future now she has her degree. It may not have been all she imagined, it may have called for a greater deal of sacrifice and isolation than she might have hoped but overall she is very positive about getting her degree.

Care, resilience and reflexivity in Elaine's story

I would argue that Elaine's learning story demonstrates that the habitus of the university is classed and that this creates difficulties. But for her this fact is far less important than the proof she has acquired during the degree of her capability, resilience and worth. I think two questions need to be answered here. First, what lies behind her unmistakeable determination? Second, why despite being clear-eyed about the limits of the course and the college is Elaine ultimately so positive about HE? I think if we explore what underpins her resilience we discover that it is intimately tied to class and gender inequality and is bound up with her sense of self and her family story. By looking at this in Elaine's case I think we will also establish several thematic lines of inquiry that can be usefully explored from other angles through the other learning stories.

So what did Elaine say about this? She ascribes much of her capacity for resilience to the fact that she has worked hard her whole life and this is integral to her own self-image and sense of personal worth (see for comparison Lamont, 2000). As we have already seen she is also very committed to the idea of learning and education as valuable activities per se. It is also connected to what she hoped to get from the course; like David she says she wants more stimulating work, like James she is looking for formal recognition, like Gwen she wants to know she can succeed and like Mark she desires more autonomy. She says *"I want the Frank Sinatra song, you know, I did my way. I want that sense of achievement".* Elaine frequently discussed the transformative power of learning and these various factors suggest that Elaine does believe that we can remake biography in a substantive way by participating in education. Our discussions always gave me the strong impression that she was very concerned with divining her own unique capabilities and she often told anecdotes, or talked about books or gave descriptions of natural landscapes which were about unused potential and hidden possibilities. Early on in the research I ask what she hopes to do in the future

> *I don't know [..] people are saying that they evolve as your education grows you could get pulled into so many different parts but where do I see myself in ten years' time? Totally comfortable, not having to worry about money, doing something I enjoy every day, like I get up out of bed and I want to be there [..] not somebody who gets up every day and feels totally aggressive (Laughs) because they hate what they do every day.*

So I think I can safely say to a large extent her resilience is sustained by a conception of a free and flourishing life linked primarily to satisfying paid work. I asked her to elaborate on

this because up to this point she had not expressed much dissatisfaction with her job and more to the point despite coming across as very calm, inquisitive and humorous she had again mentioned the importance to her of avoiding negative and angry emotions. Her response was

I try not to hate anything because I think it's a very powerful emotion and I think that it could, you know, pull you down. I try to just accept everything for what it is on the day. I get up and [..] because you have to look for the good. You have to look for it every day even if [I] feel like that my job can be mundane, it can be, you know. I've done pretty horrible jobs that gave me aggressive body language [..] so I knew it was time to go but I was looking for goodness, I was looking for some sort of goodness and I said I would give it twelve months and I did. I hate to feel defeated and I hate to feel, you know… so in ten years' time I hope to be doing...I hope to have appreciation for life. I hope to feel like I did all I set out do and that maybe emotionally I hope to be comfortable. A nice house, have two holidays a year maybe with children, I don't know (Laughs).

Elaine's motivation and hopes resist easy or neat definition and indicate how much faith she has in education. I think her account also points to the way habitus-our dispositions and practical sense- can become subject to conscious monitoring and in certain circumstance can be reflexively altered. It is vitally important that this biographical account is not just a process of adaptation and acceptance it is about being self-aware, about avoiding the worst of what is around her, about recognition and it is about rethinking self- and the potential of one's unlived life in relation to family, class and education

You know I told you about my parents, they never finished primary school yet they believed that they could if they had been given the chance. But they weren't, they were working class and if my father wasn't taken from his home and put into a reform school at the tender age of fourteen and his life changed after that because of the restrictions that were put on him from society and [..] he battled against those restrictions and absolutely had a complete and utter disregard for authority. That's why he ended up in reform schools and prisons [..] because he was angry at the system [..]. I think it was some incident in a shop and he was sent to a reform school. When he came out he was totally changed. He was totally changed [..] we know now what happened but he had this chip on his shoulder and which was a hard done by attitude, you know and 'all these people are looking down on me', blah, blah.

But I also had his drive and his innate drive to succeed. I have to say I was never hungry, he looked after us and I know that I was loved. I always knew I was loved and he might have been stupid having loads of kids but you know it put more pressure on him which made him more aggressive by nature and he'd blow up and stuff. The thing is though he gave [me the willingness] to work. We were like if we wanted it we could have it and that's my attitude

My mother had kids and she was having them left, right and centre and even as a small child, at seven or eight I was aware that my ma was pregnant again and it was bugging

me. 'It's not fair on us ma', you know. [..] I've been a mother my whole life because I've minded other children. [..] The thing is I might run away from that background because I don't want to be part of the.., you know, I don't want to be somebody else's pity, somebody else's 'God love them', [those who] struggle very hard because they have nothing. I was from one of those families but at the time I didn't realise until I got into my twenties, when I looked back and realised. I've had these conversations with my mother since. Why didn't she do anything to better herself? and she said she had no interest. She had no interest because she had no education so she accepted her lot in life.

Here we see the complex intertwining of class and gender restrictions powerfully informing her sense of the world from a very early age but also Elaine is just as concerned with her own efforts to find the necessary resources to redescribe that world. She does not want to disown or condemn her family but she does want to understand and avoid repeating patterns of behaviour if possible. She talks about her father's anger and remarks *"There was no help for him. There was no, 'would you like to see a psychologist for what we did to you?' (Laughs)[..]. There was nothing and so he had no job or job skills"*. I think it is clear that her interest in her particular academic subject is also directly informed by a desire to understand and intervene in her own world -a world in which state institutions and poverty have wreaked havoc. In one important way it is also about knowing how to offer care to people like her father *"somebody who I really loved [..] somebody who I found difficult to love because they were angry all the time, you know, looking back into their life I realise why they were angry and I understood"*.

In tracing the way Elaine talks about negativity and anger through her interviews I have come to the conclusion that she was looking to find ways of looking after herself and others. She values education and learning because she thinks it offers a way acting in a meaningful way on her world and speaks directly to her biographical concerns and commitments. In fact Elaine even said at one point *I apply everything I've learnt academically to my personal learning and I apply all of my personal learning to my academic learning"* The value she gives to learning is rooted in the belief that it will provide her with practices and ideas that will help her understand significant, and some powerfully negative, events in her past and thus develop a sense of autonomy and control over her future.

I think Elaine's story is about the way class shapes habitus, can affect one's sense of worth, and is linked to experiences and expectations of work, community and education but it is also about care, resilience and reflexivity. In committing to a course, which in many ways was

disappointing, in an institution which is dominated by young middle class students she is left isolated but she perseveres-not just because she wants to be a professional or better off-but because a good deal of the value of being a student for her is that it allowed her some measure of freedom to thinks about herself reflexively and to think through how care, class and family have made her who she is now and gather cultural resources which can be used describe her world and to overcome some of the effects of generations of inequality. In terms of the thesis and thinking about class, identity and learning it is important to note that Elaine is not an easy dupe or a victim of a vast machine of social reproduction but she is not an completely untrammelled 'free' agent either. Her biographical choices have a clear social context shaped by gender and class power relations.

Niamh: One *"little push"* and then a great leap forward?[135]

Niamh is an energetic, focussed and forthright woman. She is twenty and is this way is more like a 'typical' student than Elaine. Far less typically she is from Tallaght and came through the college access programme into a highly regarded course in an elite college-TCD. Like most of the younger cohort her account of learning and her ideas about education and her learner identity had been primarily shaped by her experience in school and she says little about her learning activities outside of school or college. Up to the second half of secondary school she had performed well academically but things went downhill as she began to explore her own identity and moved between school cliques. She recalls *"I was a weird child (Laughs). I was in between. I had a teenage phase of being the top saintly girl and now I was wearing a leather jacket [..] and my huge boots and following the crowd"*. In the same period *"I had an injury and I wasn't in school for a good while and [..] I couldn't get back into the swing of things"*. After this her grades dropped; she says the school *"had their little smart girls'* but between a little bit of teenage rebellion and the effects of her injury she found she was no longer considered to be one of them.

This slippage was important. Very few people from the school she attended go on to HE so not being one of the 'smart' ones meant her chances of going to college were slim. This made her anxious and she began adjusting her expectations accordingly

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[135] This is used in the title of Bissett's (2000) study on class and schooling. He borrowed the phrase from a Billy Bragg.

I knew I just couldn't pick myself up and I was in a rut. I actually didn't talk to anybody about it because I just never let myself think about it that much. 'It's grand, it's grand'.' If you get three sixty you can go do another course' [..] that kind of thing but college just escaped my mind when I realised how bad I was actually starting to go and I knew I'd never get the course I wanted and to be honest I was in the dark. I didn't know what I wanted to do.

There was not much direction given by her mother and father who Niamh mentions had left school at a very young age. However, one of her four siblings, an older sister, who had got into TCD via the access programme several years previously, discussed things with her

I was in sixth year and she says 'Why don't you think about coming to my course?' I said 'I'll never get into college now'. She said [..] 'You could easily try for [the Access programme] it's worth a try' and she kind of gave me a little push. I didn't have anyone else trying to tell me to go to college because my school career guidance people were terrible. Absolutely terrible, in fact they said 'you've got potential but you'll never get anywhere'.

She had begun to suspect she would never get into college but on the foot of this conversation with her sister she decided to do a PLC course and then applied for the access programme. When she was rejected the second time her sister helped again and she eventually succeeded in gaining entry. She is very effusive in her praise for her sister, and the access course, which provided her with a route into a degree course.

Like Elaine she was absolutely delighted when she began her course and he wanted to *"tell the world* "about it and like so many others links this to an opening up of her life. She declares *"I love the rush. I love the fact that I'm here because if I wasn't here I'd be really upset. I think if I was at home. Nothing to do, not learning whereas I'm in here, I'm learning really interesting stuff"*. Time in college is *"flying"* she is doing well and one of the most noteworthy things in her story is just how quickly she has managed to recuperate a sense of herself as a capable learner. Finance remains an issue and she had to secure various grants for 'disadvantaged' students and is doing part-time work as well. She says being on a tight budget is not a big hassle-it is the future that is important to Niamh. She is very aware that she very few of her peers from her part of Tallaght are in college and when she discusses this she says how lucky she feels but also indicates that she feels she has proven her worth

being from a disadvantaged area it was good that there was some other way me getting into [college] but it was tough like. I did two extra years to get here [..I have] come in

from this place where people don't think that these people had the chance or the potential, I'm doing really well. I'm up there at the top of the class.

She works very hard and explains what lies behind her motivation "*Looking at them [the lecturers] and listening to how smart they are. I want to be like them [..]. "Another motivation is just competition"* and unlike Elaine she is far more enthusiastic about this aspect of college life'

You want to know that you're better than someone for some reason. There is competitiveness in the class and I have a little rival of my own to be quite honest and I'm determined to beat that girl for some reason or other and I wasn't competitive until now. I just know that by the way she looks at me, she doesn't talk to me. She doesn't speak to me, she just gives me the eye [..] It is grand .Everyone is really nice apart... even her, but it's kind of good to have that there, it is probably that she's better than me. I have to get into my books

Like most of the access students she says the friends made on the access course are a great support and were fundamental to settling in but she now has a much broader network of friends[136]. She says "*Everyone blends really well. We all get on really well and it's a really nice class to be in and I'm happy that I'm there*". However, this does not mean her social background has ceased to be a factor in her learning story

It was different because a lot of them are from nicer places than [me], have money or they got the points obviously because they wouldn't be there so it's different for me because a lot of them, even just from the way they talk compared to how I talk do you know what I mean? It's different in that way. They're into different things; to be honest they're more wild than I am (Laughs). People who are from the nice areas [..] they were posh and stuff and wild [..] (Laughs) but I wouldn't have expected that. It was kind of, weird going in because I am seen, not by them, but I have been seen as, not by them, well 'she's from Tallaght', do you know that kind of way? But it's kind of hard because I'm from Tallaght and they are from Ashbourne and all those nice areas, do you know what I mean? I was accepted really well. [..] I also had my boyfriend when I started college and he has been a major influence in my life as well -absolutely major- especially with college and he's from Clontarf so he's also a major influence over social differences for me from Tallaght to Clontarf, that kind of thing. I'm completely looked down in Clontarf, less so now, and as soon as you say 'Tallaght' they kind just think, tar me with the same brush [..] so that helped me deal a lot with social things as well.

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136 A large majority of students of all ages discussed peer groups as a vital part of college. For many the most nerve wracking parts of college was finding and fitting in with a group that would support you. I think peer group formation merits more central place in pedagogy and educational research than it currently enjoys and I believe the classed dynamics of peer group formation deserves more research. See Keane (2009) for an account of relationships in HE and underrepresented groups.

Social problems at the time like me being from Tallaght being so different it helped me grow into a better person as well

Stepping away from the problems and not been looked down upon also involves being very focussed on succeeding

I got all the partying out of my system. Last year I did a bit with a bit of study, this year I'm just more determined. 'This is the last chance you've got to get in here, you're not going to get another chance to get into college, stop messing!'

So for Niamh it is her sister, her own efforts, her boyfriend and the access programme that have provided the basis for her transformation into a *"better person"*. In her description she has become more disciplined and has aligned herself with a different set of expectations. Her learning self is defined as successful, competitive and meritocratic, which she links to the recovery of a learner identity from an earlier period in school when she was showing promise. These changes allows her to plot her biography in a new way and she is very explicit that this has also changed the way she sees herself in relation to her community

In my area I see myself as so much better in every single person that walks by me because I know exactly who those people are and what they're doing. It's not really.. I don't see myself as better I see myself as I'm glad I'm not that person [..] because I'm looking at them walking down the road and in Tallaght you don't see very many people looking happy [..] or there's always a problem. Now there is the odd few people in Tallaght who are really smart and are going to college but when I'm in Tallaght I feel so much happier when I go back now that I'm in college because like I won't be here for good, do you know what I mean? I won't be here all my life. I don't need to be here. This isn't my life as in my life will change as soon as I have my degree I'm going to sort everything out and I'm going to look towards a better future for me [..] and I won't be living there hopefully. People see me, a lot of people, like I don't know many people in my area because it's my own choice. I don't want to know anyone in my area. People who might know me, people from my class or whatever few of them know that I'm in college but very few people around the corner from where I'm living don't know that I'm in college [..] So no one treats me weird although if I got on a bus in a college hoodie I'd probably get a bit of stick. 'Oh you're in Trinity' that kind of thing but that's nothing, do you know what I mean?[..] I feel like when I come into university it's like a new world. Like you don't think you're in Dublin anymore.

Niamh feels she is moving on and here the learning identity is not so much about integration of various aspects of her past experience-as I believe is the case with Elaine-but a reshaping of self which is achieved through individual efforts made in the light of future expectations. But as in Elaine's story gender and class intersect in her story in an interesting way

People's futures in Tallaght are 'I'm going to get married really young and have a kids really young and have a mortgage, the car, loads of debts' kind of thing. That's the way it is.[..] More kids and kids (Laughs) and yeah there's just no drive in that area to go on and in my school it's kind of like all the girls focused on was boys and girls, boyfriends and that kind of thing and that's all the kind of focus was on in class[..] No, girls would just come in and talk about boys, and boys, and boys and 'I did this with this lad and I did that with that lad'. 'Oh he's lovely'. I find there was pressure to have a boyfriend. It was that kind of environment, they all wanted to be with boys and that was the main topic of conversation daily

She goes on to say this has limited the options of her peers, including most of 'the smart girls' since they finished school

I see them all because I work [part-time] in Tallaght now and they come in and out of the shop and whatever. 'What are you doing with yourself? I had a baby! (Laughs)[..] and what are you doing Niamh? Is this your job, are you working here?'
'No, no it's only part-time I'm in college'.
'That is great, that is brilliant but you were a messer in school'
'I know ' (Laughs)
So I'm kind of, I'm [..] now going 'you're not in college, you were supposed to be and I am' and it kind of switched around!

Niamh talks with great relief that she has escaped this fate and she does not worry the way James does that he cannot get beyond where he has come from or wonder as Elaine does "*am I with them or against them*" in relation to other members of her community. Social mobility for her is about leaving these problems behind. It should be said that despite remarking that there is "*no drive in the area*" this does not apply to the way she sees *individuals* from these areas. With the right support she thinks lots of other working class students could succeed and because of this wants to get involved in mentoring other young people saying "*I just want to help people because I know how it feels*". She also says that once working class students get in they do very well

I've witnessed it with every single one of them. My sister is-top of the class. Me doing really well here. The girls that came in from the access programme up there with me. They do really, really well and I think it's because of the pressures that they have faced, I think that's a lot to do with it as well.

Niamh is good humoured, capable and presents herself as very together and it is very easy to see her succeeding. On a superficial level this account seems less about habitus, in the sense of deeply embedded notion of one's place in social space, and more about the effect of an individual's cultural choices and level of drive and ensuring that there is meritocratic access

to education. But I think if we read it carefully there is a good deal of evidence of just how much effort it has taken Niamh to "*blend in*" in an upper middle environment and distance herself from her background. Some indication of how deep this runs and how much psychic effort this transformation has taken is suggested when she declares

> *I don't want my kids to grow up there [in Tallaght] in the future when I have kids. I don't want my kids to grow up there. I'm a terrible, terrible negative person and even though I'm very (breaks off)*
> *Q:You don't come across as negative.*
> *A:No I'm very negative. If you got to know me a bit more and I was your friend and your buddy I'd be very negative. I'm just negative in every way but I don't, I'm not that bothered by it [..] Sometimes I wish I was positive, I wish I didn't care about certain things. I wish I didn't care but I do but I'm very negative. Like my boyfriend is sick of me being so negative. My boyfriend does be pulling his hair out saying 'you're so negative like, just stop!'. So he's up in the clouds (Laughs). He's unbelievable but am I don't know I grew up in that negative environment like [..] so growing up that was my future in my eyes until college was brought into my life*

Here we see the familiar theme of college as the entry point into a different world. She also says both the area and her family were permeated by this negativity

> *And I assume that's what happened to me [by] growing up in a negative place I grew up into a negative person. I'm just assuming (Laughs). Like maybe I need stress negativity to push me and I think I honestly I do think I need stress to push me.[..] I think the worst of myself I prepare myself a lot for bad things so I won't be hurt or affected by them and that's even the way with my boyfriend as well. So I'm always prepared for him to hurt me or do you know what I mean, that kind of way. [...] I don't know. I think it's just the way of preparing myself. I'm not going to get hurt or whatever. I'm not going to be disheartened.*

Again we see difficult circumstances, which are tied up with class inequality, can insinuate themselves into a sense of habitus but also that this is subject, in certain ways, to conscious change. Rather than a tidy matching of expectations and chances we have a constant self-critical conversation about how to act in the world and I think it is noteworthy just how often Niamh explains herself in the form of internal dialogues. She is using the breaks in her social experience to rethink herself as a learner and a person and uses the anxiety she feels to anticipate and ward off the worst the future might hold. It is a source of agency and resilience. Her story shifts from being one of the smart girls, through to mild teenage rebellion and the reframing of options in the middle of what she later described later as a depression like fog and which because of her sister's intervention she managed to overcome. This is the basis of the creation of a disciplined self and for Niamh maturity, respectability

and upward mobility-defined by classed and gendered middle-class norms- call for the reflexive reworking of dispositions which takes enormous effort.

There is clear evidence of personal reflexivity in Niamh's story but from my perspective it is a circumscribed form of reflexivity. So the university and the campus, the course, the access programme and her peers are described in a positive and, in some respects, uncritical way. Her work and the energy are given over to exploring "biographical solutions to systemic contradictions" (Beck, 1992, p. 137) but personal reflexivity does not always entail a great deal of broader contextual reflexivity. What I mean is that Niamh is involved in a form of adaptation which involves the refiguring of personal habitus to institutional norms. So here reflexivity remakes habitus within dominant institutional and social expectations. It is important that this is linked to a form of class disidentification; Niamh associates being working class with a fundamental lack and she sees the problems, the immobility, a lack of agency, *"sadness"* and "*not being smart'* "as defining characteristics of her area. All her community can offer her she says is a leaden fate and she needed luck, help, ingenuity, reflexivity and tactical action to avoid it. Here class *is* the basis for social practice in the sense that she is seeking to escape from a 'community of fate'. She also indicates exactly how upward social trajectories and education are imagined by many students when she remarks "*My life will change as soon as I have my degree I'm going to sort everything out. I'm going to look towards a better future for me*". I think her account resembles –although in far more explicit terms-the way Luke discusses the 'Ballymun thing' in relation to 'his actual self', which was discussed in Chapter Six, both in the patterns of class disidentification and the individualising effect that dominant, categorical approaches to inequality are having.

Tara: *"I'm not one to sit around and wait for things to happen"*
Tara is a woman in her mid-30s from a working class family in Dublin. Her early family circumstances were very difficult indeed and she says remembers at an early age being conscious of going into to school in scruffy clothes and not being properly cared for or feeling respected. Secondary school proved to be a disaster

> *When I left first year I was very, still this kind of nerdy type of introverted type of person and then by the summer, I don't know, it was like an explosion and I came back in black and the Cure were the number one and all this and wanted to wear coffin earrings and stuff like that. The head, the vice principal at that school used to harass me every day about putting stuff in my hair [..], he used to actually bring me into the*

bathroom every day and wash my hair, every single day-head under the sink...! Yeah, every day and I would just get up and go the next day back in with the soap and this was repetitive so [..] he looked out for me every day. He singled me out even though I could name a hundred other people who were actually disrupting classes who were in, you know, causing...The worst thing I was doing was being me, trying to discover me. So he had enough one day and he just said 'you pack your locker and you go'. Yeah, basically just like that, just pack the locker

This tussle with authority at a very young age had very serious consequences for Tara. To make things worse *"unfortunately I went home to a household that didn't really care that I was kicked out of school"*. So at age fourteen she was brought into the family business and accompanied her father, a handyman, on his daily rounds.

I was getting a wage every week [..] even though it was a crappy wage, it wasn't enough. During that time, working with him, he would constantly [criticise] because you were his daughter, you know, you took the backlash of everything that went wrong,[..] and I built up like a bitterness against him because of this, 'Jesus, I can't wait to get out of this' and, he was constantly at you. That was your world but throughout that I still had a yearning to learn and I suppose I was self-taught. Like I would always look for books and always be reading like literature all the time -, novels mostly- and I had a great interest in National Geographic so I thought that was the best magazine ever I discovered. I suppose I kept myself going like that and I knew I had to break the tie with him and my family because he was abusing me. He had me working, I would start work at nine in the morning and not finish until eight o'clock at night and especially Christmas time we were out the door and I was worked like a zombie (Laughs) that's the only way to describe it. At fourteen, fifteen I was worked, like he got his value from me. It was pittance what I was getting paid at the time

Evidently the issue is not just about bad wages but wage relations that turn her into a 'zombie' Tara resents exploitation but it is the lack of care in an intimate relationship that really rankles and her profound alienation reflects a travesty of care. Although her formal education was truncated self-directed learning has a role in her internal life which keeps a sense of possibility and 'unlived life' alive. This is similar in some respects to what Elaine and David said. She felt her real value remains undiscovered and this idea is sustained through her conversation with herself through books and magazine. As a result a distinctive mixture of resilience and humour, with a slight undercurrent of anger, is threaded through much of what Tara has to say about her early life. Although her anger is primarily directed at her father she also thinks that this was due in part to institutional failure and neglect

not once did anybody in this whole equation say 'Why are you not in school?' and I can't understand this now as a mother that why was I not put into a different school? I don't know why nobody went back over to the school and say 'Jesus ,like you know

she's at school ....she only done her hair, do you know what I mean, she's not out bullying kids!'

Her kin did not defend her and the school saw her as a member of a difficult family and a problem to be disposed of and then promptly forgotten. This early experience left Tara determined to look after herself and strike out on her own. She soon stopped working for her father and found a new job

Oh God, in a shirt factory, terrible! Absolutely! like something out like Coronation Street (Laughs) just putting the front onto the back of a suit and then that was quota based, you know, they time you and all that kind of stuff. Do you know what? All the time in there I just knew I was better than everyone (Laughs). I think that was part of it because I knew I was better and then at fifteen I fell pregnant and had Cathy my first daughter and then after that I thought that the road was..., I didn't think that I'd probably come out of it but I did. I started work. I had to, the only way is to go back to FAS [..] and I said 'maybe I'll try and do a course in FAS' and I went and did a sales course in merchandising and how to put bits on display and I surprised myself academically because you had to do like basic maths and stuff but I thought it would all have left me and I surprised myself and I got a really high grade coming out of it and I said 'God I still have it, I still could manage that and I went on to work in like a food market'. That's what FAS do, you know, you do this course and then its, they kind of throw you into the workplace and I did work in a shop like for two years and it was grand but I kind of felt there's more out there. I knew I had more and then I kind of, I would be like that anyway. I'd be the kind of person who would seek out employment, well not seek out employment but look for something better. You know I always wanted something better and I looked in newspapers and there was jobs going with promotional companies so I could do that. 'That sounds like fun for me'.

She *"fell pregnant", she "had to work"*, she was *"thrown into the workplace"*; there is no mistaking the difficulty of her situation shaped by family dynamics, and class and gender inequality. At her young age it certainly must have taken considerable resilience on her part to make the best of it *"to come out of it"*. I think it also established a mode of biographical agency which appears to be right at the heart of her sense of self. She describes herself today as an enterprising, resilient and determined person. In fact, her current learning identity and, more broadly, her approach to work and education is almost entirely fused with the need to improvise and improve. This was a recurrent theme in all her interviews. Her next job was promoting a luxury drink which

had been launched into Ireland and they took me on and said 'you could be our kind of girl', you know the type of thing where you go out and promote our product and I loved that. I said 'this is me. I'm in my element here' (Laughs) and then when you're in that game other people start to approach you and start offering you work. It just, that whole

promotion thing is very like that and companies would approach me and say 'Do you want to work for us? You're very good at what you're doing there'. That's what I did for a long time was promotions [..] I started to feel I could be a sales rep now. I could see little goals and little niches and something in the market and I'd say I can be, instead of just being the girl who hands out stuff I could be the person who organises the actual promotions.

She moved between jobs securing better and better conditions over the next few years working hard and enjoying it. Her strategy of finding niches reflects her biographical circumstances, in which she had to be self-reliant but also the simple fact that as she went from her teens into her twenties more and more money was being spent on consumer goods in Ireland. In the meantime she had also got married to a very supportive husband, bought a house and had another child. The Celtic Tiger was now in full swing*; "the two of us had good wages coming in and like the kids were in a private school (Laughs), like we were living the dream type of thing".*

Although Tara stayed in touch with her family she felt quite distant from them. She thinks they do not acknowledge how much effort she has had to go to move from the factory to being a successful sales rep

I'm not one to sit around and wait for things to happen, I make them happen but my sister her word was to me 'you're so lucky because everything always happens for you' but like, 'do you think something just comes my way Rose? I have to go and chase things! That's the only way you get on with life and you know you can't sit back. You know nothing has happened that way' and she couldn't get her head around that. No, she didn't see it all. She thought that I was just a lucky person who seemed to...Just look, I don't consider myself lucky at all. I consider myself my own fortune. I make my own fortune. I didn't acquire. I didn't just, you know, I went after it. It didn't just stick to me, like I made my luck [..] and I've told them numerous times how to do this. Even when I was in promotions, I got them jobs in promotions and with that work you get paid once a month and they weren't happy with that. 'When do I get paid?' 'Yeah, at the end of the month', 'what I have to wait till the end of the month!'. Ah here !' so I ended up giving them their wages out of my money because I rather do that than listen to, you know [..] and say 'here!'. You know that kind of thing and I felt they drain on me a lot. Yeah, they'd ring me with a problem, only when there's a problem.

I believe this is excerpt is significant in two ways; first of all Tara's discussion of her family suggests just how fundamental care and reciprocity are to how she sees the world, second she obviously wants to find a way of describing the relationship between individual agency and social mobility. While the first issue may be simply ascribed to the contingencies of family life the second part definitely links class (dis)identification to this family history. The

significance of monthly wages versus cash in the hand, and of immediate payment versus long term planning plainly contrasts her enterprising self to less motivated family members stuck in what she describes as a slough of inactivity. In her discussions Tara often gave the impression that her family want to pull her back to where she has come from. In this way her family background becomes a type of class horizon which she is constantly making an effort to move beyond.

One other issue surfaced during this period when she was working in sales

> *with no qualifications. The only difference with my CV (Laughs) and other people's CVs was the lies. Like I had [on my CV] a full, you know, Leaving Cert the whole lot. I had to put it in. Even though I felt the older I got the more it didn't matter. You know no one asked about that but when I was a bit younger you were near enough to the Leaving Cert age where people would say 'how did you get on in the Leaving Cert? and I actually hadn't a clue about the Leaving cert, I hadn't a clue what subjects were involved, what the process was, hadn't a clue even what the grades[were], I had to ask my husband because he had done the Leaving Cert. 'What's a C, what do you mean when you say Pass and Honours? What does that mean?'*

> *Until one day I was in an interview with this [..] company and I had, I actually approached [them] and said 'I could work for you, I'm good at what I do and I showed them all my figures that I had increased the targets'. He said 'how good are you on maths?' and I said 'I'm pretty good' and he threw a percentage question at me [..]and I just blanked at the meeting and he said 'you don't even know that!' and I said 'yeah I do' and I started like fluttering, even though I had worked out percentages before but it was all on calculator and he threw this at me and I just blanked and then he said to me, look if you want to work for this company you have to do this [..]test and he sent me off on a maths test and I didn't get one of them right.*

Here again we see how classed educational careers are important even for those who achieve a measure of upward mobility and have an effect regardless of forms of class (dis)identification. Tara continued to work for other companies for a while but she decided she wanted more security and more stimulation and says she knew the type of work she was doing was not going to sustain her in the medium term. As with most mature students family considerations like having a proper pension as she got older were also a factor. Besides which when she was offered some work in a school but her lack of qualifications meant she could not get the job even though she really wanted to take it. For all these various reasons Tara signed up for an adult education course, sat the Leaving Certificate, did very well and then went straight onto an access course. Her husband said he would support her financially. When

her initial plan- to become a nurse faltered- she changed her plans and she enrolled in a challenging academic course.

There are a number of parallels between Tara and Elaine's lives and experience in college; they are both from a similar background and are approximately the same age, both worked through most of the Celtic Tiger and are similarly determined and resilient to make the most of their lives. Tara is also a dogged and hard worker and focused more on disciplined achievement than pleasure at college. Both of them associate education with empowerment and agency. They want a more stimulating life and a professional identity but behind this is a more complex biographical set of desires linked to class and family life. She feels her birth family do not understand or appreciate what she is doing and like Elaine she got into arguments with them about things she had learnt in college. Also, despite being extremely good humoured and bubbly Tara experienced a sense of isolation that if anything it was sharper than Elaine's. In her case her sense of dislocation was far more tightly linked to the fact that she was one of the only mature students on her course. Tara was sensitive about this and both lecturers and other students said, and did, things which increased a sense of being out of place. One lecturer was very rude to her on the basis of her age and she also recalled an occasion when she was getting ready to go out with her classmates and glanced at the mirror and thought "*the more make up I put on the more I looked stupid...an old woman with a load of kids*".

Like Elaine she was also trying to think through how best to approach care and self-care. She spoke on several occasions about feeling tired of "*people dragging out of me",* and was wary of the neediness of other students in her class and wearied by the reliance of her brothers and sisters to help out with her mother. Right through the degree Tara continually talked about the pressure on her time and this intensified her ambivalence about the burden of care. This meant she always had to follow a strict timetable to the extent that lunch breaks - which include her regular trips to the gym - were seen as welcome breaks. Both the pressures of care and the isolation she felt in college are evident when she remarks

> *I like my own time because it's the only time I ever get is in here on my own and I cherish it [..] even if it's an hour, even if I just walk around the library or walk around or sit on the park bench and eat a yoghurt and just on my own and you always meet someone. Like a stranger might just even sit beside you and start chatting to you, you know that kind of way or even just looking at the birds and all. I love looking at the lads*

(Laughs) and then I come home because I know like at home it's the madness, it's the madness again, you know that way and I find lately I'm not rushing to get home now as much because I don't know. I just feel at the moment there's much dependence on me. Like there won't be any milk in the fridge unless I go and get milk, do you know that way and in here I don't have to worry about, I don't worry about what's going on out there.

Things become so frenetic in the third year that she even talks about enjoying the little bit of time for study in her part-time work when she sits in the car in between jobs. She became exhausted from trying to balance her roles and acknowledges she is sometimes "*a terror at home*". In particular she finds herself clashing with her daughter who is also in college. It enrages and confuses her that her daughter cannot see the value of HE and talked about her lying in bed squandering her opportunities.

Tara persevered and did well at the course and is currently registered on a Master's programme but we can see just how complex notions of identity in relation to class, gender, care can be. Tara going to college was making good on her own terms and does not have a strongly classed notion of self. She has fashioned a life by overcoming the barriers she encountered at an early age by being disciplined, individualistic and enterprising. Although her financial situation was good during the boom years but she knows that the insecure, quota based sales work without the proper credentials will not sustain her in the long run. Her habitus is very adaptive and she does not register a strong class difference between herself and other students in college but as a mature student she is forced to recognise the effect of class over time. In trying to get away from very difficult early circumstances she had to improvise in ways that means she did not get the education she hoped for and she had to cover over the cracks and gaps in her CV. I think that for Tara going to college is about changing this and catching up once and for all. As a consequence in her narrative class has a very distinct place; it is largely in the past, it is associated with her family and the worst of socio-economic inequality can be avoided, she suggests, if you can learn to act in a creative, strategic and reflexive way on your own life.

It also shows just how biographically central and complex care is as a topic. In fact I think Tara's way of viewing and talking about class is inextricably tied up with her experience of care. She experienced a lack of care from institutions and her family and had to look after herself as a young mother. Nonetheless, they now ask for her care without, it seems, recognising their own previous failure in this regard. Looking back she believes she can now

see how more care could have changed her life course. She has in turn struggled to offer a different type of life for her daughter who went to private school and now appears to take her opportunities for granted. The point, of course, is that these are chances which were unimaginable for her when she was a teenager and this conflict with her daughter was biographically very important.

Tara is reflective and very resilient but feels the onus is always on her to constantly innovate and adapt within the circumstances she finds herself in. She has chosen, and been required, to reshape her sense of habitus but in some respects even though class is very firmly placed in the background (against which personal agency is seen as vibrant and biographically central) her occupational opportunities and educational career are classed. I believe it even colours and intersects with how she thinks about the intimate binds and attachments of family life.

Differentiation and the changing nature of HE: the role of institutional habitus in shaping learning

Tara, Niamh and Elaine's stories illustrate some of the strategies that working class students use to adapt to college and how this is tied to diverse conceptions of class and learner identity. There is undoubtedly a sense in each of these accounts of having to work to fit in and to cope with varying degrees of cultural dislocation while in college. I will argue below that I think it is simply impossible to make sense of these accounts without a concept such as habitus which links the formation of personal identity and dispositions with social structures. However, unlike Bourdieu (1984) it is being suggested that this adjustment of personal habitus to a new field is less tidy and more interesting than he allows for. In each of the biographical accounts there is evidence of what might be termed the uses of cultural dissonance.

Also despite the pressures and dilemmas that HE throws up we can say these breaks in the ordinary course of things were highly valued by all three of these students not least because HE is seen as a transformative space which promises upward social mobility and recognition. Even when things are difficult students persevere, and succeed, because of their desire for recognition and mobility. They also display, with different degrees of intensity, intellectual passion and ethical concern. Evaluations, attachments, binds, vulnerabilities and the development of intellectual and social capacities are just as important, and not entirely

distinguishable, from the desire to accumulate capital of various sorts. I think these stories also demonstrate how the interplay of structure and agency remains profoundly classed yet social action within structured social space certainly lacks the semi-automatic quality ascribed to it by Bourdieu (2000). All of these students clearly exhibit the capacity for complex reflection and action on their circumstances. In fact they all maintain that individual reflexive action is *necessary* to get by and flourish in the world they live in and they all wholly embrace the notion that biographies are open and possible to remake. This suggests that Beck (1992) and Alheit (1994b, 2005b) are right that there are new form of freedoms, and new demands, in modern biographies linked to the possibility of the remaking of the self. Unlike Beck though I want to draw attention to how *reflexivity is used in a variety of ways* and that the varying degrees to which self, institutions and social structures are scrutinised within specific modes of reflexivity are very significant.

The specificities of institutional settings cannot be overlooked in teasing these issues out[137]. In many student accounts-such as James, Elaine or Niamh's- the disjunction between biographical and institutional habitus looms as one of the defining characteristics of contemporary working class experience in HE. But while this theme was very common reviewing the data as whole there is a definite pattern of institutional differentiation across the various research cohorts. A sense of dislocation, or at least of social distance, was far more pronounced in two of the three case study institutions-the two universities. Accounts of feeling like a 'fish out of water' hardly featured at all in the interviews conducted in ITB- the most recently established and least elite of the three case study institutions.

In ITB there are large numbers of both young and mature working class students and this undoubtedly affected how the students felt and thought about college. As one student put it *"there are a few posh people here but they sort of aren't. They don't act it"*. It is also far more multicultural that the other research sites and in terms of ethnicity and class ITB's student body is remarkable because it is broadly representative of the area it is situated in. My contemporaneous field notes record this fact with a good degree of surprise (which I think says a lot about my own experience in HEIs and just how accustomed we have become to the

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[137] The importance of institutional differentiation internationally has been noted already in Chapter Three. It should also be mentioned that in the UK where diversification and differentiation has a longer history and operates on a much larger scale than Ireland this topic has become one of the defining issues in scholarship on widening participation, access and equalit. The post 1992 reforms have been intensively researched in order to capture the changing morphology of access, choice and equality (for example Archer, Hutchings & Ross, 2003; Ball, 2003; Ball, Davies, David & Reay, 2002 etc.).

elite complexion of college campuses). Besides which the atmosphere and the architecture of the college is open, modern and business-like and it is nestled at the edge of an industrial park and it looks far more like a workplace than the other two case study institutions. The social spaces-the canteen and cafeteria are full of young apprentices in work clothes and these spaces and the sports hall occupy a very prominent part of the ITB campus. (By contrast in the two universities it is the libraries and administrative buildings which are the public face of the institutions). On campus promoting access is even integrated into the physical design of the college-so for example student support offices are readily accessible in the main building (which is even called *Doras)*. So the physical environment of ITB directly reflects the sentiments expressed in their mission statement which promises to "serve its students and the community by meeting the skills needs in the economy and increasing the level of participation in third-level education" (ITB, 2011). These various factors-design, student composition and socio-genesis- means that ITB has a very different distinct institutional habitus from NUIM or TCD and to illustrate the difference this makes, and think about what this might mean for an increasingly diversified HE sector, we will look at Aoife and Katy's experience in ITB and compare them with the other student stories I have already looked at.

Aoife: *"I'm happy enough that I'm here"*

Aoife came to ITB straight after school when she was eighteen. She is from Dublin and her father works in a hospital and her mother is a cleaner. The family are close and she is particularly fond of her younger sister. Her parents have supported Aoife both financially and emotionally and she says her family are *"delighted because I'm the first"* in the whole extended family to go on to tertiary education. She liked school where she had good friends and had one very supportive teacher who she remembers affectionately. Aoife likes the area she is from even though she says it has 'a reputation' she know that in reality it is a nice place to live. The difference between Aoife's description of her community and many of the descriptions given in the last chapter is patently obvious.

When Aoife was leaving school her career guidance officer steered her away from a social science course and towards a vocational degree. Like most of the working class students interviews there was little knowledge of third level institutions in the family *"my dad always said 'it is up to you what you want to do'"*. She came to college through an access route and

chose the college because *"I didn't get the points that I needed to go into Trinity but I'm happy enough that I'm here. I liked it when I came here for the interview"*.

During the first interview Aoife was a little hesitant but college was fine and she was not very anxious about the course; in contrast to some of the other accounts discussed previously college was not described as something extraordinary and certainly not viewed as a magical or transformative place. Her first impression was that it was *"business looking and [..]a fella's college"*. Asked if she was finding anything in college difficult she says *"No, just new I would say. I took it all in. I didn't find it really stressful"*. Aoife's main concerns in first year were the loss of her part-time job and the amount of time she had to spend commuting to college. The most challenging transition she faced was that she found college life was very different from school. Initially she missed her friends from home but all the same she liked the change in pedagogy. *"In school the teacher comes in and teaches because they want you to get your Leaving [Cert] points but [here] they teach you here because they know that you're going to like it and it's more interesting. It's something new"*.

Despite being upbeat at the outset Aoife found herself struggling a little over the first year. Part of this was academic demands and part of this was I think due to motivation. It became clear that she was had misunderstood the sort of jobs she might expect to get after graduation with her degree. Also, writing in a disembodied voice, using the third person, threw here a little and the pertinence of the theories covered in the various modules seemed a little unclear. Feedback, peer support, and specific classes on essay writing helped her get over these issues without too much difficulty. She also says that the vocational element of the course she was doing, which came later on in her first year, made the learning tasks seem a lot more concrete and relevant. Aoife motivated herself with the knowledge that she was developing skills which would be of use to others as she *"likes looking after people"*. It is worth considering the significance of this element of Aoife's story. Despite the fact that much of the literature (Bernstein, 1960, 1971a, 1971b; Bourdieu & Passeron 1990; Young, 1971) on knowledge and class suggests that an orientation to immediate and practical knowledge is a defining characteristic of many working class students Aoife's disposition was not typical of the broader research cohort. Within the various cohorts the specific disciplinary demands of a course-for example if a course was applied and scientific- appeared to have a far greater influence than class on how people described and understood knowledge. Although two other

students who had extensive manual work experience before college also discussed learning in this way overall there was little compelling evidence of clear relationship between class and the desire for practical and immediate application of knowledge.[138]

Even though Aoife did get through college without too many academic difficulties and became noticeably more confident as time passed and even mentioned towards the end of her degree that she was beginning to feel like a professional there remained a good deal of uncertainty in her discussions of her course. The purpose and significance of what she was doing sometimes seemed a little hazy and in the third year of the degree she was still wondering *"if it is a proper degree but I think it is"*. Aoife talks in a clear and engaging way about friends, family and relationships and generally she is jokey, personable and at ease with herself but her descriptions of education and college lacked the same vitality and humour that she brought to her discussions of the rest of her life. Both in interviews and informal conversations it appeared that Aoife's major concern were the changes in her personal life. In particular she talked about her relationship with her boyfriend and mid-way through the course she left home and found a flat with him because she thought it would be *"good if we moved in with each other to see if works"*. At that time she also got a job working in a fast food restaurant to help pay for the rent for their flat.

Aoife was one of half a dozen students who I met who appeared to be floating through college. She decided half way through college "I *am not putting pressure on myself"*. This was quite unusual amongst the working class cohort amongst whom third level education was usually seen as a privilege and a significant opportunity. As I mentioned already Aoife did not evince any strong desire to completely transform herself or make herself anew. I never got the sense from anything she said of that she felt there was a mismatch between institution and social background. Of course this is precisely how HE was described by the young middle

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138 Students of all backgrounds and ages reported struggling with academic theory. I am a little sceptical of the way Bourdieu and Bernstein's way of framing these issues but this does not necessarily invalidate their findings (respectively on codes and cultural capital) as they would argue that the relevant cut off point happens much earlier and that working class students who have low levels of cultural capital and who remain using 'restricted' codes are far less likely to come to college in the first place. Whatever one thinks of the Bernstein and Bourdieu's theories I think it is obvious that the selection and streaming does occur at a much earlier point in educational careers. The question of course is-and this cannot be answered in the thesis- is whether the knowledge orientations amongst the participants are in any sense indicative of what is happening outside of colleges. I cannot answer that but the changing nature of work-in which manual labour has been replaced by specialised and routine work and in which different types of codified knowledge plays a greater role- does open up a wholly speculative but interesting possibility that this supposed link between 'practical' and immediate forms of knowledge and class might be changing in significant ways.

class cohort-that is as a space of gentle transition rather than transformation. I believe this is certainly linked to the habitus of the institution and that she can develop a sense of herself as competent learner and potential professional without having to struggle to be something very different than what she already is -at least on the basis of the findings of this research project- quite unusual. On the positive side this indicates that HE does not have be a culturally dislocating experience for non-traditional students and I would say if this was the case right across the cohort one could begin to imagine that Irish HE was becoming genuinely egalitarian

However, it would be a mistake to discuss this without situating Aoife's story within changes within HE as a whole. I have already discussed the international and Irish literature that suggests that HE has become increasingly diversified and differentiated and argued this has to be factored into any analysis of inequality. Aoife says ITB was not her first choice and the vagueness of the decision making processes over the choice of course and its ultimate value is. I think, telling. Large scale research in the UK on choice in education has made the argument that often "class is inexplicit but pervasive in [students and families] educational strategies" (Ball, 2003, p. 11). For example Reay, David and Ball (2005) examined how students select institutions and they discovered that there were two main groups 'embedded' and 'contingent choosers'. They argue that the latter category, primarily people from low income working class families, who often hold low levels of cultural capital, rely primarily on 'cold' information in assessing the value of a specific degree.

Within the research data there was strong evidence of 'embedded' and 'contingent' choices in Irish HE. The most informed accounts of the 'objective' value of particular courses and credentials were given by upper middle class students with high levels of cultural capital. The most striking example of this was given by Sam a student in his twenties whose parents are academics. He chose his institution after an extended multi-factorial analysis of a wide range of colleges and courses. Sam eventually created a very detailed spreadsheet which weighted factors such as the international reputation of a course alongside and the sort of social life he might expect. Here the politics of recognition are not so much about securing dignity and respect as ensuring one gets the best educational credentials. This level of planning and forethought is very unusual but it does nonetheless illustrate how access to information and a

feeling of control and entitlement in choice making processes have an important class dimension.

On the other hand, in many, but certainly not all[139], working class accounts information was far less distinct. I would argue that Aoife's choices can be seen in this light. Although she did consider going to an elite institution this was not a realistic option. Like some other students the fact that lower points were required has contributed to her sense the course may not be "*a proper degree*". I think this indicates more about how Aoife conceives of her own social trajectory, and the effect of the points system, than it does about the actual value of the degree course she was on. It seems to me that ITB is managing to minimise cultural dislocation and this is to be commended. Nonetheless Aoife's story can be read as part of a broader story is one in which the power of class is being reinscribed and naturalised through new hierarchies in HE (rather than in access to HE per se). This is speculative but plausible and underscores the need for large scale mixed methods research which explores graduate destinations as well as graduate perceptions of the value of third level education (see Fleming, Loxley, Kenny & Finnegan 2010).

Katy: *"We're as good anybody else. We matter and I think that's mainly it"*
Katy went through a very different experience in the same institution. While her story offers further insight into the expansion and differentiation of HE and the classed nature of student decision making her account also demonstrates that valuable reflexive learning can occur without sharp, cultural dislocation. In fact, I think if we read Katy story alongside the other student stories discussed already I think it adds another layer entirely to an analysis of the interplay of habitus, reflexivity and institutional differentiation.

As noted in the last chapter Katy arrived at college after being made redundant but her decision to return to learning was rooted in a longer story about who she was and an intense internal conversation her own abilities. She did extremely well in first year and was even told that she had submitted the best piece of work a lecturer had ever been given by a student. From the very beginning of the course she was reading very widely and doing independent research. Like Elaine she was also thinking about her own life and with the time and space college offered her realised that she already had some skills and strengths which she could

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[139] For example Tara was very well informed on career routes and the external value of her credentials

draw on especially *"emotions and feelings and thinking about things and I suppose thinking about them deeply and then taking them apart and putting them back together and seeing how they work"*.

She found she loved some of the lectures and the material but *"hated"* some of the groupwork and found some of the class activities very off-putting. After a year she began to believe that *"I probably sold myself short before I came here because I didn't know where to go"*. She continued

> *it became pretty evident very early on that I had a chosen the completely wrong course. So I kind of struggled with that pretty much all of last year because…it was so annoying, because I didn't believe that I was intelligent enough to go to college before I came in here [..] so I picked a course that I felt 'well that looks interesting but it also doesn't look massively challenging'.*

Both in interviews and a diary Katy made available for the research indicate that her lack of academic confidence can be traced directly back to being treated differently at school *"because of my [class] background"*. *Katy* attended a mixed class school where she felt *"marked by poverty"* in the eyes of the school and the other pupils. The school, and in particular one teacher, indicated that they had very low expectations of her and she began to think of herself as *"stupid"*. A worry about her own lack of ability lodged deep inside her and highlights, yet again, the power of formal educational institutions to shape, and often distort, our sense of capacity as a learner. The dissonance between how she appears on the surface- Katy is very analytical, articulate and self-aware-and her inner conversation about learning which is fretful and unsure was, from the very first interview, very noticeable and intriguing.

It is also pertinent that the success she enjoyed in her job at Premiumcorp-the multinational where she was employed before college- did not really mitigate her sense of feeling incapable. When she did well on a university extra mural course before entering college she convinced herself that this was because it *"was not a proper course"* and that the lecturer had just simplified everything in a way that it was easy for her to comprehend. The things she had learnt through life by caring for her father, and through her relationships were similarly undervalued before she came to college. So again we have a biography in which the learning story is primarily defined through the experience of formal education and official and legitimate knowledge is seen as definitive.

All the same, there was in the folds of these experiences a burgeoning sense that she might have been undervalued in school after all. Katy links this to broader biographical shifts- both in her work and in her family and this meant she arrived at college with a very strong desire to learn. Once she got there she realised very quickly that not only could she survive at college but there was a strong possibility that she was going to flourish and excel. This created a new set of binds though as she did not want to draw too much attention to herself in the group. She decided to *"take a chill pill and sit back and not be this person that stood out"* and even pretended to other students she was finding the course difficult while privately keeping well ahead of the assignment schedule, writing longer essays than required and doing extensive further research. After a couple of months of sitting on her hands she explored the possibility of transferring to a different course but financially and logistically it was not possible. Like another student Emily she said the fact that you lose your grant if you have to repeat a year elsewhere was the main factor in her decision to stick with the course. Some of the academic staff were very helpful to her during this period but in the end Katy decided it was her mistake in the first place, that she would just get on with things and she *"smoothed that over"*.

Katy continued to excel over the years and helped to establish a study group which other interviewees at the college mentioned to me as being of enormous help to them. Other problems surfaced including going through a very important personal crisis and some other issues with the course which was handled with extraordinary insensitivity by one staff member. One of the interesting things about Katy's experience is that once she was doing well in college the hierarchy of knowledge and the self-image as a learner which had been forged through schooling, began to dissolve. It is telling I think that in terms of learning two of the most important things for her during the whole period occurred outside of college. One was reading a book by the scientist Richard Dawkins about religion and the second was related to a profound change in her immediate family relationships.

Yet despite feeling like she might have made a mistake in her choice of course, despite being well aware, and irritated, at some of the intellectual and organisational limitations of certain modules on the course and regardless of the fact that some of the most significant learning she experienced in this period had very little to do with college Katy is-like so many others-remains very upbeat about her experience in HE. The reader will hardly be surprised to learn

that this is because she feels that doing the degree changed her sense of herself as a learner which in turn allowed her to think her differently about her own life. She found she

> *could get rid of that label I was giving myself as well that everyone else had given me. This is me doing something for myself and I no longer feel inadequate [..] I feel ridiculous, God, the fear of coming back to school [..] and now I wish I could tell people who are struggling or with that decision or with that fear [that it is ok. College] was for me [..I thought] this is just for you and once I said this is me being responsible and doing something for myself [..] I started getting more confidence because I didn't feel I was inadequate or I wasn't able to do things [anymore]. That helped hugely with my confidence and self-esteem.*

She says up to this point she had been seen as a doer and carer but not a thinker and that this has now changed. Also *"as soon as that started happening I was able to kind of let go of things from the past";* namely her feelings about childhood poverty and the lack of care and recognition shown for her in her school because of her working class background. It included overcoming the after effects of a childhood spent with a domineering father and subservient mother who *"dumbed down"* for her husband hiding books in the house *"as if they were drugs"* and who pretended to read Mills and Boon so he wouldn't *"feel threatened"*. Recognition that she was a capable learner, and the time spent thinking and researching issues-some of which touched directly on these biographical concerns-has helped her to renegotiate and think through these relationships from a different perspective. She says both her mother and her very supportive husband also decided to go to college in the same period. Due to circumstances they all ended up living together as Katy went back to college and she describes a whole household as learning and changing and says her mother is *"now giving her the encouragement that she never got"*. She also feels she can use these insights to help others in the future. Going to college, perhaps even on a course which she would not choose again *"has been huge"*. Reflecting on the whole experience Katy says

> *We are the first women in our family to go [so] even to attend a college is basically good. Everyone wants to tell their story. Everyone wants to feel they are heard or have made a difference or they exist and there's a reason why they doing [things] and I think it would just be a huge positive thing for us now that we got to this stage, we're as good anybody else. We matter and I think that's mainly it. I had a huge fight in my head about college when I felt I was on the wrong course and I was thinking, I was talking myself into staying and I was [..] talking myself into going [saying to myself] I don't need college it is an institution, it's stupid, it's ridiculous. Why do you need a degree to tell the world that you matter or you're important or that you've reached some level of academic standing that somebody else is going to assess? It's just nonsense you know.*

This is for yourself but that's just the way society is and I think we're conforming a little bit. (Laughs) [..]

[Before I had said to myself] I'm not going to college (Laughs) [..] that was for people from like upper echelon, [..] but [that] was because I really wanted to do it. I was saying this because it was making me feel better that I hadn't done it [..] so now I'm in college I've had to kind of let myself feel 'Yeah, you are this person' (Laughs). You're the one who wants to do well in the exams. You are the one who wants to go up in the cap and the gown and get the old piece of paper like that says you've done a certain amount and you've reached a certain level'. So yeah, maybe it's more kind of this acceptance. I think it unfortunate but everyone just puts so much importance on a degree and an education now. They do. I mean you can't really go into any job, any professional job without having that level so from a career point of view without it you're pretty much, you're stuck in a labour job or a lower paid job.

In this short excerpt we can see many of the main themes within the data as whole. Katy directly links the search for respect and the remaking of gender and class expectations to the experience of learning. She is clear about the necessity of credentials but the main benefit of attending college is that she feels in has opened up her sense of what is possible in her life. As part of this process she has reflected upon and altered established patterns of behaviour and expectations and identified sources of respect, autonomy and agency. The result she says is that she has created new relation to self and others.

Katy's story adds an important layer to my analysis of contemporary working class experience of HE. For starters there are a number of similarities between Katy and Aoife's discussion of choice in HE, I would argue their choices have been powerfully informed by class (through levels of cultural capital, expectations, sense of entitlement and sources of information). I think the findings suggest that the sort of classed patterns in choice and decision making discerned by Reay, David and Ball (2005) may well be important to understanding recent changes in Irish HE. This is bolstered by the data on families, cultural capital and schooling and the remaking of habitus in universities discussed earlier and the general statistical information outlined in Chapters Four and Five. I think this confirms that class inequality continues to exert a major influence in shaping educational careers despite the expansion and diversification of the educational system. This should not though blind us to the fact that the diversification of HE has, in many respects, been positive in the sense that it has created institutions and practices which are not alienating or as cultural dislocating for working class students as the traditional university has been. However, I would argue that unless this is replicated in high status HEIs *as well* this will have a limited impact on inequality.

But if we think about what Katy and Aoife said and felt there are other things to be learnt here. I think the type of learning orientation students develop can frequently be just as important as the institution or social background in shaping experience within HE. This is a theme which runs through a great many of the student stories. Ultimately, discussing the difference this can make in a meaningful way is part of an effort to take student agency and student voices seriously. To do so requires an explicit theory of what learning should and could entail. Ideally, building on the observations in Chapter Four and the material above I would argue that we would be best served by institutions which help what I have called struggling and floating learners to become more self-directed and reflexive. To step back a little I think that it should now be clear precisely why I think we need a critical theory of learning which is capable of capturing the power of a general social logic (linked to the dynamics of class formation in a capitalist society and the tendency for our social practice to be adaptive) but that can also account for the impact of specific institutional and initiatives and the powerful effect of reflexive agency. Before I bring these various themes and theoretical strands together in a single conceptual framework I want to look at how institutional initiatives and alternative strategies for accumulating cultural capital might be integrated into this general description of student experience and learning.

Dermot and Ger: accumulating cultural capital inside and outside educational institutions

Dermot: *"If something is interesting to me I would go down my own path"*
Dermot was 19 when I conducted the first interview with him and comes from west Dublin. He is one of the few young working class students interviewed who did not come through to college through an access route. This is because he did not attend a 'disadvantaged' school but travelled outside of his community to go to a mixed class school which had good facilities and was led by a dynamic principal. He enjoyed compulsory education and says it *"was a great community [..] they were looking out for us in their own odd way"*. Within the school there was a strong expectation that pupils of all backgrounds would go onto to third level education and in the final cycle of secondary school, in the run up to the exams, the students were drilled twice a week on application procedures. According to Dermot this had a big effect and most of his classmates did go on to college.

He mentions that *"neither my parents went to college or finished secondary school"* and he is conscious that he is the first one to go to college in his family.

> *There is very, very laid-back attitude in the house to education. They made space when I was studying for the Leaving Cert for [..] but it was never like..it's the end of the world or impending doom. 'If you need to do it again you can do it again [..].it's up to you, whatever you are happy doing'. It was very reassuring. The same when it came to deciding what to do [in college] and I don't think the word sociology was ever heard in the house before [I mentioned it and they said] 'that will be a bloody waste ' (Laughs) which I didn't agree with but I could see where they're coming from on that one. 'You'll never leave the University, you will go from one side of the desk the other'. So when I mentioned the idea of studying history they warmed to that. But if I came here and I was studying basket weaving they would be okay with it.*

Dermot's father liked the idea that he would choose history as a subject because it was one of his own passions but overall he says *"there was probably more pressure from school"* than his parents. Before he applied to different colleges he also *"did a little research into what departments have the same interests as me"*. From the outset Dermot had a strong sense of what he wanted to get from the college but he still found the first few months of college difficult and hit *"the normal bumpy road in first year. It has been fine but I don't think that's unique at all think. It's a radical shift [..] a massive change* [from school]*"*. This way of describing first year as a normal settling in period is interesting because it is further evidence that there has been a major generational shift in working class educational expectations in many communities. He is after all only a decade younger than James who despite all his enthusiasm for college sees it as a completely *"foreign country"*. He discusses what helped him get through this year and says

> *befriending second years was important for me. I got involved in a campaign [opposing the reintroduction of student fees] and I met a lot of second years and third years. There's a lot of reassurance and that they will say if I manage the first year then you can make it'. That attitude I think [is] a huge benefit. You can see those students who don't mingle outside first-year are like deer in the headlights It was very reassuring to talk to people who made it through*

Like most students, from all backgrounds, such informal support networks were crucial to getting by and acquiring the information on how to best approach specific subjects and lecturers. It became clear on the subsequent occasions when we met that the group of people he met through student politics had become good friends, Dermot talked about how much confidence he got from this and says proudly *"we built a big campaign"* and made the

college *"community closer"*. Dermot also felt the lecturers from his department were approachable and he felt he could

> *knock on the door and ask 'do you know anything about this?' There are good personal relationships there which I like quite a lot. I don't know any other university where you could do that. There is not an office that I would not feel confident in knocking on the door.*

and contrasts it to other college he has visited which he describes as a *"concrete jungle"*. For Dermot both in terms of the friends he has made and his interaction with the department it is important that he feels he is part of a community. The last thing that helped him through first year, and really defines his sense of himself as a learner, is his love of the subject he is studying. He is enormously passionate about history and punctuates his discussions of college and his life with historical anecdotes and ideas for non-academic research projects. Towards the end of his degree he even got a part-time job where he could further explore his love of history. He identifies very strongly with his discipline and says history is a vital part of the national conversation and feels that studying this brings him more fully into well-established public debates.

Nonetheless, for all his enthusiasm Dermot has been bored by some of the modules and his approach to this is quite pragmatic and says he has learnt that *"a lot of academics, depending on their own background, want different things. Some want your personal opinion others don't want it at all, some frown on that altogether"*. Asked if he follows the criteria lecturers give him he says

> *Ehhm.... as far as it is tolerable. A certain amount is the extent you want a wonderful grade and a certain amount is whether you don't want to fall asleep in front of a computer. If something is interesting to me I would go down my own path. [..] if the subject is of no interest to me they will generally get a very dull pre-packaged essay with very little personal opinion. So... it comes down to your own interests.*

Over the course of the degree he perceives that he has developed as learner and benefited from study. He says

> *I am a very 'I'll do it tomorrow' sort of person but in college it is very structured. There is a deadline it has to be in the box [..] when I first came to college [I would] open the box and I was getting back essays with red pen all over them now you take the time and [I have] a certain sense of structure.*

Interestingly, one of the most important aspects of mastering college knowledge for Dermot is that he thinks it has helped him blog about history and current affairs more effectively.

So in Dermot's biographical account a positive experience in school alongside a strong sense of his own interests has meant that both socially and academically college has not been a fraught experience at all. Amongst the working class cohort Dermot was quite unusual in that he was very positive about the college, and highly motivated, but was nevertheless quite measured in his assessment of its value and says "*this is not the world to me I like to be in town [with non-college friends] on a Friday evening*". Like Aoife this is more a space of transition than transformation but Dermot appears to be far more assured about where this will lead him to in the future than Aoife and heartily welcomes the transitions-intellectual, personal and social that college has brought.

So in this narrative there is no indication of the sort of clash between self and institution that we have traced in many of the other student stories. One could make a case that his initial choice of college, made he says, on the basis of "*approachability*" and the fact it had "*no airs and graces*" is a classed process that reflects the interplay of personal and institutional habitus. Class also affects how parents get involved in the decision making process. This is true but on the other hand his choice of course was based on extensive research and he understands very well where the degree might bring him. Tellingly towards the end of the course when asked about his future Dermot said "*I haven't ruled out anything* "and was thinking of "*upgrading his degree*". In the end Dermot did enrol in very highly regarded postgraduate course in an elite institution.

So here is a working class student who found a college that suited him, and where he did not feel out of place or particularly impelled to prove his worth and flourished. Dermot is bright, intellectually confident and his way of describing university is very similar to the middle class cohort and in truth he seems more at ease with the demands and rituals of academia than some of them. His degree was also used as a stepping stone to a more elite postgraduate course. So what has made the difference? One can point to the fact that Dermot comes from a supportive family with a moderately good income and that his father does a widely respected working class job. Attending mixed class school with high expectations of all students is certainly part of the story as well. As I mentioned already some of this is generational and

Dermot says that widening participation has changed educational expectations in his area. While his friends older brothers all went straight into work many of his peers in his community now assume they will go to college before starting their first job. As part of this shift he is very hopeful about his and his younger brother's future even though at the end of the research he ruefully noted he was going to *"more emigration parties than twenty firsts these days"*.

One of the other really noteworthy things about Dermot's learning story is just how strongly it has been shaped by his father's interest in history which is linked to his trade union activism. When Dermot was young his father served as the archivist for his union for a period of time and Dermot mentioned his father's involvement in the union and his passion for history several times in our interviews. While he recognises the way he approaches history is now different to his father, and says his perspective is more academic, it is the continuities which are important to Dermot and he describes his own studies in some respects as an extension of a family story which he places within a longer narrative of working class history. This has given Dermot a sense of class pride which was rare in the research (for similar findings see Tett, 2000). For Dermot there is an obvious connection between his own learning projects, his family story and what he thinks are the strengths of working class culture. He is fully aware of intraclass differences and he says he knows that for some working class communities everyday life can be *"hell"* and talks passionately about problems faced by residents in an area close to where he grew up. Dermot understands the difficulties that come with inequality but he does not choose to disidentify himself from his background. In his mind being working class is mainly associated with doing useful and valuable work and having a strong sense of community. For him this is part of the national story and is a story worth telling and representing.

This is, I think, is an interesting example of how 'legitimate' cultural capital can eventually be accumulated by building on non-formal learning activities and this ability to draw on non-elite forms of social and cultural capital deserves far more serious consideration in tackling inequality in education. Moreover his belief that he is part of bigger story means that Dermot positions himself very differently in relation to the 'legitimate' knowledge of the university. I suspect it might have informed his strong desire for community which brought him into a student campaign and affected his choice of university and his interactions with staff. The

institution is seen as place he can critically borrow from, and engage with on equal terms, and this, along with the peer support he talks about, has meant that there has been no biographical rupture in coming to college.

This reminds us that many accounts of social reproduction (Althusser, 2008; Bernstein, 1960, 1971a; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Young, 1971) for all their clarity and condemnatory power, overlooks the ability of institutions, in this case Dermot's school and his department, and the non-elite cultural practices of family and the organised working class and the right type of peer networks to make education more meaningful and accessible. The claim here is not that class structures can be transformed by such interventions but that these interventions can nonetheless make a difference, Dermot's story points, albeit in very limited terms, to how we might widen the equality agenda in practical ways by orientating curricula and pedagogy to informal learning in working class life and by finding ways of recognising, in various forms, the positive aspects of working class life and history.

Ger: *"the University is the ultimate middle-class institution"*

Twenty one year old Ger, who grew up on a working class estate in a town in Dublin's commuter belt comes from a much more disadvantaged working class community than Dermot. I think Ger's account will help us to further explore habitus, change in HE and the possibilities and limits of using alternative resources for accumulating cultural capital amongst non-dominant groups.

Ger is energetic, funny and outspoken and enjoys a busy social life on campus. One important difference from Dermot is that Ger describes his working class habitus as being radically different, and far more at odds, with the habitus of the university. He says maintaining a sense of belonging in his community while attending third level education has been one of the real challenges of his degree. The past three years in HE been very enjoyable and stimulating but he says he lives a divided life in which he generally keeps his friends from university and the friends from his estate separate from each other. He is struck by just how the lads he grew up with have a *"different sense of humour, completely different, couldn't be more different. Different way of going on. Different social attitudes, completely different"*. from most of the students he has met. Most of the time he thinks people from his community are easier to get on than the mainly middle class students in college because he finds them funnier and more straightforward in the way they interact and communicate. Above all he

thinks there is far more of a hidden agenda and backbiting amongst his middle class peers at university.

> *I tell you, I'm more comfortable in working-class settings than I am in middle-class settings. For me the University is like the ultimate middle-class institution [...] It's always 'Are you going out? Are you going out? Are you going out?' and if you don't have the money is like 'Get it from your parents'.[..] You're out of your depth here, you don't belong here. I found myself gravitating to the Dubs from the northside because they understand [..]. Well, look at my own area at home out of an estate of a couple of hundred people and the only person I'm aware of in college is me, and I know the estate fairly well*

He finds as a consequence he is now in two different lifeworlds. and while he prefers his friends at home "*the lads they don't really understand why you are going to college so there is a sort of peer pressure to get a job to get married*".

Nonetheless, like Dermot he has flourished and interestingly he also chose to highlight many of the same factors as Dermot in describing why this is the case. He attended a mixed class school with high expectations, perceives the subject he chose as biographically relevant, enjoyed good peer support at college and views his education as the accumulation of cultural capital for himself, for his family and for his community. Ger is critical of his school for ignoring the students who were not performing academically who were "*thrown to one side*" but the school did nonetheless have high expectations for most of the students whatever background they came from. In his case he says he *"was academically very, very average"* but they made him feel like he *should* go to college.

This and his preliminary engagement with an access course *"took away the [..] scariness"* and made him feel he could get through the course. Like Elaine and Niamh he has also drawn on his sense of difference to motivate himself in college.

> *Now I don't make a generalisation here but there are a lot of students who are in college because that's what mummies and daddies want them to do it because they are upper-middle-class or whatever. But for somebody from a working class background it's a privilege. It is not something that can go to waste*

He says although he has *"slacked off"* and been *"lax"* on occasion in the back of his mind he always thought he had to make the most of his opportunity. He also likes studying *"it's something I want to do and not something I am forced to do"* and believes his understanding

of the world has been clarified and enlarged through reading for his course. Ger also says his department was very approachable and he loved arguing about ideas with staff and other students on his course.

The fact that his mother and father completed diplomas and a degree as mature students and are very active in their community is very important to him. He refers to them quite a lot and I think this reassures him it is ok to move between his two worlds- between his friends at home and college- and this does not mean he has to break with his community. He speaks admiringly about the fact that after his father graduated he used his credentials to do community based work and then adds

> *Money is not the focus. I'm doing this to further myself do you know what I mean? I like knowledge, this is going to sound stupid, while a lot of conversations in college are about careers and making the big bucks I am ambitious but not in that way. I don't really value money that much. Now, hopefully one day when I get older [..] old I'd like a good standard of living. but first and foremost I want the job that I like [maybe] maybe non-governmental work human rights work or community work*

As part of this work he hopes to dispel some of the myths that surround communities like his own, which he believes are commonly stereotyped and denigrated. This is a markedly solidaristic version of the desire to 'give back' discussed in the last chapter. There is no doubt that Ger has encountered a difference between the institutional habitus and his personal habitus but the access office, his family's stock of cultural capital and the approach of his school meant that he felt he could manage this. Listening to him it also becomes apparent that by naming the institutional habitus as middle class and excluding Ger was able to create an oppositional identity which allowed him to take what he wanted to take from HE somewhat.

In both Dermot and Ger's accounts being able to place oneself within broader family and community stories help to make college a less troubling place. Politically influenced collective narratives position these young students differently and this allows them to externalise rather than internalise some the pressure of being working class in a predominantly middle class place. In both cases –with different degrees of friction-this has become a source of a generative personal learning which has motivated them in their studies. In terms of the overall cohort the preceding learning stories are in some way more typical but it does offer a different and valuable perspective on how the accumulation of cultural and social capital in working class families and communities through informal and formal learning can organically link the university to working class life (for similar arguments see

Crean, 2008). This also suggests, as Freire (1972) has argued, that the way we imagine ourselves collectively affects the way we exercise agency and think about solidarity. This is something which Bourdieu's disenchanted eye cannot see very clearly; there are valuable counter-hegemonic ways of building up cultural capital which can be later valorised within dominant institutions.

To return to a point made briefly earlier in the thesis if we think about Dermot and Ger's stories alongside what Luke, Kieran, Niamh, Aoife, Mark and Amy said about education we begin to see just how diverse young working class experience has become within Irish HE. There is no simple generational shift here; amongst the school leaving cohort some access students went to schools where it has now become fairly normal to go onto to HE others are in areas and communities where this is still very rare indeed. We have also seen that for the young students who do get to college the transition is handled in a wide variety of ways and results in very different processes of identity formation. Some of these differences can be ascribed to varying levels of cultural capital and different socio-economic opportunities associated with various intraclass positions-that is to say with fairly predictable and durable structural class inequality but there is also some indication that innovation, intervention and initiatives based on peer support, reflexive agency, oppositional political cultures and even mainstream institutional change-that is to say emergent social practices-can have an impact on educational outcomes.

Section III

Reflexivity, habitus and social space: Retheorising Bourdieu through the data

Introduction

This section will draw on the learning stories discussed above to elaborate in a more systematic manner a theory of class and learning which responds to and is capable of making sense of how working class students view and value HE. I want to begin by reiterating why I think some notion of habitus is required to make sense of what the students said but I also will argue that the data suggests the formation and reformation of habitus is less tightly defined than Bourdieu suggests and more open to the effect of reflexive agency than he acknowledges. This argument is directly linked this to the claims made about the evaluative and normative nature of social action, I also think a theory of habitus is best situated within a more differentiated theory of reflexivity and that this will provide a way of framing the data

on learning and social practice. The rudiments of this idea have already been sketched out above in the discussion of the student learning stories but for the purpose of clarity this will be now offered in a more propositional form.

The need for a theory of habitus in analysing the empirical findings

So what do we learn about learning and Irish HE by listening to Ger, Dermot, Aoife, Katy, Tara, Niamh, Elaine and the other interviewees? The first very obvious point-which nonetheless deserves to be forcefully reiterated- is that culturally Irish HE is still predominantly a middle and upper class space. Access policies and the expansion and diversification of HE *has* changed this somewhat but the data is unequivocal that this remains one of the system's defining characteristics.

Consequently, many working class students encounter HE as a space which force questions about identity and worth upon them. For some students this sense of difference can be generative but based on the data it is also incontrovertible that it also creates loneliness, dislocation and difficulty. The question 'do I deserve to be here and how do I fit in' was not an issue in the interviews with the young middle class cohort. I think explaining how and why different social groups experience HE in these varied ways requires a concept like habitus which argues that shared social conditions and processes of socialisation result in a sedimented and embodied life history and a sense of the world and of our allotted position in social space[140]. Habitus is dispositional and works at a very deep level and is necessarily affective and normative and informs both our social strategies in present and conceptions of the future. I would argue that we can see this embodied, sedimented, practical sense of the world at work in nearly all of the learning stories and this emerges most clearly of all in the accounts which articulate, in different ways, the disjunction between individuals' habitus and institutional habitus.

As we have seen this cultural gap is coped within different ways- so Ger created an oppositional identity, Elaine used this dissonance as a biographical resource and Niamh embarked on 'project of the self' in which sought to remake her sense of habitus. The variety of responses is not salient to the present discussion rather I am interested in what this says about the classed nature of Irish educational institutions. In other words it is not about these

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[140] It is important to say that Bourdieu does see the formation and reformation of habitus as dynamic and subject to change but his emphasis is overwhelmingly how we are forced to adapt to dominant social structures.

individuals' choices so much as what has to be at work culturally and institutionally for these choices to make sense. For example from my perspective it is very apparent that when Niamh talks about *"blending in"* this occurs as a response to the power and legitimacy of middle class culture in society and within an elite institution. Similarly when Elaine or Tara discuss how isolating college can be I am not at all inclined to see this simply as biographical accidents. The data also suggest that coming to college often means that working class students have to renegotiate their relations with workmates, friends and extended family leaving and even themselves and are left with a lingering sense of being 'out of place' both at home and at college. These breaks, gaps and struggles are rendered invisible in rational actor and correspondence theories and are, by default, deemed irrelevant to those interested in enhancing human capital or the dynamics of political mobilisation. Yet this remains a central feature of HE for working class students. The most plausible reason for so many students feeling in one way of another 'out of joint' in HE, even when the experience is very highly valued, is that there is a primary habitus formed through our experiences in the family, school and work and this forms the basis of embodied and practical sense of what is and should be, and 'one's place' in social space. This of course does not mean, as we have seen, that 'one's place' is just accepted by people or that what occurs in HE is simply about social reproduction but rather that habitus offers a convincing explanation for how boundaries which exist in social space inform social strategies and get internalised in various ways.

The concept of habitus also invites us to take the long view of how choices, actions and practices are shaped and can help explain why the interviewees often discussed being carried along by the current of events[141]. I concur with Bourdieu that practical reason is primarily adaptive, and even often semi-automatic, and I think it is salient that this type of 'quasi-automatic' action surfaced most frequently in biographical accounts of finding jobs and leaving school (see for example Elaine's story). This can be also be discerned very clearly in Katy of Aoife's discussion of how they chose their courses and is thus key to understanding educational careers within a differentiated system of HE.

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141 Clearly I am choosing to use habitus as sociological idea which can be used to fruitfully explore phenomenological experience and psycho-social dynamics and which helps us to grasp important aspects of the making of biographies. This is closer to the way this is approached by Andrew Sayer, Diane Reay, Bev Skeggs and Mark Murphy than it is to Bourdieu, Bourdieu was sceptical about what he once termed the 'biographical illusion' and has remarkably little to say about psychology compared to philosophy, politics or the social sciences (although he uses Freud to illustrate some of the paradoxes of knowledge and denial in *The logic of practice)*. It should also be said that in approaching Bourdieu in this way I am also demarcating a smaller and more defined place for habitus in a theory of structure and agency (see below).

I encountered further evidence of the salience of a theory that foregrounds the adaptive and practical nature of social life over the four years of research. One of the most useful aspects of longitudinal research is that it allows one to trace continuities and breaks in how people present themselves over time. As it happens nearly all the interviewees were very consistent and often retold stories year to year-sometimes verbatim and sometimes with a shift of emphasis or detail-but the important themes, figures, ethical orientations-and ultimately the conception of self behind the presentation- were remarkably coherent. However, in conducting longitudinal research it also became very clear the extent just how the participants subtly adjusted to new circumstances based on likelihood of reaching goals and objectives. This made me more aware of how often I do the same thing. Reviewing the transcripts one sees how events, including those which were completely unanticipated –are normalised and there is a constant adaptation to the given. In other words, there is evidence, within certain parameters, of what Bourdieu (1984) has memorably termed 'the choice of the necessary'. It may be banal but it is important and I could offer numerous examples of this; so when anticipated grades, jobs, funding or courses etc. did not materialise there was a tendency to downplay disappointment and conversely when unexpected new opportunities arose it would be described as intentional. The point is that the research yielded a lot of example of how we all chose to subtly shift the emphases in our accounts to accommodate unforeseen change and to bolster our sense of agency and control over our lives.

Overall, I think the life and learning stories all presuppose the constraints and enablements of durable and identifiable social structures of class inequality which are internalised in a deep way[142]. I have already argued that Marxist theories of class conflict and mobilisation, human capital theory and the many variants of neo-Weberian theories of class and stratification are very poorly adapted to describe either the existence, or the significance, of class inequality as part of our embodied, practical sense of the world. Time is not empty-a simple sequence of choices- and we never act solely in the white room of rational action. On a biographical level less is done in the red mist of conflict over social interests than the literature on class

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142 It is worth repeating I do not think that the formation of habitus is shaped only by class power. We only have to think about how Elaine, Tara and Katy's stories have been shaped by the gender to see this. Furthermore, we cannot meaningfully assess what they say about the world without considering how care and carelessness have played out in their lives and how this has shaped their practices and their ideas of the self. Class, gender and the experience of care and recognition are layered and intersecting rather than effect of singular form of domination or completely discrete phenomena.

suggests. In reconstructive mode it is very hard, and perhaps even impossible, to account for the interviewees' patterns of (dis)identification, discussion of worth and lack of worth, or even their accounts of social mobility without some concept like habitus. For this reason along with the student discussions of how they felt at home or at sea in specific institutions, their semi-automatic life transitions and their early socialisation I believe habitus is worth retaining as a concept. It may well be we need to develop new terms but as it stands habitus is one of the only concepts available that is capable of grasping the profoundly intersubjective and social nature of personal experience which does not elide the normative and affective nature of social action or deny the reality of social power and enduring structures of inequality.

Habitus, reflexivity, recognition and desire

However, Bourdieu's idea that the working class is *simply* fated to 'make a choice of the necessary' and that we solely adapt to and internalise social structures is not borne out by the data. It is not all habitus in these student narratives or more precisely habitus proves itself to be more amenable to reflexive change than Bourdieu allows for in his writings (perhaps with the exception of *The Weight of the World*). In Chapters Three and Five the residual determinism of Bourdieu was criticised- a social theory that, despite all its explanatory power, comes close at times to suggesting a perfect circularity in the functioning of dominant power and strongly implies that the only site of truly reflexive knowledge,-the break with doxa,- is sociology. Taken to its logical conclusion this position is unwarranted and even absurd. As can be readily discerned from the excerpts and stories above Ger, Dermot, Aoife, Katy, Tara, Niamh and Elaine are routinely reflexive and both their ideas of self and practices are affected by the use of this power. Every single one of the preceding biographical accounts demonstrate that desire, reason and intention, developed through intersubjective interaction and internal conversations, have causal power (for similar arguments see Archer, 2007; Harre & Secord, 1972). I maintain that social practices are messier, less completely determined and more relationally shaped than Bourdieu suggests (De Certeau, 1984; Honneth, 1995b, Murphy, 2011; Sayer, 2005, 2011).

As a consequence social practice is far more than "the adjustment to the objective chances" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 379) it is affected by self-monitoring and this includes a wide range of creative tactical interventions that are not readily discernible in Bourdieu's descriptions of the

social world. There is a restless desire to be more and to be 'other' in these student narratives which cannot be ignored. To take just one example- I do not think Elaine's choice to go to college is explicable solely in terms of habitus. In her biography there is certainly evidence of habitus-in her early schooling and her career- but lack and difficulty are also the source of biographical reflexivity and creative action. Biographical stories are made in a tension field between self and structured social space in which habitus is only one key element. I think the subtle changes in Elaine's perception of self and in how she relates to significant others and how this then affects networks of care and communication are sociologically important. This suggests that reflexive agency within relational networks, linked to attachments and concerns, and new social contexts can be sources of emergence. We need concepts that are sensitive to these breaks in the ordinary course of things and the identity shifts which occur in new contexts and an overly structuralist notion of habitus absolutely fails in this regard.

Foregrounding these aspects of the making of biographies can be readily linked to the argument made in the last chapter about the importance of the normative and evaluative dimensions of social practice and the centrality of recognition needs. If we consider the way all the interviewees discuss their desires and the way this is framed in relation to biography we will soon discern the limits of a structuralist version of habitus. It is not a coincidence that many of the desires articulated by the students are linked to proving their worth; there is in all of these stories a narrative of becoming in which there is a dialectical relationship between perceived lack and future orientated desire. James wants to overcome his sense of inferiority, David is looking for greater autonomy and more time with his family, for Katy it is about confidence etc. My contention is that desire is linked to notion of flourishing and acting on desire through projects entails reflexivity on attachments, concerns and hopes. There is, to paraphrase, Axel Honneth, at a very fundamental level an endless struggle for recognition at work here (Honneth, 1995a; Murphy, 2011). These various desires, these small and large attempts to meet recognition needs determined what we care about shape who we are and cannot be taken out of the narratives without leeching them entirely of both their phenomenological and *sociological* content.

I have argued at length that the hopes people bring with them to college have a clear social logic which says a great deal about social inequality in Ireland. I now want to also claim that the learning stories demonstrate that people routinely act in a reflexive way, which is not fully determined by social conditions, in order to flourish. A strict Bourdieusian might respond to

this talk of desire, the struggle for recognition and everyday reflexivity and argue that it obscures the objective chances of agents in social space in realising their goals and assert 'whatever the players do the game remains the game'. The work of social science from this perspective is to trace a direct line between origins and destinations and between 'choice' and fate. They might go further and say the bold hopes of these students is just a reaction to their misrecognition and this has led them in turn to misrecognise the value of the credentials they are acquiring. I think this sort of reasoning is tautological and ultimately obscures more than it explains and the logical outcome of this approach is to say most of what the interviewees say about their own lives is mistaken; the squeaking of parts of the vast machine of social reproduction.

Empirically and theoretically I believe this is completely mistaken and leaves us with an impoverished understanding of the world. I believe we need a more stratified and less reductive approach to analysing social practice. I think it far more realistic to say in each biography there is habitual practice alongside a tactical form of reflexive action, a mixture of resistance, flight and adaptation which as Michel De Certeau puts it "operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of opportunities and depends on them" (1984, p. 37). Sometimes this reflexive action closely follows the prevailing social logic and on other occasions the dominant logic is circumscribed or largely ignored. This obviously relies on broader social circumstances-so in the stories above both the boom and access policies are the precondition for most of the students participation in HE-but this *also* depends on the students inner conversations about their own development, what they care about and the way they think about the possibilities of their 'unlived life' (Alheit, 1994b; Archer, 2007). It is indicative of just how important these internal dialogues are to social practice that frequently the most in-depth and intense parts of the interviews occurred when the interviewees revealed how hopes, vulnerabilities and projects are central to the contours and overall form of our internal conversations. Again and again the participants ascribed enormous importance to intimate relationships in the discussion of hopes, attachments and vulnerabilities. Therefore, as Mark Murphy has argued (2011) we need to develop conceptual tools that are capable of discussing relationality alongside strategies of distinction. The point being that these internal conversations are not only profoundly intersubjective and ethically charged they are also mediated by culture and class. This complexity is what you hear when Ger talks about his estate, his mates, his father and his future plans to be a community activist, when Elaine discusses understanding self-care and her father's anger, when Aoife talks about adulthood

and her brother, when Katy says she has finally overcome her worry that she was stupid and has changed how she relates to her mother, when Dermot discusses his father, history, and belonging, when Tara explores the issue of care, siblings and the making of a disciplined self and when Niamh ponders her desire to move up in the world and away from the negativity that has surrounded her.

I have on this basis concluded that Bourdieu's (1984, 1990, 2000) work is far too tightly wedded to a notion of human behaviour in which a Hobbesian pursuit of social advantage is viewed as the prevalent mode of social interaction in *all* social spheres (Sayer, 2005). Thus somewhat ironically, in a profoundly relational theory of social space, is hidden ontology based on competitive individualism. But one of the most strikingly consistent finding that has emerged from these biographical accounts is the extent to which the pursuit of social advantage, in terms of status, monetary reward, and the self-interested accumulation of symbolic and cultural capital etc., is only one, albeit very important, element of social action. This is true even in the student narratives, such as Mark's, which described their decision to come to college as primarily strategic and instrumental terms.

All the interviewees showed a marked concern with the conditions of human flourishing in the very broad sense of that term. This certainly includes strategic, self-interested action especially in terms of securing more favourable working conditions, social mobility, status and money. However, the interviewees tended to think through the rewards and strategies of social action, including acquiring cultural capital, in terms of a multi-dimensional and often *conflictual* field in which dispositions, attachments, ethical commitments and interests influenced their choices and priorities. This is why developing relationships of care, overcoming previous negative experiences, enhancing autonomy, establishing a new practical relation to self, and being recognised by others featured so very prominently in the students' stories.

Furthermore, I think several of the life stories indicate that developing a sense of freedom and capability is not necessarily augmented by struggling against others. In fact, David, Ger, Dermot and Elaine say this explicitly. So to paraphrase Sayer "quite simply not all is social struggle" in these students accounts "there is also a great deal of peaceful coexistence, compliance, cooperation, solidarity, sympathy, respect, generosity and mutual indifference"

(2005 p. 97). Thus Katy arrived at college to make good a credential gap but her main concern in the end became rethinking her own life story and it would be both bizarre to say she is mistaken about her own motivations and attachments. Moreover, her frustration with her course prompted her to establish a study group which for a least one other student was vital to their sense of being cared for and getting through her course. Similarly, there is no reason to doubt the truth of what Dermot or Ger say about feeling their studies will allow them to accumulate cultural capital for themselves as well as their families and communities. Nearly all the students learning and life stories discuss complex and conflictual matrices of motivation and action. Holding on to this complexity of experience and motivation without losing sight of broader critical and egalitarian concerns has been a key aim of the present research.

So in terms of thinking through habitus-it is pertinent that 'interests' are framed in an evaluative and reflexive way by the students especially through the process of rethinking past experience. In fact, negative, often classed, experiences, and an awareness of a lack in self or others through family, community and working life seem to be a particularly important resource of evaluative reflexivity. This suggests that although a culture of necessity may be endured it is far from always accepted or fully internalised. Recognition needs are also informed by ethical concern for self and others and this appears in the way developmental projects are articulated and in the widespread concern to 'give something back'. I think this is precisely why the work of Andrew Sayer and Axel Honneth is so valuable. If we begin with the assumption that our practical relation to self is in dependent on recognition and that identity formation is an endless, socially mediated process which depends on intersubjective experience and the forms and imperatives of various recognition order which are dominant in society I believe not only are we going to develop a more realistic account of social practice but we will find it easier to understand demands for justice and equality which are immanent in everyday life. So I would assert the making of biographies is affected by the distribution of social power and the logic of domination but the form and stakes of the social game cannot be grasped solely through a disenchanted account of doxa and interests. It is also about our vulnerability and capacities, about our sense of self with and in others, and about cultural resources and respect.

In the end my argument here is quite simple; the people I met with know why they value what they value and we should pay more attention to what these desires, ideas and practices

tell us about society. I believe if we ignore or pass over social agents' self-understandings we will end up with a diminished form of social science. Habitus remains a powerful conceptual tool for describing social reproduction but it needs to be supplemented by a more rounded notion of human motivation; I think we need to grasp the centrality recognition and relationality in social experience and offer a more nuanced account of agency. Specifically here I want to link it to a more fully differentiated theory of learning and reflexivity.

Conceptualising habitus within a differentiated theory of reflexivity and learning

I have argued that there is evidence of deep and durable dispositions-or habitus- informing habitual social practice. I then claimed that stronger forms of reflexivity and action based on desire, attachment and concern is very common[143]. We obviously cannot leave it at this- the question of how habitus and reflexivity precisely function together in social practice has to be addressed. I would like to suggest that this occurs in a differentiated way, and reflexivity can be employed in a 'strong' manner to consciously change dispositions or can be used in a 'weak' way to refigure and adapt habitus to new circumstances which are nonetheless determined by the dominant social logic. This develops some of the points made in Chapter Four about learning and reflexivity but I want to develop this more fully in relation to specific context of the research and the content of the student accounts.

I think examining the learning stories we can identify the existence of two major forms of learning and from a critical perspective posit a third[144]. The first is adaptive learning and includes very complex and worthwhile activities. This goes beyond the semi-automatic learning and could even include much of work involved in acquiring very sophisticated and developed bodies of knowledge-for example working through the university curricula of a Genetics course or an English degree. This is reflexive in the sense that any complex form of learning requires reflexivity and obviously much of the official day to day learning in college is of this sort. All students have to alter their habitus somewhat within HE to manage the knowledge forms, rituals and pedagogy of the institution and this demands, at the very least, a weak form of reflexivity. I think this sort of reflexivity is described in Aoife's discussion of adapting to college. However, if this type of adaptive learning occurs in an institution with an elite habitus, in which high levels of legitimate cultural capital are the norm, it may call for a

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143 See Finnegan (2010b, 2011a, 2011b)for an earlier treatments of these ideas
144 This is indebted to the ideas discussed in Chapter Three especially Engestrom (1987), Bateson (2000), Mezirow (1991), and and in a less direct way to Dewey (1910, 1916, 1938) , Freire (1972) and Habermas (1978, 1984, 1987).

more dramatic refiguring of habitus for a working class student-and I think this is the process discussed by Niamh and this is more demanding and challenging. In many cases this is very difficult to do and there is no reason to believe from the research that this is always successful. For instance James' struggle to adapt has been exhausting and only partially successful from his perspective. However, if one can draw on cultural capital and there are bridging initiatives in place this transition can be effected, sometimes almost seamlessly as Dermot's experience indicates.

What marks out what I am calling weak reflexivity is that it is primarily aimed at integration on the terms set by institutions and dominant social structures. At this level reflexivity and habitus are closely intertwined and action is overwhelmingly defined by the immediate social context. Reflexivity is mainly aimed at managing dissonance between socialisation and a specific field and the locus of change is the individual. These transitions are often biographically very important and lead to changes in disposition but the aim is mainly adaptive. However, this can become linked to deeper forms of reflexivity.

Stronger forms of reflexivity can transform dispositions substantially reorganise biographies and can even result in creative forms of learning which can alter, or potentially transform, social practices. The locus of change can be individual or collective. The most common version of strong reflexivity evident in the learning stories came about through a process that Mezirow (2007, p. 13) has termed 'subjective reframing' in which previously taken for granted assumptions, norms and roles are reflected upon and modified. Here reflexivity has a broader focus and often resulted in altered dispositions but also can lead to a different understanding of how society functions. This took many forms but for most of the people I spoke with, especially mature working class students, simply attending college was understood as a break from previously assigned meanings and roles in their life usually defined through work, family and schooling. I think it is very significant that this subjective reframing was often described as part of a result of a successful struggle for recognition. As one student put it *"you do not have that feeling that you have not quite made it once you have a degree"* and undertaking and doing a degree generally seems to enhance people's sense capability, agency and worth. It appears that even crossing the threshold can lead people to seeing society and previous ideas about oneself in a very different light. We live through histories of self and community and operate with a deep sedimented knowledge of the way the world works. If an agent's dispositions have been shaped in part by the social experience

of subordination and disrespect small biographical changes which break these patterns of can be explosive. This is part of the reason the symbolic value of attending HE is so important; this can put one's position in social space and fate into question. A majority of the accounts given by students included some version of this idea, even when the learning and everyday experience within HE had not been very positive. I think this is also linked to the widely reported change that students felt they were now able to comprehend and even intervene in public space.

If this type of subjective reframing is pursued further it can lead to deep forms of biographical learning in which habitual expectations and patterns of culturally assimilated values are examined even more thoroughly. Mezirow (1990, p. 14) argues that this can result in

> becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable and integrative perspective

Mezirow (1991) argues that this is a difficult process which follows identifiable phases in which the learner moves from a disorienting dilemma through to self-examination and eventually to change and reintegration. I think there is quite strong evidence that Elaine and Katy went through a transformative learning process in which they examined their own deep assumptions and came to a more inclusive perspective on society and self. I think it is impossible to achieve this without altering in some way classed and gendered dispositions and one's practical and embodied sense of the world. It should be noted though that the programmes Katy and Elaine were on did *not* seek to foster this type of learning. I think in both cases it was time, space, personal dilemmas and the recognition 'dividend' of doing a degree which were crucial in fostering a largely informal biographical type of transformative learning. It is not irrelevant that both women also saw their subject as biographically relevant but we do need to recall that both Katy and Elaine were in some way disappointed by the institutional experience.

It is perhaps more significant that the widespread experience of subjective reframing did not necessarily result in transformative learning. In fact the longitudinal dimension of the research indicated that the students' learning was often uneven, discontinuous and socially

mediated process which followed fairly elliptical trajectories. The students frequently highlighted the extent to which opportunities for development had to be seized in the midst of life and they were constantly managing time, money and social pressures. So despite imagining university as a space of recognition and potential transformation learning usually remains tightly bound to social context. With this in mind if we look at the way James, Terry or David describe their learning processes they are probably best described as partial, attempted or ongoing transformations. What the data suggest is that the creation of space and time for reflection and the recognition boost that often accompanies getting into and going through college creates the basis for transformative learning but social conditions and the structure and design of HE courses means that this occurs very haphazardly. So while many students reflected deeply on their assumptions, partially because going to HE was seen as unusual, this more often than not happened in a circular and unresolved way and the interviews would regularly orbit around these unfinished processes or the existence of perceived obstacles to transformation.

Behind this is, I think, the deeper question of finding a fit between one's sense of self and available social opportunities. The contradictions between desire and reality can congeal or halt the growth of personal autonomy. This has become even clearer since the interviewees have graduated. Consider Rachel who so warmly discussed the value of education in the last chapter and said you *"become more of yourself"* through a degree. After college she found the *"would get that nice warm feeling I felt I was giving something back but now the whole insecurity [of contracts] with a child and a mortgage far outweighs that now"*. In other words structured social space often negates or at least limits the efficacy of the type of learning which reforms one ideas of self and dispositions. So while there an 'explosive' potential in reflexive biographical learning the specific focus and depth of this reflexivity is very much contextually bound.

What did not happen in college: The institutional limits on reflexivity
My contention is that reflexivity is ubiquitous and very common and can lead agents to scrutinise self, objects, practices and social structures in the light of their concerns and attachments in a deeply critical way. But it is important to differentiate the depth and range of focus of human reflexivity. The first level refigures and adapts the individual, the second level changes predispositions, biography and social practices and this can be individual and

collective, and I want to argue, that the third level changes the context in which the learning happens. This type of learning experience was largely absent in the student stories.

Certainly, Katy, Elaine, Ger and to a lesser extent Dermot reflected in a deep way about the colleges they attended in relation to the broader social context. It was also quite common at the end of college for students to report a liberating disenchantment with the authority of university knowledge. Steve, reflecting on how he understood the process of his intellectual development in higher education, says that he slowly realized that fixed, authoritative, putatively neutral knowledge was open to question and necessarily value ridden. Concluding his reflection he says

> *I think I realised at the end that it [knowledge] is a two way thing… that some of the understanding I had in the courses came from when I was in the canteen …having a chat with fellow students …something the lecturer didn't get across.*

However, one the most noteworthy aspects of the research has been the extent to which the culture, curricula, practices and historical significance of HE were generally *not* questioned at all by most students. If it was- as was the case for Ger and Katy-this can be ascribed to working within a frame of reference and a set of ideas that were *not* primarily developed by engaging with the institution. So although self and society were explored reflexively by most of the people I spoke with the socio-historical context in which the formal learning they were enagaged in remained invisible. To make this more concrete I should say that to a remarkable extent although the students often felt empowered personally by getting a degree and felt happy discussing content and techniques with staff during their course very few of them felt they could control, or even begin to discuss in any depth their learning experiences within institutions. The feedback forms regularly used by colleges were regarded as ritualistic and empty exercises by the few students such as Emily and Katy who mentioned them. This indicates the existence of another paradox; despite regularly making substantive egalitarian or meritocratic claims on the university, underpinned by a notion of democracy, very few students indicated that they thought the quotidian activity of the university should be altered and function in a more democratic way.

Basing an argument on what is not in the data may be seen as specious but I think critical analysis has to be speculative at a certain moment. My comments here are rooted in recent developments in learning theory. I share the Finnish thinker Yrjo Engestrom's belief that the

most valuable form of learning is learning which problematises and can therefore transform institutions and social practices. Engestrom (2001, p. 2, see also 1987) calls this 'expansive learning' and argues

> In an expansive learning cycle, the initial simple idea is transformed into a complex object, into a new form of practice. At the same time, the cycle produces new theoretical concepts - theoretically grasped practice - concrete in systemic richness and multiplicity of manifestations. [..] The expansive cycle begins with individual subjects questioning the accepted practice, and it gradually expands into a collective movement or institution[145].

Engestorm quite rightly argues that such learning necessarily involves collaborative practice and can only occur across networks through self-conscious collective effort to identify and work through the contradictions in a given activity system. In HEIs this would mainly have to come, at least initially, from the institution itself. The first obvious implication of taking this approach would be that students would begin to have far greater input into the nature of the university itself and clearly this is not happening.

However, expansive learning does not necessarily require institution wide change in the first instance; the starting point could be far more modest-to allow the contradictions within the learning process become a more significant part of day to day work in educational institutions. Based on the data I can offer some concrete examples of what I mean. It is notable that despite the fact that a large majority if students relied on informal peer group networks to get through the degree the college experience as a whole encouraged them to view success and participation in wholly individual terms. The effect of grading, in which the struggle for recognition is turned into a competition for status, was discussed by many students. A majority of students took a fairly conformist approach to their learning and spoke of *'squeezing"* rote knowledge into essays and exams. The chasing of grades in turn affected how people approached the limited amount of group work they had to do on the courses. Arguments and difficulties grew out of people strategising over who they wanted to collaborate with either on the basis that they could do less work or achieve higher marks. In one institution the tensions over group work led to a rift in a class which eventually became tangled up with questions of ethnicity.

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145 My way of framing learning puts far more stress on the biographical, embodied and affective nature of human activity than Engestrom. This needs further research to explore exactly how these things affect the structure of learning activities.

The contradictions in all these learning stories-between developing a sense of agency and capability and adapting to institutional requirements, between collective and personal effort, between recognition and status, between individuation and individualism and ultimately between habitus and strong forms of reflexivity- remain largely unexplored by HEIs. Simply put the institutional power of the university to shape the form learning takes meant that expansive learning- which could have occurred through collectively reflectively thinking through the significance of these contradictions- was hardly countenanced.

I am suggesting that both the second and third type of learning-subjective reframing and perspective transformation, and expansive and collective learning are subject to the power of social reproduction but less completely than the first form of adaptive learning. This indeed suggests that the basic insight of habitus-the tendency to learn in a way that adjusts to given immediate context- is correct but frames it differently than Bourdieu. Within this differentiated theory of learning reflexivity is as important as durable dispositions and there is a clearer possibility of significant individual transformation and expansive learning within social structures even on a small and local scale. I believe such innovations are the basis for new emergent practices and ultimately a new form of social relations.

Class, biography, reflexivity and the flows of capital

Up to this point I have focused on learning stories in this chapter. I strongly suspect that learning to listen to working class students will be crucial to making any significant progress in access and participation in the future. As vital as this is to understanding working class experience it would be a mistake treat these accounts as a complete description of class processes and I now want to frame these findings a little more broadly. I have left an important question unanswered in terms of how this discussion of reflexivity and learning fits within the broader debates over these issues (while bearing in mind the caveats about 'generalisability' entered earlier and my remarks about the composition of interview cohorts and the context of the research).

These broader sociological issues cannot be avoided in a discussion such as this. As we have seen in recent years very strong claims for the power of reflexivity have been made. Beck (1992, p. 135) describes a world in which biographical reflexivity has assumed far more

importance than collective forms of identity and claims "the proportion of life opportunities which are fundamentally closed to decision making is decreasing and the proportion of the biography which is open and must be constructed personally is increasing". I think the participants' stories confirm that we live in a society in which the detraditionalisation of the life course and changing nature of paid work means that it is normal to have to reconfigure one's habitus in relation to new fields on a regular basis- as Tara and Katy's stories demonstrate. If we link this to the discussion in the last chapter about how mobility and class is understood by the interviewees I think we can describe this as a process which is creating new opportunities and anxieties about biographical change. This also means that previous notions of habitus-which is based on more stable and enduring communities of class fate-, need to be rethought and this is one of the things I have been attempting to do in this thesis. I also think Beck is correct to argue, along with Alheit (1994b, 1996, 1999, 2005a, 2005b). that this phenomenon along with bureaucratisation and standardisation of learning processes means that formal education now has a new social significance. This, I would like to posit, enhances the desire for education, and goes some of the way to explaining the very positive evaluations of HE given by interviewees documented in this chapter.

Yet I find it hard in the light of the research, not to be scornful about some of the overexcited claims of Beck who has also maintained "it is [..] a *lack* of social structures which establishes itself as the basic feature of the social structure" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 51). This may have been cutting edge social science at one point but I think it is a completely useless if you want to understand the content and form of lived experience. I believe the thesis adds to the accumulating evidence that structured, differential access to moral and material resources continues to shape biographies both inside and outside of education (see also Lamont, 2000).

So the question here is not so much does reflexive agency affect structures-I am certain it does- but just how efficacious and 'explosive' these forms of agency and self-understanding are. For example Margaret Archer (2007) has argued that types of reflexivity largely determine patterns of social mobility. My research comes to a far less voluntaristic conclusion than Archer and I think the research indicates the extent to which available social opportunities and institutional arrangements continue to shape and limit the way reflexivity is exercised. Contra Archer I have also made the case that institutional settings such as universities can often determine the specific form and depth reflexivity takes.

I think the limits of Beck and Archer's approach to reflexivity becomes even clearer if we think about this in relation to the structuring of social space along the axes of ownership, authority and legitimate cultural capital. Individual reflexivity can obviously lay the basis for individual social mobility and significant forms of personal development. Based on the research I think reflexive action to ensure upward mobility and/or acquire legitimate capital is very widespread indeed. But restructuring social space particularly-ownership and authority over the labour process is necessarily collective and will remain unaffected by any of the significant biographical transitions described in the thesis. This brings us back to a minor but important line of argument in this study. On both a global and local level much of the structuring and restructuring of social space depends upon the dynamic flows of capital. This is true regardless of the centrality of habitus, reflexivity and recognition needs in everyday phenomenological experience. To pick the most obvious example the availability, type and conditions of work is dependent on precisely these processes. The students discussion of mass unemployment, Katy's account of working in a multinational that was relocated to Asia and Elaine's work in manufacturing electronics during the "*good old Celtic Tiger"*, Rachel's move from shop work to being a lab technician, James and Mark's work in building trade, Tara's work as a sales rep for new consumer goods underline just how central this idea is to understanding contemporary working class experience. The global circulation of commodities-for example labour, money, drugs and complex financial products-has directly shaped the lives of the people I spoke with in very profound ways. But an analysis of habitus or more generally of biographical experience cannot and does not capture the full significance and power of these flows of capital within social space.

So without some theory of capital flows a full reconstructive analysis of these stories would be impossible. We have also seen how the division of labour - which is also linked to global capital- is directly relevant to these biographies. The point is that the long cycles of accumulation, the changing nature of the division of labour, the circulation of ideas and commodities lie beyond the range of biographical decision making described by Beck but this is not properly factored into his or Archer's discussion of the possibilities of reflexivity in modern life. I think this demonstrates that historical and spatial class processes, which occur on different scales and levels, some which are easily registered in day to day life and some which are not continue to have an enormous role in shaping our biographies. This of course

has considerable implications on how one might delimit the use of habitus, reflexivity and the struggle for recognition within a theory of society.[146] Addressing this fully cannot be done in the present study which is primarily orientated to exploring the significance of everyday accounts of class identity in relation to higher education. However, I think I can say that I believe these biographical accounts point to a more fluid society and more creative and open forms of reflexive action than Bourdieu's notion of habitus allows for but a more structured, power determined social reality than reflexive modernists are wont to depict.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how working class students view and value Higher Education. Building on the previous chapter it explored through learning stories and summaries of the empirical data how identity and learning are linked in the biographical narratives gathered for the research and explored how and why working class students value HE so highly. It has been argued on the basis of the data that HE is imagined as a space which facilitates social mobility, offers the possibility of recognition and the hope of transformation. The student narratives suggest that HE now occupies an extraordinary and unprecedented place in the social imagination and that many working class students put enormous faith in HE.

The processual nature of learning was explored and I examined the changes, challenges, choices and strategies of working class students in HE. Resilience, recognition and reflexivity emerged as key themes and what this might mean for a theory of habitus and learning was then outlined. Three types of reflexive learning were described based on the extent and depth of reflexivity and the chapter concluded by linking this to theories of reflexive modernity and outlined how institutions, resources and deeply embedded structures of power makes some of

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146 I think we can speculate that many of these processes are often 'identity insensitive' (Sayer, 2005). It is interesting to note that most of the interviewees did not talk about *socially significant but experientially distant* issues at great length. I think this supports Barrington Moore (1978) and Honneth's (1995a) contention that social action tends to be grounded in phenomenolgical, moral experience. It also points to a temporal decoupling of structure and agency in many instances (Archer, 1995). I think this means that habitus needs to be quite tightly delimited and primarily used as a concept in exploring psycho-social experience. In this thesis this has been done by elaborating it *within* a distinct theory of social space and class formation. At this point it seems to me, to borrow an awkward but useful phrase from Bourdieu, that the structuring structures of class domination (which depends on differential patterns in ownership, authority and access to legitimate cultural capital) does inform much of our lived awareness of social space and shapes our sense of habitus in a profound way. I have also argued that our 'place' is social space is subject to reflexive intervention by individuals and collectives orientated by a complex matrix of interests, recognition needs, attachments and ethical commitments. There is a good deal of work still to be done here to develop these ideas and even to begin to apply this analysis to broader patterns of change, questions of global power and the dynamics and effects of social movements would require a sizeable amount of further research.

the overheated claims about reflexive modernity appear rather implausible. Having examined what the interviewees say about society in education in detail we can now summarise the findings and ask what the implications of these findings are for widening access and social equality.

Chapter 8
Summary of the findings and conclusion

Introduction: A modest proposal

The fundamental premise of this thesis is we should attend carefully to what working class students say about society and education because it is only by listening to these voices that we can begin to develop a proper 'bottom-up' perspective of the educational system. I would argue that this this perspective offers the only secure basis for deepening our analysis of education and inequality. If we want an egalitarian and democratic system of third level education in the future I believe research, pedagogy and policy will need to respond to and integrate the needs, desires and expectations of working class students in a meaningful way and this should affect how education is imagined and designed. Of course achieving this would in all likelihood demand an entirely different type of HE and a more equal education system more generally. The sort of cultural sea change this necessitates will obviously not be brought about by the efforts of individual researchers or for that matter even by well-placed policy makers. As John Marsh (2011) has pithily put it there is abundant evidence that we cannot teach or learn our way out of inequality. Class inequality is structural and systemic and ultimately the only secure basis for greater equality in education is greater equality in society.

What work such as this thesis *can* do is offer an overview of some of the themes and issues at stake and suggest possible fruitful directions for research, pedagogical innovation and institutional change. With this in mind this chapter will bring the various strands of the study together and briefly, and somewhat tentatively, explore some the implications of the findings. I say tentatively not because the implications of the findings are unclear-for the most part I think they are very clear indeed. Rather I want to offer them in a democratic and egalitarian manner-as an analysis based on listening and thinking over an extended period of time- and in full awareness that no-one can claim to have final or definitive word on these important issues.

To do this I will summarise and discuss the findings under three rubrics; 1) class identities, social space and the struggle for recognition, 2) visions of education, and 3) the prospects for widening participation in HE. I will then make some brief remarks on class analysis as a whole and how my research sits within debates about individualism in a neoliberal era. I will

conclude with a reflection on the limits of the research and some notes on possible future directions of inquiry.

Class identities, social space and the struggle for recognition

The research was designed in a way that allowed me to immerse myself in the life and learning stories of fifty one people who were generous enough to offer their time and their insights to me. So what do we learn when we listen carefully to what these students have to say about class, learning and education?

First of all I think we learn that class matters but perhaps not in the most common ways in which Marxist of neo-Weberian sociologists tend to suggest it matters. Instead, based on the interview data and desk research, I have argued that class relations are defined and maintained through inequalities in ownership, authority and legitimate cultural capital and the interviews collected for this research document both the persistence and human impact of these inequalities. Some of the students I spoke with exist in very vulnerable situations and have suffered greatly because of class inequality. In fact, a large minority of people I interviewed have endured poverty and had to deal with the sort of problems that so often accompany poverty. However, for the majority of the interviewees the impact of class inequality was more subtle –it was about feeling hemmed in and not in control of important aspects of their life and it was about having less opportunities, or having to work far harder to create opportunities for themselves, than middle class people. Many of the interviewees discussed disrespect-being viewed as unimportant, been spoken down to and being treated and seen as lesser as aspect of working class experience. Above all they linked class inequality to the existence of barriers to the full development of their human capacities and having limited access to valued social practices and ways of being. These things became particularly clear to me through a comparison of the working class and the middle class cohorts and the data supports the arguments of neo-Weberians who argue, based on quantitative studies, that class continues to have an enormous role in determining who in society has resources and who has easy and ready access to developmental opportunities.

Although the participants discussed the enduring impact of inequality collective notions of class identity surfaced very rarely during the research. This cannot, and should not, be stretched into an argument about the irrelevance of collective notions of class identity in all circumstances but it is an empirical observation that in this particular research context the

notion of class identity as typically described by Marxists and other radicals, had very limited explanatory power. There was little sense of collective identification and there was very scant evidence of either rudimentary or subtle forms of self-conscious resistance in the interviews. People discussed shared conditions in the community, work and education and had common concerns but this certainly does not lay the basis for 'complete' or tidy class identities. Rather class emerges in the students' descriptions of how the world functions and how we learn to 'know our place'-that is in our maps of social space and in shared experiences of power and powerlessness. I think we can conclude from this that class is not a thing but rather set of socio-historical processes which are affected by class formation and classification struggles and this leads to a wide variety of patterns of (dis)identification which requires empirical investigation to be properly understood.

Class is also a more loaded term than we sometimes acknowledge and appears to carry moral connotations (Sayer, 2005). I believe that sociological approaches which describe class simply in occupational terms, as statisticians do, or in terms of structural constraints and rational choices, as the neo-Weberians do, hinder attempts to properly record or analyse the cultural power of class in everyday life. Despite an impressive record of empirical research by neo-Weberians such as John Goldthorpe, the 'rational actor' model used by these theorists cannot capture the affective and normative dimensions of class experience. Within this paradigm the deeply emotional and charged accounts of inequality, resilience and the remaking of self which featured so often in the interviews are irrelevant to the task of understanding class. But I think that the affective and normative dimensions of class are absolutely integral to understanding the *decision making processes* of the students I met and grasping what makes class important to individuals and society. Taking the interviewees seriously means giving due weight and consideration to what they say and for these people pride, shame, disrespect, esteem, and hope for self and family are absolutely central to their biographies. This finding is directly relevant to a wider debate that sociology needs to make more space for the evaluative nature of social practice because this is absolutely crucial to 'how we make our way in the world' (Archer, 2007; Honneth, 2007; Sayer, 2011 see also MacIntyre, 1981; Taylor, 1989). On the basis of the research I can confidently argue that understanding the 'immanent structure of the social world' requires far more attention to the concerns, cares and moral evaluations that shape everyday life than the Weberians and many other class theorists, including Bourdieu, have been willing to give in the past.

So what do I propose instead of these models? I have argued that the research suggests that the structure of social space is classed and that differences in ownership, authority and access to legitimate cultural capital gives rise to opportunity structures and horizons of expectations which inform biographical patterns of (dis)identification (Skeggs,1997). Most of the interviews discussed social inequality but the specific way this is articulated in terms of personal identity was often deeply ambivalent and layered. The majority of participants in the research did not chose to talk about class identity as a singular, unified and all encompassing thing but discussed life stories in which class is brought into focus at certain points and periods and downplayed in other parts of their biography. Class was generally assumed to exist 'out there' in a powerful, but often vaguely defined way, but this is not always seen as personally relevant. On this basis I have argued that it is best conceived as a set of forces within social space which gives rise to a wide variety of biographical strategies and responses.

However, within these diverse responses there are clear patterns; not least that the making and remaking of the self, linked to the class processes of (dis)identification discussed above, are firmly anchored in notions of place and space. It was very striking how often students linked class to their experience of physical environments and their communities. In most of these accounts of working class areas there was an overwhelming sense of restriction and lack of control. Most often this was explored through accounts of embodied experience in disadvantaged areas many of which have social problems. The biographical accounts also make clear that embodied lived experience in physical space is always layered by a conception of social space. Not coincidentally it is in those circumstances where physical space and social hierarchy are most clearly intermeshed (in certain poor communities, in schools etc.) where class was foregrounded most explicitly in the interviewees' biographical narratives. This suggests that the physical spaces of work, community and education are also experienced as relational social spaces defined largely by unequal access to material and symbolic resources. The spatiality of everyday class experience has been somewhat neglected in Ireland (for exceptions see Breathnach, 2006; Daly, 1984; McManus, 2003; Pringle, Walsh, & Hennessy, 1999; Saris & Bartley, 2002; Silverman, 2001) but interestingly the interviewees continually projected "onto a (spatial) field of all aspects, elements and moments of social practice" in their biographical narratives (Lefebvre, 1991a, p. 8). I have concluded from this

that space plays a central part in the reproduction of class differences and we need to grasp it as something more than the 'container' of historical processes (Lefebvre, 1991a) [147].

That these shared experiences in social space were rarely linked to collective political projects is wholly unsurprising given what has already been said about both Irish and international politics in the thesis. However, the individual accounts of trying to get by, flourish and develop did nonetheless follow a powerful collective logic. In the multiple accounts of human flourishing offered by the participants there was a strong concern with positive personal development which they linked above all to autonomy, recognition and social mobility.

Moreover, the desire for mobility and recognition was very often linked within the student stories to their previous experience of invisibility, symbolic violence and disrespect. In fact, as I have already mentioned the experience of disrespect was given far more weight in the interviews than I anticipated and the issues of dignity and worth surfaced repeatedly especially amongst those with low levels of cultural and economic capital. It was noted that this follows, in broad terms, the dialectical making of self through the experience of disrespect and the desire to develop one's own talents and capabilities and to prove one's worth proposed by Axel Honneth (1995a, 2007). In these terms I would contend that Honneth's work has enormous explanatory value in grasping contemporary Irish working class experience and as such the research is part of a minor but important line of inquiry into the nature of class which foregrounds these issues (Bourgois, 2003; Moore, 1978; Thompson, 1993; Sayer, 2005; Sennett & Cobb, 1977; Skeggs, 1997, 2004). I also think that this could be usefully extended to explore the historical experience of class inequality in Ireland as my overview of class formation in Chapter Five indicated.

So class is not so much a determinant of a predictable patterns of identity formation but structures social space in a way that creates a socio-cultural forcefield which sets horizons of possibility and people respond to this both through adaptation and through reflexive action. In these accounts reflexive action was usually seen in individual terms and class inequality was mainly regarded as a biographical accident. But I have also suggested that shared conditions and expectations create a map of social space which people employ to devise their strategies

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147 As noted in the last chapter considerable work needs to be done elaborating this theory of social space beyond the context of the research.

and practices and I think the politics of respect and recognition are fundamental to understanding many of the biographical modes of action described in the thesis. Taking the various accounts together we begin to perceive the contours of a more general map; on it we can identify where working class people discern some of the points of light are as well as the location of dim corners and dead ends in Irish society. In these accounts negative social experience is overwhelmingly associated with blighted communities, unresponsive schools, and tedious and credentialised workplaces. Perhaps with the exception of the subject of the family, and on this matter there were very sharply varied accounts of care and carelessness, the clearest point of light was education.

Visions of education: Educational desire, policy and competing ideas of the university

I believe it would be a mistake to imagine that debates about the politics of education or the direction of policy can be settled simply by exploring how the system appears from a student perspective but it does need to be taken far more seriously. So with this in mind how did the participants see education? Most of the mature students I spoke with wanted to escape from unrewarding, often boring, and sometimes badly paid work in which they felt pinched by routine. They felt that the most effective way of securing more rewarding work was to acquire credentials. The school leavers were just as emphatic that credentials are not just important, they are necessary, if one wants to avoid the most banal and unsatisfying work in society. In this sense the demand and enthusiasm for HE is fundamentally connected to the hope of occupational mobility.

However, most students also put a good deal of value on learning 'for its own sake' and a majority of the interviewees expresses, in one or another form, the idea that education was an important part of personal development. This was associated with having time to reflect, intellectual stimulation and affirmation of one's intellectual capability. Again this is linked to questions of worth and recognition; to be educated, the students indicated, is to be more worthy of respect. Interestingly, a large number of students, especially mature students, also suggested that getting a degree gave them more of a voice in society.

This tremendous faith in education was very striking indeed and deeply surprised me. Both the desire to learn and the hope for a 'break in the ordinary course of things' surfaced repeatedly In this way intellectual curiosity is linked to a conception of the university as a place where meaningful transitions in one's sense of self- some of which are potentially

transformative- could occur. In coming to college "they wanted to be somebody, a real and presentable self, and one anchored in the verifying eyes of friends" (Wexler, 1992 p 7). Despite highlighting some of the flaws in Irish Higher Education the overwhelming majority of students said HE was valuable because it offered access to previously denied symbolic resources, opened up the possibility of greater agency and the space to explore one's 'unlived life'

They also made clear that they believe college is a place in which class barriers can be overcome by proving classed evaluations wrong and/or by becoming more middle class. HE now occupies a very unusual place in most of the students' maps of social space. It is seen as a recognition space; that enacts the principle of basic equality and offers the opportunity to develop one's unique capabilities proof and to overcome previously encountered obstacles to development. The good faith of the students, and the intensity of the hopes they brought to college, is an enormously valuable resource and I think it should not be underestimated or taken for granted. There is absolutely no reason to assume this good faith is an inexhaustible resource.

This way of viewing college was often in sharp contrast to the accounts given of schooling, especially amongst mature students, which was often seen as rigid and class bound. Negative early educational experiences and the high value given to HE means that the students perceive access programmes as another one of those 'points of light' in social space. In fact, they were unanimous about the value of access programmes; I think it is extraordinary that in four years of research and over a hundred hours of interviews not one single serious criticism was voiced by students about FE and university access programmes. Instead, access officers were highly praised and numerous students said that without these programmes they would never have made it through college.

There was also a particular premium put on the idea of staff and institutions being 'approachable' and -with a relatively small number of serious exceptions- the students indicated that they felt that HE staff did act in this manner The vast majority of the students also indicated that they thought education should be conducted in a democratic way and when students complained about college it were very often because this was not being honoured (e.g. being spoken down to, being ignored or overlooked etc.).

These findings differs quite markedly from others studies (Althusser, 2008; Bernstein, 1960, 1971a, 1971b; Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1976) which have stressed a more deterministic notion of social reproduction or studies that have documented working class disinterest or antagonism towards formal education (Sawchuck, 2003; Willis, 1977)[148]. While I acknowledge the specificity of the cohorts I spoke with I now think the play of adaptation and transformation is far less straightforward than some reproduction theorists have suggested and believe that we have not paid enough attention to how notions of intellectual capacity and social hopes get remade through even within quite traditional educational institutions.

In many respects the findings are similar to recent studies in the UK (Archer, Hutchings & Ross, 2003; Reay, David & Ball, 2005) on student experience in the UK that attending HE for working class students is riskier and less certain than it is for middle class students but my emphasis is slightly different than these studies. It is more difficult for working class students but a large number of the people I met with were passionate, curious and committed to their field and because of this were willing to take a risky course of action. More generally, the passion for education displayed by a large portion of the interviewees demonstrates just how incorrect the often debunked, but nonetheless incredibly persistent idea, that working class students are somehow a problem that needs to be 'fixed' is.

To summarise, we can say that most of the students valued HE greatly because of a desire to learn and to be recognised, the need to acquire credentials and in the hope of ensuring social mobility. It was also a common refrain amongst the students that getting a degree was not simply about protecting oneself and one's family from the worst problems faced in working class life it was also valued because it provided an opportunity to *"give something back"* and to *"bring people along"* which was imagined in a wide variety of ways.

I have noted elsewhere that the strong desire to learn and the intention to 'give back' is the basis of a grassroots approach to lifelong learning which is very different to that espoused in government and international policy (Finnegan, 2009; Fleming, Loxley, Kenny & Finnegan 2010). Currently lifelong learning policies are underpinned by a form of market

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148 I think there are good reasons to believe this reflects the context and sample. I think a sample including more skilled working class non-participants or a linguistic analysis might yield a different set of findings (see Mac Ruairc, 2006; Sawchuk, 2003).

functionalism and is conceptualised mainly in terms of maintaining a flexible and competitive economy in the modern 'knowledge society'. I think the students emphasis on democratic, personally meaningful knowledge, increased occupational security, greater free time, social purpose and communicative richness is a far cry from economic functionalism and free market fundamentalism. This fuses strategic action with pragmatic social concern and a traditional liberal conception of the value of a broad education with an intense awareness of the value of personal agency. This appreciation for a broad, non-instrumental conception of the value of education with a strong emphasis on respect, confidence, meaningful work and participating in the public sphere is especially noteworthy because recent research suggests that in narrowly monetary terms graduate success is often relatively modest (Fleming, Loxley, Kenny & Finnegan 2010).

It is remarkable that long after the twilight of social democracy, in a period in which there is a growing mania for measurement and standardisation and education is increasingly discussed in terms of market outcomes (Ball, 2007), that these students should assert that education is still fundamentally tied up with 'learning to be'. This, I think, amongst other things supports the arguments made from a variety of theoretical perspectives for maintaining a sense of education as a valued activity in its own right (Aronowitz, 2000; Collini, 2012; Dewey, 1916, 1938; Nussbaum, 2010) and confounds the predictions of commentators who complain about a complete "loss in faith in education" (Furedi, 2009).

Access all areas? The prospects for widening participation in HE

I have little doubt, based on my research and quantitative data, that higher education is becoming both more accessible and less extraordinary in many parts of working class Ireland. While there is no reason to assume that all working class school leavers that currently do not come to college would necessarily want to attend or would benefit from participating in Higher Education comparative statistics (HEA, 2010a; O'Connell, 2005), the high number of rejected applications to enter colleges through access programmes aimed at working class students (HEA, 2010a) and, most markedly of all, the interviews conducted for this project suggest that there is considerable unanswered demand amongst working class people for good quality third level education. However, the same data suggest that there are enormous structural and institutional barriers to increased working class participation in HE. The class division remains stark and the challenges facing proponents of widening participation are

considerable. I have discussed the headline figures in Chapter Six already so I will not go over this again rather I will summarise what I think we can learn from the interview data about access, class and equality in HE.

First of all, the biographical interviews reaffirm just how important early educational experience is. According to many of the research participants schooling in Ireland was a deeply classed in the past and some of the younger students insisted that this was still the case. This contention is supported by recent socio-linguistic research into class and schooling (Mac Ruairc, 2006) which suggests that cultural and economic inequalities remain a defining feature of working class experience in compulsory education. As a consequence of negative and classed educational experiences many of the adults I spoke with had spent years, and even decades, after school unsure of their intellectual ability and there can be no doubt that can be enormously limiting and even destructive. Students also highlighted the lack of information or support available for them in the final stages of school. The data indicate this has generally improved and that school interventions and recognition figures in schools and communities can make a difference but there is clearly a continuing need to ensure supports and information are in place especially for families who have limited knowledge of how the system works and/or low levels of 'legitimate' cultural capital. Given the differentiation and diversification of HE in Ireland also documented here it is crucial that working class students are given the requisite information that allows them to be brought into and succeed in high status disciplines and institutions in far greater numbers.

With regard to widening access to HE the research indicates that the major issues remain the same as they were before access policies were mainstreamed-finance, institutional practices and cultural barriers (Lynch & O'Riordan, 1996). Financial resources are absolutely necessary for achieving greater equality and grants and funding were mentioned as crucial to their decision to attend by many students. The interviews also suggest that the people who are most likely to encounter serious financial barriers are those relying on benefits or individuals with very little family support.

I think it is also clear that what institutions- in the compulsory, FE or HE sectors- do, or do not do, can have a massive impact on an individual's educational trajectory. Widening access relies on a delicate web of supports and small changes and initiative often have a

disproportionate impact. In particular, providing a wide range of paths into HE through community education and access programmes appears to be vital. But austerity measures have led to massive cuts in the community sector (it is anticipated that there will 35 per cent cut in funding by the end of 2013 see Harvey, 2012) and despite a spurt of growth in enrolment there have also been significant cuts in HE spending- 5.4 per cent in 2009 and 9.4 per cent in 2010 (Estermann & Pruvot, 2011, p. 29). These cuts directly affected some of the students I met. There also appears to have been a shift in access policy priorities as well. It is of grave concern that one of the only publications issued by the Access section of the HEA recently focused on Springboard-a job creation initiative. Creating employment is of massive importance but this reorientation nonetheless raises serious concerns about the future health, or perhaps even the existence, of this web of supports that many of the students I spoke with relied upon. Given how hard won the small gains in equality have been I do not think this is a trivial matter.

One of the major differences between this study and Lynch's pathbreaking research on the class barriers to widening access is that is strongly suggest once students are already in HE and the financial supports are in place cultural issues loom large (see also McCoy & Byrne, 2011b). When it comes to Irish HE there is a good deal of anecdotal, statistical and qualitative evidence that the habitus of most HE institutions remains very middle class. Despite the sterling efforts of access offices to bring students into colleges and offer support to them while they are enrolled the extent to which HEIs are relying on individual students' resilience to overcome the biographical pressures that accompany this transition into a middle class space is remarkable but hardly praiseworthy. Crucially, in most of the accounts overcoming such difficulties are envisaged by students as an individual problem rather than an institutional responsibility. I think we have to acknowledge that relying on student resilience has its limits and if we are serious about further widening access and equality we have to move away from testing working class students' capacity to cope and adapt. Access policies need to highlight more clearly that the predominantly middle class culture of most HEIs is an issue and remains a barrier to widening access and participation. Obviously, this situation reflects a long history of educational inequality in Ireland and these contradictions and tensions cannot be wished away or easily overcome but it is I think unacceptable that a large section of the Irish population does not feel equally entitled to access and use tax payer funded institutions.

I would add that many of the working class cohort thought becoming a college student necessitated a break with being working class and sometimes with family, friends and their community. This suggests that the association between being educated and being middle class is very strong in Ireland. Related to this there was a strong tendency for interviewees, especially those from the most disadvantaged segments of the working class, to describe themselves in deficit terms-as students and even as human beings-who had failed to match up to the 'standard' expectations of society. The idea that to be working class is to get things wrong, to fail, to be lesser appears to be deeply embedded in Irish society. In a number of the student narratives working class areas were described as educational and cultural black holes and the intensity of these descriptions was such that people came close to associating being working class as a sort of primal lack and blindness. Furthermore, according to some of the interviewees the source of inequality is educational inequality rather than vice versa and one student even said "*the lack of education that caused the divide, the class divide*". These ideas did not fall from the sky they reflect the way we talk about, or chose to remain silent, about class in Irish society and identify class exclusively with the harshest and most difficult aspects of working class life such as poverty, marginalisation and social problems: I believe it also reflects a loose and aspirational way of discussing the relationship between education and inequality more broadly.

The historical research undertaken for this project and four years of listening to students has made be all too aware of the damage this can do. When adults of all ages deeply question their own worth as human beings because of their social background we should not just take note we should ensure that it is counteracted[149]. The data suggest that the effect of being treated, or perceived, differently on the basis of what you own and where you are from is enormous. I note with interest that class and the politics of respect and the experience of disrespect has also emerged as an important theme in three other studies of education (Bridgeman, 2011; Gray, 2010; Mac Ruairc, 2006). When thoughtful working class adults suggest you cannot be educated and working class I think we get an inkling of just how deeply rooted the problem of educational and social inequality is in our society.

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149 I have been careful not to pass over the multi-voicedness and diversity of Irish working class experience and I want to reiterate that no-one I met saw themselves as a victim but there is no escaping the fact that many of the people I spoke with have suffered greatly as a direct consequence of class inequalities and I believe this needs to said very explicitly.

The research also indicates that educational institutions have a central role in changing or reinforcing these notions of class and worth and how ideas of class get refigured through educational experience. This finding is doubly important if one of the other major findings of the project is correct- that formal education and credentials have assumed tremendous importance in contemporary biographies. It appears that formal education wields unprecedented power in defining contemporary learning identities and this is unlikely to change in the short-term. So what is to be done? The data suggest much more care has to be given to the way class is envisaged through access polices, institutional practices and pedagogy. One of many things I will take away from the conversations I had with the research participants is just how completely inadequate most of the readily available ways of discussing class are. These categories and designations gloss over the causes of class inequality and offer no space either to describe what is positive about working class Ireland or to articulate the 'injuries of class'. It was noted that the categorical approach to class and access has certain empirical limits in Chapter Five (see especially Bernard, 2008) but I think with the student interviews in mind the reader will now understand just how biographically important this issue is. The categories of welfare and disadvantage used to keep track of access targets were regularly employed by research participants, especially by younger students, to make sense of their own experience (e.g. 'I am from a disadvantaged area' or a 'single parent family' etc.). Categories and targets are a necessary part of ensuring widening participation and greater access but they are very blunt tools for biographical and social reflection; they are not neutral and I think we need to be cognisant of how they invite a certain practical relationship to self and one's experience. Specifically, the data indicate that these categories have a direct role in diffusing a meritocratic and individualistic notion of education and equality which, I think, is neither useful to students nor clarifies what is at stake in debates over equality.

So both in terms of institutional policies and pedagogy there is a strong case to be made for developing a richer 'sociological imagination' in relation to class within HEIs. However, implausible this might sound in the current conjuncture this is hardly a utopian proposal and could easily be done on either a small or large scale through access programmes, community education and HE courses by exploring working class history, the positive aspects of working class culture, and the structured and structuring nature of socio-economic inequality. Of course this has been done before (Freire, 1972) and is being currently practiced elsewhere (Russo & Linkon, 2005). This I think this would in part involve catalysing and using the sort

of subjective reframing that people found so valuable in their own lives in a more directly sociological manner (see Crean, 2008). In these sorts of circumstances I would also argue recovering notions of class agency, dignity and empowerment is paramount to offset the widespread denigration of the working class life.

Arguably, though there is a much more radical set of challenges that need to be answered within HE. I have made an extended argument that HE is *not just* part of a system of social reproduction it is a space in which normative demands are often formulated and sometimes articulated. I also believe these hopes and normative demands reflect some of the pressures, limits and structural inequalities that we encounter in everyday life outside the walls of universities. If we accept this then we should begin to work through these immanent demands in various ways (not least by acknowledging that they exist and need to be explored by listening to what students have to say!). For instance if I am correct that education is envisaged as a space in which recognition needs might be met then some of our assumptions about pedagogy, relationality and the purpose of education will have to be completely rethought (see also Murphy, 2011). Similarly if we took these demands for democracy seriously we might have to begin to really reconsider what the university does and what it is for. I would make the case that there is currently very little real democracy in how we devise curricula and imagine pedagogy. Furthermore, the dominant forms of evaluation and assessment encourage students to disregard informal learning and to use collaborative work instrumentally rather than reflexively. If one accepts the basic ideas behind the differentiated theory of learning offered in the last chapter-that biographical reframing, critical thinking and collaboration are necessary for higher forms of reflexive learning then there are clearly enormous unexplored possibilities in Irish HE (Dewey, 1916, 1938; Engestrom, 1987; Freire, 1972)[150]. As it stands though I am tempted to conclude that while the university is very valuable for working class students in all sorts of ways, to paraphrase Michael Burawoy, it still remains a means to someone's else end.

So in the midst of crisis what might happen to access and equality? I have already noted the dwindling resources in the sector but recent publications have reaffirmed a commitment to a version of lifelong learning that links economic competitiveness to widening participation (DES, 2011). However, even within these very limited parameters I think access is under

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150 Given these bold hopes and immanent normative demands it is noteworthy that what *actually* happened HE was often not responsible for the most powerful learning experiences reported by students.

threat; there has been an ongoing discussion about the reintroduction of the student fees, there have been cuts to grants and the head of the HEA predicted a funding crisis early this year. This has led to commentators including, quite predictably, the ex-president of the University of Limerick, Ed Walsh, to step in and argue for an individualised loan system, marketised pay for academics and further deregulation of HE. Given how embedded the marketised thinking and managerialism is already (see Chapter Five) and the remarkable persistence of social and educational inequality in Irish society it is very questionable whether Irish universities and colleges are on the path to becoming representative and democratic bodies that students hope they might become. I am afraid, in the midst of a deep economic crisis and a weak civil society, the question arises whether the access agenda as we know it can be defended, let alone deepened in a meaningful way

Class, individualism and the waning of the collective social imagination
Access and widening participation cannot be treated solely as a numbers game. I am interested in how important and highly regarded institutions function in our society and how such spaces allow us to imagine ourselves in relation to others. As Raymond Williams argued in *The Long Revolution* I think the issue that we face is how we can best make use of our common inheritance and culture as a collective set of resources for the advance of all. However, the social and political context discussed in Chapters Three, Four and Five indicate just how remote this approach is from many mainstream ideas and practices at the moment.

The biographical accounts suggest that in this historical conjuncture for many students having a working class identity is a burden which is better to discard if at all possible. This reflects the political weakness of the Irish working class, the nature of power relations in Irish society and also the individualised nature of contemporary society (which is, it seems, a global phenomenon). The research strongly support the idea that we live in a fluid, detraditionalised society, in which work has become more complex and the old narratives of solidarity have broken down (Beck, 1992). We also live in a time of new forms of class polarisation (Harvey, 2005; Standing, 2009; Wacquant, 2009). I have argued, in a variety of ways, that this is primarily, but not exclusively, linked to neoliberalism which has been described as a "programme for destroying collective structures which may impede the pure market logic" (Bourdieu, 1998b, p. 1). In this neoliberal era I think the reality of classed social division is most often confronted and worked through by reflexive individuals in the

light of their concerns and attachments. As we have seen such reflexive action can be collective, and it can be transformative, but currently the response to this is largely individual (although not always individualistic). The interviewees' biographical accounts suggest that the most common response to the current conjuncture is to test where boundaries in social space are strong and resistant and where they are weak and porous and develop projects of mobility on that basis. I think this offers evidence, albeit not fully conclusive proof, that classed social experience is being responded to in increasingly individualised ways (Savage, 2000) and that biography has become the most important, or at least the most realistic, site of agency (Beck, 1992).

Nonetheless, I have already argued there is an exaggeration in Beck's 'epoch' theory and it is premature to discern in all of this as yet more evidence of the complete "fragmentation of the utopia of human solidarity" (Freire, 1998, p. 23) in a 'century of the self'. But even with these qualifications I think these changes are significant and in many ways worrying. For example within it became clear during the research that many students see educational credentials as a new class line (see also MacDonald, Shildrick & Blackman, 2010). I do not want to play the Cassandra here but I think it is entirely plausible to speculate that if the goal of widening access is not pursued more aggressively this could quite possibly deepen intraclass differences rather than create greater equality. Alongside the shifts in the labour process, the division of labour, housing policy and the changed dynamics of wealth accumulation the (non) possession of credentials may contribute to social polarisation and we need to think about how this can be avoided.[151]

The response of critical egalitarians to this situation cannot be arguments which amount to telling people they would be better off 'staying put' or dreaming up solidaristic communities where they do not exist, It falls outside the remit of the present research to address this question in full but I think at the very least we need to squarely acknowledge and confront what is occurring here-a serious waning of the collective imagination. The role of research and scholarship in countering this is very small but not completely insignificant and my argument is that a crucial aspect of this will be developing a language for discussing class

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[151] This concern with the splintering of the working class has been a theme in the poems of the Dubliner Colm Keegan (2012) who wrote (p. 29) "They don't build statues /for the likes of us/No circle of angels/ at our feet on the street/no mounted bust/We don't make policy /shape the nation / or battle on behalf/ of the downtrodden. /We battle ourselves./And all the one's who see/ he flaws can do is run/like ever other migrant/chasing the never setting sun/that turns out to be disdain/ like flames on their skin".

inequality, which acknowledges the complexity of human desire and which recalls what empowers and emboldens as well as what threatens and oppresses ordinary people in education and beyond.

Reflection on the limits of the research and possible avenues of future inquiry

I have argued that intensive qualitative research, such as this, can help us to reframe macrosociological arguments about expansion and inequality. I think the thesis does offer a different and largely new perspective on class, identity learning and education in Ireland. Yet despite this at the end of the research project the limits of this particular project are very evident. I think, given what has been said about the situated and contextual nature of research, it would be extremely inaccurate to present the thesis as anything else but a contingent attempt to make sense of important topic.

The grounded and empirical approach which is intensive and small-scale means that some of the broader claims about class, society and social power carried within the thesis need to be explored in further detail. Furthermore, the limits and possibilities of deploying an embodied, spatial, normative model of class-based needs further elaboration. I suspect these ideas have some value but I think it is important to note again that this conceptual framework has been developed in the context of a very specific research project and will have to be adapted and amended through further research.

There have been innumerable analytical and theoretical false starts over the course of the research. In retrospect I think my adherence to a very open approach to research remains the correct choice but this was enormously time consuming. In the future, in a similar project, I would change aspects of the design and would certainly use longitudinal interviewing more selectively.

The dearth of background material on working class culture in Ireland was very frustrating indeed and this forced me to embark on a line of research which was not planned at all within the initial proposal. I think this has been a valuable experience but because of the practical limits and the focus of the research there are very evident lacunae in the thesis. The material gathered for the thesis-and summarised relatively briefly in Chapter Five- needs to be expanded upon to really explore and test some of the ideas mooted there.

Ideally given time-it would have been very interesting to interview more working class people outside of the education system for comparative purposes. Similarly, a greater number of interviews with students in elite and technical disciplines and from skilled manual working class backgrounds would have been useful and may well have changed the findings. I also became aware during the research that my knowledge of contemporary schooling was limited and a more detailed account of contemporary working class educational experience would have to explore this in far greater depth

There is also a lot of interview material and themes that have not been fully discussed here. I am very aware that within the data there is a useful material on learning, families, ethnicity and gender which simply could not be covered within this thesis. This I think is especially true of gender, Returning to gender in the future-both theoretically and through the empirical material gathered for the research- would allow me to address some of the knottier questions about how to develop the theory of class argued for here alongside a more in-depth analysis of how this intersects with the experience of other forms of social inequality.

There are enormous implications in taking a recognition orientated approach to class once this type of analysis is scaled up away from intensive, qualitative research which I would like to explore. Much more needs to be said about respect, status and politics in Ireland. I would like to see how the ideas and frameworks used here could be used in relation to historical and social movement analysis. Clearly work need to done developing the connection between political economy and the theory of identity and learning advanced in the current thesis. In all likelihood this would require theoretical amendments and as I have noted before would almost certainly need to integrate a more detailed analysis of the flows of capital and the commodity form into the theory of class and social space advanced here.

The scale of the present research is quite large for a qualitative research project but it is still limited. Fully developing some of the points here would, I think, call for more ambitious research and a larger network of researchers. I think the argument for intensive qualitative research, and specifically biographical research, remains very strong but ideally in the future I would prefer to work with a group of researchers using a broad range of research skills and interests which would allow for a more mixed methods approach (I think some of the research by CRESC in Manchester indicates how this might be usefully done). Inevitably as a researcher the methodological form shapes to a degree the answers one arrives at so I also

think revisiting some of the themes identified here using a more fully ethnographic approach or perhaps a designing a project using Participatory Action Research might well yield very worthwhile findings that would be helpful in reframing what has been said here. Similarly, I think there is enormous scope for further work on oral history exploring class and identity in Ireland.

There are relatively few researchers interested in class in Ireland most of whom I think I have identified over the course of this research. I think an interdisciplinary seminar on class would be potentially a very useful event. Within this small group I have also identified a number of egalitarians, community activists, oral history researchers and historians, economists and literary critics who might well be interested in to developing working class studies network and I will explore the possibility of establishing such a network in the future.

I am intrigued by the possibility of using a broadly cultural studies approach to researching class in Ireland in the future. This academic field remains bizarrely small. I have used the rudiments of such an approach here but the limits of what has been achieved are very evident. Yet power, class and culture are crucial issues for egalitarians and I am absolutely convinced that developing a more nuanced and realistic analysis of contemporary working class experience is fundamental if we want to connect critical theory to what happens, and what matters, beyond the walls of the university.

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